Chapter 1

Title: The Littlest Guide

Author: Angelee

Pairing: Jim/Blair (preslash)

Summary: Two year old Blair bonds ten year old Jim.

Beta: By my sister Anna. All final errors are mine—with apologies.

Note: Part of this story first appeared in My Mongoose earlier in the year. Check out the cute artwork by Patt Rose if you get a chance. http://mymongoose.populli.net/mtm/ang.htm I really like the one at the bottom. (o:

And http://mymongoose.populli.net/majb/ang2.htm Since then I thought about it and thought about it some more and decided that it was short. Plus there where some things about the story that bothered me. So I changed them and compiled part one and two together and added more to make it a bit longer. For all of you who sent feedback—I sincerely thank you and I hope you like the changes. For those of you seeing the story for the first time I hope you enjoy it.

THE LITTEST GUIDE

“No. Absolutely not.”

“You must. Blair has already been proven to be a Guide.”

“My son is two years old. Two-God damn it. He is way too young to be a Guide.”

Blair sat quietly in the chair as he watched the big dark-skinned man and his Mommy arguing. He had no idea what they where arguing about. Just that it had something to do with him. And that was only because he kept hearing his name mentioned.

He sighed softly. His Mommy had forgotten to pack his books and he’d already eaten his animal crackers. He was bored. Without his Mommy or the man noticing Blair got off the chair and wondered off.

He didn’t know he was in a Guide testing facility. Where everyone who reached the age of two came to be tested. It was mandatory. For the sake of the world most treasured and rarest of being-The Sentinel.

Blair didn’t know that the blood test they drew from him showed a high level of pheromones that proved to the world that he was a Guild. All he knew was that the blood test hurt and he had cried. He did get a chocolate candy for his tears as well as a Batman band aid for his owie. The chocolate he’d mostly eaten and now mostly worn smeared all over his face. The band-aid he wore on his right index finger like a badge of courage.

He didn’t care about that any more, all he knew was that he was hungry and thirsty. He looked back at his Mommy and at the man balefully. They were still arguing. He’d have to go in search of what he needed by himself. He was after all a big boy.
As he searched for something to eat and drink he heard someone crying. He didn’t like that sound. It hurt him. It hurt him in a way he didn’t understand. He followed it into a room where there was a tall, mean-looking man standing over the boy he’d heard crying.

“I know it hurts, Jimmy. They’re getting a group of Guides together for you now. Hang in there, son.”

“Oh-God. Dad it hurts. My head feels like it’s going to explode.”

“I know, son. I know. If I could take the pain away I would. You weren’t suppose to come on line for at least ten years. Hang in there, help’s coming.”

“I ‘elp.”

Blair walked up to the two who were looking at him curiously. What they saw was a tiny child, a baby-really. With a wild mane of curly hair framing wide, blue eyes and a pert little nose. And a face covered with chocolate.

“I ‘elp,” The tiny little boy said again, coming up to them unafraid. “no cry. I make better.”

Blair went to Jim opening his arms. “Up.” he demanded.

Jim reached down doing as he’d been bossily told. “urt?” Blair asked, sympathetically.

“Yes.”

Blair sighed sadly. He wiped the tears of pain still coursing down Jim’s face with tiny hands. The Sentinel moaned softly, moving into the touch eased the pain in his head as if by magic. “No cry. I make all better,” He was told softly.

Jim had come online less than twenty-four hours before He’d never know such agony in his whole ten years of life. He hurt. Oh, God-how he hurt. But as the tiny, little munchkin with the chocolate-smeared face making himself comfortable in Jim’s lap, it didn’t hurt as much. He actually felt a lot better.

Blair for being so small knew exactly what he had to do. He moved his curly hair away from the side of his neck exposing it to the Sentinel. “Nose here.”

“Huh?” Jim asked distractedly.

“Nose here.”

“You want me to put my nose on you neck?” Jim asked, shaking his head trying desperately to clear the fog.

Blair nodded. “Yes, here. Sniff.”

“Sniff?”

“Yup, sniff. Now,” Blair demanded impatiently.

“I can’t. You’re too little. I need someone older.”

Blair’s blue eyes narrowed. “I not little. I two.”

Jim kissed the tip of Blair’s tiny nose. “Yes that is old, Chief,” he said, smiling down at the child in
his lap. “but you’re too little to be a Guide. I need someone older.”

Blair was starting to get very annoyed with this boy. He was refusing his help. A help he was willing to give. “I not to little. I test,” Blair held up his band aid covered finger. “see. Doctor say so. I you Guide. You mine Sentenell.”

Jim shook his head. “No, baby. You’re too little. Besides the doctor is coming with a bunch of Guides for me to choose from. I hear them coming now.”


Jim felt funny. As if the room was starting to spin dizzily. His nose was starting to pick up a scent, hypnotic and compelling. It was calling him. Cinnamon. Hot and spicy

With a start he realized it was coming from Blair. Blair was calling to him. Releasing the scent into the air.

Yet he shook his head resisting. “No, baby. You’re too little. I can’t take you for my Guide.”

“I not to little,” Blair told him angrily. “you mine. Sniff.”

“No.”

“Yes,” With that Blair stood on Jim’s lap. Practically getting into Jim’s face. “sniff.”

“No. Dad help me,” Jim pleaded with his father. “take, Blair. Get him out of here.”

William Ellison watched quietly. His son had been in such agony. An agony now eased by a tiny slip of a boy. This same boy now demanding Jim make the final commitment of a Sentinel to a Guide. A baby with the will of an adult. Knowing exactly what he wanted and he wanted Jim.

“I don’t know, Jimmy. Blair seems to know what he wants. Why are you refusing him? He made you feel better, didn’t he?” William asked, watching in amusement as Blair wrapped his tiny arms around Jim’s neck when the threat of being taken away from his Sentinel had been very real.

Jim tried prying the little arms away. Finding Blair to be really strong for such a little tyke. “Yeah, he did. But he’s got his whole life ahead of him. I don’t want to take that from him.”

“So do you, son. You’re only ten years old. Your life hasn’t even started yet. But you’re a Sentinel. Blair, here may be a little young, but he seems to be a Guide. Your Guide at least according to him.”

“B…but Dad, I…” Jim’s voice trailed off as he noticed Blair sending out more of that odd, hypnotic scent. He shook his head desperately trying to clear it. “Don’t, baby,” he protested weakly.

Blair tightened his arms around Jim angling his curly-head. “Jim, mine. Sniff.”

“I…I can’t.”

“Can. Nose here. Sniff,” Blair told him pointing to the exact spot he wanted Jim’s nose with his left hand. With his right he tugged at Jim’s head.

Jim unable to fight the comforting scent surrounding him finally gave in with a heartfelt moan. Burying his face against Blair’s neck he pulled the little body to him tightly.

He felt Blair running gentle comforting hands through his hair. Could hear him making soft, cooing noises.
Jim had never felt anything like it in his life. It was as if he was being offered love. Pure, clean, un tarnished love. So pure it made his heart ached. It felt so good. So very good. He pulled Blair to him tighter. Wanting more, he keened softly.

Blair gave it. Releasing another flood of scent. Jim’s keening increased as it caressed his frayed nerves. Healing all the wounds caused by coming online so suddenly, so very painfully.

Something else was happening at the same time. Blair was releasing another scent. Subtle, so subtle, yet to his Sentinel nose clearly defined. Mixed with the heat of cinnamon, there was the clean, fresh fragrance of oranges.

With a start Jim realized what Blair was doing. He was releasing the scent that would bind them together for all time. There was no place on this planet that Blair could go that Jim would not be able to find him. He would always know where his Guide was. Always.

Just as the scent would make sure that Jim was his and no others. Would want no other. Ever. As Guide and as soon as Blair was old enough, mate. Blair was making sure Jim knew exactly who he belonged to.

Jim smiled inwardly. For someone so young, Blair seemed to extremely possessive. He no longer fought the bonding. It was hopeless in any case. Blair had seen to that. They now belong to each other for all times.

Jim buried his fingers into soft curly hair as he sniffed hungrily at his Guide’s neck. He didn’t hear the commotion that had taken over the room as Guides from every corner of the planet came to woe the youngest Sentinel in recorded history. Jim was deep into the bonding his little Guide had begun.

Finally, the bond firmly in place they slowly pulled apart. Ignoring the noise in the room. Lost in each other and the bond they now shared. “Better?” Blair asked his Sentinel.

“Yes, baby. Thank you,” Jim told him with a smile.

“No more pain? All gone?”

“Yes, all gone,” Jim said licking at the chocolate covering Blair’s face. His tiny Guide giggled happily in his arms.

“Jim, silly.”

“Yup.”

The noise in the room rose to a level they couldn’t ignore any more and both of them looked at the dozen or so people yelling and screaming at each other at having lost the world’s youngest Sentinel.

“They mad,” Blair told Jim.

“Yup.”

“Blair, baby. There you are.”

A lady with bright, red hair came running toward them. Jim growled at her menacingly when she reached for Blair.

“Hi, Mommy. No touch. Jim get mad.”

Naomi Sandburg did as Blair asked. Not so much because he said it, but because the young boy
holding Blair was eyeing her as if she intended to do Blair bodily harm.

“Blair, honey-what did you do?”

“I be good, Mommy. I ‘elp, Jim.”

Naomi wanted to reach out to her son. She couldn’t as the growling increased in intensity every time
she tried.

Blair turned to the boy holding him. “No growl. Mommy no hurt.”

The growling promptly stopped. But icy, cold eyes continued to glare at her. Daring her to take Blair
away from him.

“What’s happened here?” She asked Simon who’d come up to them. The doctor she’d been arguing
with before she noticed Blair was missing.

“They’ve bonded.”

“No,” Naomi said horrified.

“Yes. Much to the disappointment of every Guide in the room,” Dr. Simon Banks looked at the two
newly christened Sentinel and Guide pair. They were both ignoring all the adults as Jim licked
Blair’s face like a cat cleaning it’s offspring or mate. Much to the delight of the child he held. Blue
eyes shining happily at every swipe of Jim’s tongue, Blair’s bright laughter filling the room. “except
for maybe one.” Simon added.


Both Jim and Blair stopped what they were doing to stare at her as if she’d grown another head, arms
wrapped protectively around each other.

“Can’t,” Simon told her, biting down hard on his cigar. He couldn’t smoke in a hospital facility, but
that didn’t mean he couldn’t have it in his mouth.

“And why not?” she demanded.

“Because there is no way to dissolve a bond once it’s in place,” William Ellison told her.

“And who the hell are you?”

“I’m William Ellison. I’m Jim’s father.”

“Well then, you do something. I want my son back,” Naomi demanded.

“Can’t.”

“And why the hell not? It seems to me all I’ve been hearing is a lot of CAN’T.”

“Because Blair now belongs to Jim,” he told her calmly.

Naomi began arguing with the two men. Her voice joining everyone else already yelling in the room.

Blair looked at Jim sighing softly. “They fight lots.”

“Yup,” Jim replied, rolling his eyes in disgust.

“Okay. Come on.”

So busy arguing amongst themselves no one in the room noticed when the ones they were arguing about walked right passed them and out of the room. Blair held tightly in Jim’s arms.

***

With the most pressing of Blair’s needs taken care of, Jim took Blair to the cafeteria. That’s where their perspective parents and Dr. Banks found them.

Blair’s tiny hands waving wildly as he told Jim a wild tale about wolves and panthers. The Sentinel listening tolerantly. Saving Blair’s apple juice from being knocked over time and time again from those flaring little arms. He was offering his Guide a piece of peanut butter and jelly sandwich when…

“Blair Jacob Sandburg, what have I told you about running off like that?” Naomi scolded angrily.

Blair turned startled blue eyes toward his mother. “I no run off, Mommy. I wiff Jim.”

“I’m still your Mother, Blair Sandburg.”

“Yes, Mommy-always. But I belong wiff Jim now,” Blair told her, quickly scrambling off his chair and into Jim’s lap.

Naomi reached out her arms. “Baby, come with me. We’ll figure out how to dissolve the bond.”


“No, Mommy. No belong you. Belong Jim,” Blair told her.

“B…but I’m your Mommy,” Naomi replied, more than a little stunned at the turn of events.


“Mrs. Sandburg, you need to stop this,” Dr. Banks told her. “the law is on the side of Jim and Blair.”

“I won’t let this happen. He’s just a baby,” Naomi replied, her blue eyes filling with tears.

“A baby he may be, but he is Guide to one of the youngest Sentinels in recorded history. There is nothing you can do.”

“I’ll file a complaint.”

Simon shook his head. “Do it if you wish, but if I were you I wouldn’t go to the time and expense. You will lose.”

“Mrs. Sandburg why are you fighting this. All of Blair’s needs will be met from now on. And I mean all of them. From clothes to food to college expenses when he’s ready. Not only that, he will be protected by one of the most powerful beings on the planet. Jim will die before he lets anything happen to Blair,” William Ellison told her softly.

“And he will also become his lover,” Naomi replied bitterly.
“Yes. That he will, but not until he’s old enough,” William agreed.

“I wanted more for my child that to be burdened with a Sentinel.”

“Mrs. Sandburg, being a Guide to a Sentinel is not a burden. Look at your son. Does he look like he’s burdened?”

Naomi looked at Blair who was carefully holding Jim’s head against his neck. Quietly talking to him.

“Blair, is this what you want? Do you want to stay here with Jim?” She asked sadly.

Blair looked up, eyes shining happily. “Yes, Mommy.”

“Jim,” The young Sentinel’s head came up. “do you swear you’ll take care of my baby? You’ll never let anything bad happen to him?”

“I swear, Mrs. Sandburg. On my life.”

Naomi wiped at the tears coursing down her face. “Well, it seems as if I have no choice. I won’t fight this anymore.”

“Good. That’s good. Come with me to my office. There are papers you need to fill out,” Simon told her, gently urging her out of the room.

“I just wanted him to experience life to the fullest. See the world.”

“Oh, he’ll do all that. Only now he’ll have a Sentinel at his side when he does it,” Simon replied.

“and I envy him with all my heart,” He added, turning to look at the youngsters cuddling tightly on a cafeteria chair.

***

FIRST DAY

“Hi. I Blair. Who you?” The littlest Guide the planet had ever seen, asked of Steven, Jim's younger brother.

“I'm Steven. Nice to meet you, Blair.”

Blair looked over at Steven with wide, innocent blue eyes. Shyness not a word in this two year old's vocabulary. “Hello,” He said, offering his hand.

It had been decided that Blair would move in with Jim and his family. Since right after signing the paperwork for Blair-Naomi Sandburg had disappeared. Without a sign... without a word. She had simply walked out on her little boy.

As far as Jim was concerned, good riddance. She had tried to take his little Guide. That was something he would never allow. He may only be ten, but he would die to keep Blair by his side. There was no forgiveness or understanding in his heart for someone trying to take what was his.
So now, Jim held Blair tightly in his arms introducing him to his brother and his new home. Steven would move out of the bedroom he and Jim shared and Blair would move in. From now on this cute, little two year old would be the center of Jim's life.

“I live here now?” Blair asked Jim quietly.

“Yeah, baby. Is that okay?”

Blair nodded his curly, little head solemnly. “Okay. Where Jim is, Blair is.”

Jim felt his eyes fill with tears. “Really?”

Blair patted Jim's chest. “No cry. I you Guide. I stay you always.”

“Are you sure that's what you want?”

“Yes,” Blair asked frowning. “Jim no want Blair?”

“That's not what I said…” Before Jim could finish the sentence he could smell the scent.

“No, Blair, you don't have to do that,” he protested weakly.

Blair moved his head to the side demandingly. Jim had no choice. He sniffed at Blair's neck hungrily, keening softly as Blair began releasing the bonding scent as well.

He could feel little hands holding his head against a warmly scented neck. It felt good... so good. Love-Blair was offering him pure unadulterated love. Yet it was starting to bother Jim that Blair was releasing the scent wherever and whenever the hell he felt like it.

Slowly he pulled away. “Demanding little shit, aren't you?” he asked the tiny boy he still held close. Before he knew what happened, little teeth bit his nose-hard.

“Ow! You bit me,” Jim told him, stunned.

Steven who'd been watching the whole thing broke out in laughter. “Oh, man-this is just to funny.”

“Laugh it up, asshole. I wasn't cussing at you, Blair,” he told his little guide hurriedly when Blair made a disapproving noise. “I was cussing at Steven.”

“Cussing no nice. No do.”

‘Okay. I'm sorry,” Jim replied meekly. That caused Steven to break out in a fresh peal of laughter.

Blair eyed Steven. “No laugh, Jim.”

“But it's funny.’

“No laugh,” Blair told him sternly.

Jim eyed his brother from behind Blair's little body. Mouthing silently. “There, asshole.”

“Blair, Jim's cussing at me,” Steven complained, smiling evilly at his brother.

The curly little head turned toward Jim, blue eyes narrowing. “No hear anything,” he said, frowning at the extremely innocent look his Sentinel was giving him.

“Yeah, he was. I swear it.”

Before Blair could reply the Ellison's housekeeper Sally walked into the room. “So this is Blair?” she asked walking up to the little boy who suddenly, oddly enough, turned extremely shy, pushing into Jim's body in an attempt to hide.

“This is Sally, Blair,” Jim told his little guide softly. “she doesn't bite.”

Wide blue eyes looked at Sally from under a wild mane of curly hair. “Hi.” he said softly.

“Hello, Blair,” Sally told him, instantly taken with the baby. “I hear you're coming to live with us.”

“Really?”


“He did?” Sally asked, looking at Jim who was smiling happily at his Guide.


Jim kissed Blair's forehead. “Yup. I'm all yours.”

“So how's my family getting on?” William Ellison asked, joining them.

“Great, Dad,” Jim replied.

“So, Blair, how do you like your new bedroom?” William asked Blair.

“Nice,” Blair said looking around. “why two beds?”

“Well, one was Steven’s, it's yours now, the others for Jim.”

Blair frowned at William. “No need two beds. I sleep Jim.”

“But you can't. You have to have a bed all your own.”

“Why?”

William looked at Jim who shrugged. “Hmm, cause you do?” Jim questioned.
Blair shook his head. “No need. Steven keep bed. I Guide, I sleep wiff my Sentinel.”

“Well, I guess that’s-that,” Jim said.

“Yes, I guess it is.” William agreed, smiling. “Jim-Blair needs clothes. All he has is what he has on.” He looked at the child in Jim’s arms. “Want to go shopping, Blair?”

Blair looked at Jim. “Shopping?”

“Yup, shopping.”


“Always, baby. Always.” Jim replied, hugging him close.

***

Shopping with Blair turned out to be an experience none of the Ellisons were expecting. Blair, having wiggled free of his Sentinel’s arms, calmly walked the aisles, carefully choosing each and every garment as if it were a world altering decision, always seeking Jim's final approval before going on to the next item.

With the clothing issue taken care of, William wanted to get the little Guide a few nonessentials like toys. Thinking perhaps now Blair would show his true age going after everything he saw. Proven wrong as Blair just as carefully went up and down the toy aisles finally settling for a black fuzzy panther and a wolf. Having made his decision, nothing the three Ellisons said or did would get Blair to add more toys to the cart.

Blair was turning out to be an unusual little boy acting far older than his two years and more than a match for strong-willed Jim.

As a treat, William decided to take them all out to dinner and ice cream after. For the first time since
he'd chosen Jim as his Sentinel he wasn’t in Jim’s arms, but in his own chair. An intense look on his little face as he checked Jim’s plate making sure there was nothing on it that would make his Sentinel sick.

Jim had tried giving his Guide attitude. All his ten year old arrogance coming to the forefront, trying to overwhelm Blair with it. All the little Guide had to do was turn those big, blue eyes toward Jim and growl. It wasn’t even a loud growl. A tiny rumble from that little throat and Jim had become the meekest of Sentinels, allowing Blair to continue his careful inspection of his food. It was the funniest thing William had ever seen.

Getting ice cream had turned into something else entirely. Something William would not like repeating again any time soon. Jim had zoned on the ice crystals that lined the giant freezers as he was about to help Blair chose ice cream from the many flavors the store had to offer.

It had frightened the hell out of William and Steven when all of a sudden Jim straightened, blue eyes glazed and distant. Laughter dying on his lips.

They watched in stunned fascination as the world’s smallest Guide brought the youngest Sentinel ever known out of his first zone. They weren’t the only ones watching. Silently, everyone in the store watched, as with the gentlest strokes of his little hands and softly spoken words, Blair brought Jim back.

Still in Jim’s arms, unafraid of having his Sentinel drop him. Knowing instinctively what had to be done and doing it. Finally, when Jim had returned from wherever he'd gone, Blair had released pheromones to center a badly shaken Jim in the here and now.

Nothing had ever frightened William as much as watching his son laughing one moment, frozen stiff as a statue the next. Yet Blair had taken it all in stride. He was an unusual and very special little boy William mused to himself as he made a final check on his three boys before turning in.

True to his word Blair was in Jim’s bed. Sentinel and Guide tightly curled around each other, Jim holding Blair tightly to him.

Turning off the lights William noted that in his tiny little hands Blair held the panther close. The wolf sitting on the bedside table between the two beds as if keeping watch.

***

WALK IN THE PARK
“Hmm.” Jim woke to little hands caressing his face.

“Jim, okay?”

“I’m fine. You?” Jim asked hoarsely, trying to clear his voice.

“I good.”

Solemnly, Blair stared down at his Sentinel a tiny frown marring his cute little face. Jim stared back wondering what the hell his little Guide was doing. That was when he realized that Blair was releasing the scent.

“Blair…” Jim moaned softly. “don’t.”

“Must.”

“Why?” Jim asked, pulling Blair to him urgently. Burying his face against his Guide’s neck, he keened softly.

“I Guide. Take care of my Sentinell always.”

Blair’s tiny hands gently soothed Jim. Offering and giving comfort. It was then that Jim realized that Blair for all of being two, took his job as his Guide very serious. And he had sensed that there was something not quite right.

“Blair. Oh, God-Blair.”


Jim lost himself in the comfort and unconditional love Blair was giving him. Allowing it to center his world. He keened again as the rich scent reached to his very soul covering it like a warm blanket. He buried his head tightly against Blair’s neck breathing deep. Hands those tiny hands continued to gently stroke his hair. Giving Jim everything.

Slowly he became aware of his surroundings to find Steven sitting on the edge of his bed watching them curiously. “What was that?” Steven asked, eyes wide.

Steven had read all the pamphlets he could find on Sentinels when he’d found out that Jim was one. He’d seen Jim in such pain when he’d come online he wanted to help. Knowing he couldn’t. Only one person could do that. But what had just happened hadn’t been covered in any of the literature he’d read.

Jim cleared his throat. “I…I don’t know. Blair must have sensed that something was off. He released the scent to fix it.”

“Do you know what was off?”

Jim frowned. Doing a internal check. “Hmm, hearing and sight I think. I’m still trying to get use to this whole Sentinel thing. But they seemed to have been a little off. It’s better now,” Jim smiled at his little Guide. “thanks to Blair.” Tiny hands had not stopped stroking the back of Jim’s head. “How did you know, baby?” Jim asked softly.

Blair shrugged his little shoulders. “I Guide.”

Jim kissed the tip of his Guide’s cute little nose. “Yeah, you are. My Guide?”

Jim felt his eyes fill with tears. “Oh, Blair,” he said, pulling his little Guide to him in a hug.

Blair returned it. “Jim, okay?”

“Y…yes.”

“Good. Jim?”

“Yes?”

“I hungry,” Blair said plaintively. His tummy growling loudly in agreement.

Both Steven and Jim laughed. “Okay, let’s get you changed and we’ll get you fed,” Jim replied, lifting his little Guide into his arms.

Breakfast was a replay of the night before as Blair carefully checked everything on Jim’s plate. Only this time Blair sat on Jim’s lap and alternately fed his Sentinel and eating himself.

Every now and then Jim would catch Blair looking at him oddly, but he guessed that his little Guide found everything to his satisfaction, he hadn’t released the scent.

Breakfast was a happy affair. As the joke flew fast and furious as Steven and Jim teased each other unmercifully. Sally and William laughing at the two boys antics.

Blair watched quietly. Feeding his Sentinel in between jokes.

It had been decided that both Steven and Jim would take Blair to the park right after breakfast. Show him the area he now lived in.

Summer break from school having come in handy as everyone became use to having a small child in the house. Once school restarted it would lead to a whole other set of problems.

William was already looking it to it. There were special clauses for Sentinel and Guide. But none for a Sentinel/Guide pair as young as Jim and Blair. Blair was to young to be in classes that Jim would have to take while in school, but the little Guide could not be that far from his Sentinel.

It was nothing that William couldn’t deal with—with the backing of the Sentinel group and with the amount of money he was willing to use to keep both his son and his little Guide together and safe, everything should work out. At least that’s what he was hoping. He had his fingers crossed in any case.

Smiling he watched as his three boys made their way out the door. Jim for once walking Blair out instead of carrying his little Guide. Shaking his head chuckling softly to himself he went into his study to make some phone calls.

***

“Nice,” Blair proclaimed as looked around the park.

“Yeah, it is. It’s the best park in all of Cascade,” Steven told him. Seeing some friends he waved. “Jim, there’s Rafe. Wanna go say hi?”

“Sure.”
Blair watched the whole thing blue eyes wide. They were a lot taller and older than him so he wasn’t real sure what to make of Jim and Steven’s friends. Yet they all readily accepted the little Guide. Having been briefed by Steven that Jim was a Sentinel and now needed one. Henry-known as H for short, Carl and Rafe all gravely shook Blair’s hands when he offered it to them.

“Wanna play some football?” H asked the two Ellison boys. Both readily agreed.

Jim looked at his little Guide. “Blair, do you wanna play football?”

“I to little,” Blair said shaking his curly head. Looking up at the five boys watching him. “I sit under tree. Watch.”

Jim frowned. He couldn’t leave his little Guide sitting alone. That wasn’t right. Blair was after all still a baby. “No, I can’t let you sit there by yourself. I’ll sit with you while the others play.”

“I’ll sit with him, Jim. We can take turns playing, if you like,” Rafe offered.

The Sentinel looked at his best friend. “Are you sure?” he asked uncertainly.

Rafe smiled at him. “Yeah, it’s cool. I got a kid brother at home and my parents are always asking me to baby-sit. I don’t mind at all.”

“Well, okay if your sure,” Jim replied, kneeling on the ground in front of his little Guide. “Is it alright with you, Blair?”

Blair nodded. “It cool.”

Jim chuckled. “Okay. Just don’t let Rafe teach you any other words,” he said kissing Blair on the forehead.

He watched Rafe take Blair by the hand leading him toward one of the trees near where they would be playing. Confident he could trust his best friend with his Guide he turned to his other friends.

For the next hour and a half they played football. Rafe and Jim taking turns with Blair. Jim even took his Guide to play in the playground. Swinging him on the swings laughing at his little Guide’s squeals of delight. And yells of “Higher, Jim, higher.” It was the same thing on the carousel only this time it was squeals of “Faster, Jim, faster.”

Blair’s happiness seemed to be contagious before Jim realized it all of his friends including Steven were riding the carousel with Blair. While Jim worked his butt off pushing it.

“Damn, you guys are heavy,” Jim told them, panting heavily.

They’d decided after a while to rest for a bit under the same tree Rafe had taken Blair to. His blue eyes widening when he realized what he’d just done. He nervously looked at Blair to see if his little Guide had heard. He really didn’t want to get his nose bit in front of his friends for cussing. Jim sighed happily. Blair hadn’t heard, he was busy investigating a Lady Bug crawling on Rafe’s left hand.

“Well if it isn’t the freak.” Heads turned toward the voice. A collective moan from all of them. It was Mike. The biggest, meanest bully they knew.

“What do you want, Mike?” Jim asked, rolling his eyes in disgust.

“Why would I want anything from you, freak?”
“Go away, Mike. No one wants you here.”

“It’s a free park, last I heard, freak.”

“Then go to the other side of it and leave us alone,” H told him.

“Don’t want to,” Mike replied.

Jim sighed. “Go away, Mike.”

“I hear you’re a Sentinel now. You’re a bigger freak than I thought,” Mike taunted. “Can’t live without a Guide now, can you, freak?”

“I don’t have to explain myself to you, Mike. Go away.”

Mike turned toward the little boy sitting quietly in Rafe’s lap. “So is this your Guide, freak?”

Jim sighed again. “Mike, why don’t you go away before there’s trouble?”

Mike came up right into Jim face and pushed him hard. Hard enough to send him sprawling to the ground.

Before anyone had a chance to react Blair came out of Rafe’s lap, launching himself at Mike.


Mike not expecting it took a step back before regaining his footing. When he had, he backhanded Blair sending the little Guide flying.

“Blair,” Jim yelled, horrified. He turned toward Mike, blue eyes icy. He needed to take care of his Guide, but first he needed to take of the threat.

Jim growled low and rumbling before proceeding to beat Mike to a bloody pulp. He had to be pulled off by Steven before he did any serious damage.

“Jim, your Guide needs you. Leave Mike alone now. He’s gotten the message.”

The red, angry haze that covered Jim lifted at the mention of Blair’s name. “Oh, God, Blair,” Jim whispered hoarsely as he went to his Guide.

Blair was in Rafe’s arms a little hand clutched to his cheek. Jim reached out with violently trembling hands. “How bad is it?”

Blair removed his hand to reveal a dark, purple bruise forming over the whole left side of his face and he had blood on the corner of his mouth. “Oh, God, Blair,” Jim said, eyes filling with tears. “we’ve got to get you home. Sally will know what to do.”

Jim picked up Blair hurriedly he ran as if his life depended on it. Not realizing that his friends and Steven were following. Steven after giving the fallen Mike a swift, hard kick to the stomach. Earning a most satisfying moan of pain.

“Sally. Sally come quick. Blair’s been hurt,” Jim yelled as he just about knocked the door down in his haste to get in.

Three adults came rushing in from the study. One being his father, Sally and the Doctor he recognized from the hospital, Dr Banks.
Dr Banks jumped right in and grabbed Blair from Jim’s arms. “Here, let me have him. Mr. Ellison there’s a bag on the front seat of my car, get it for me, please. Here are the keys.”

Sitting Blair on top of the dining room table he began a careful examination. “How did this happen?” He asked, gently probing the angry looking bruise.

Jim wiped the tears coursing down his face. “We were at the park and Mike one of the bullies that lives around here came up to us. He was saying stuff and then he pushed me, knocking me to the ground. Blair didn’t like it so he attacked Mike. Mike backhanded him. Hard. Will Blair be alright?”

“Yes. I think so. Do you hurt anywhere else, Blair?” Simon asked, carefully checking the back of Blair’s curly head.

“No. Only hurt here,” Blair replied, little hand touching the side of his face.

Jim felt his eyes fill with renewed tears. “Some Sentinel I am. I can’t even take care of my Guide.”

Rafe touched his arm. “You couldn’t have known, Jim.”

“I should have known and knocked the hell out of Mike before he got a chance to get near Blair.”

Jim looked at Simon, blue eyes brimming with tears. “Are you going to take Blair away from me?” he asked voice trembling. “I wouldn’t blame you if you did.”

“Should I?”

Jim looked at the floor. “I…”

Blair who’d been watching Jim solemnly. “Down,” He demanded of Simon, who quickly complied. He went to Jim, staring up at his distraught Sentinel. “Up.”

Jim lifted his little Guide up into his arms. “I’m sorry I’m such a lousy Sentinel, Blair,” he said quietly.

Tiny hands gently caressed his cheek. That’s all it took. With a moan of such loss it touched everyone in the room Jim buried his face into the side of Blair’s neck sobbing his ten year old heart out.

“You can’t take Blair away from Jim,” William told Dr. Banks, wiping at his eyes.

Simon looked at the two little boys holding tightly to one another. “I couldn’t even if I wanted to. The bond is in place and unbreakable. I have read of a couple of cases where a Guide broke the bond with their Sentinel. Simply walked away. Those cases are very rare and has not happened in this century. The bond is so new I think that if Blair wanted he could break it. But I don’t know. There simply isn’t any information on a Sentinel/Guide pair so young. They’re the first. This will be a learning experience for everyone.”

“No cry, Jim. I okay,” Blair told his Sentinel. “no hurt much.”

“I suck,” Jim sobbed into the side of Blair’s neck. “I don’t deserve a Guide like you.”

“No say that. Jim my Sentenell always.”

“I suck,” Jim repeated.
“No say that.”

“Why not? It’s true.”

“No true. Jim protect Blair. Hit Mike.”

Jim pulled away slightly. “Not fast enough to stop Mike from hurting the side of your cute, little face.”


“I… No, Blair don’t,” Jim protected weakly. Unable to continue when Blair began releasing scent.

“Sniff.”

“Blair, I really wish you’d quit doing that,” Jim replied, moving his head back and forth fighting the calling of the bond.

His little Guide was having none of that. “Jim, need. No talk. Sniff.”

“No, Blair. Please.”

His little Guide tangled his fingers in his hair pulling at him impatiently. “Sniff.”

“No.”

“Sniff.”

“No,” Jim fought the seductive calling of Blair’s scent. Wanting nothing more than to give in. “I don’t deserve you.”

“Jim mine. Sniff.”

“Blair, please, don’t.” Jim begged weakly.

Blair frowned. “Jim no want Blair?” Hurt clear in his voice.

“With all my heart,” Jim told him with a sob.

“Then sniff.”

“I can’t. I don’t deserve you. I can’t take care of you.”

Blair tilted his head to one side observing his Sentinel with wide, blue eyes. “Jim take care me. I take care Jim. We take care of each odder.”

“Are you saying we can take care of each other?”

Blair nodded. “Course.”

“Of course?”

“Yup,” Blair nodded again.

“Are you sure you want me?” Jim asked, voice trembling.

Jim gave Blair a brilliant smile. “Forever and ever?”

“Yup,” Blair agreed.

Suddenly Jim frowned as he eyed his little Guide. “Aren’t you going to scent me?”

“Nope.”

“Nope?”

A tiny hand stroked the side of his face. Jim moved into it with a small sound of contentment. “Jim no need. Jim fine,” Blair told him softly.

“Oh. Then since I’m not going to get scented can I have a hug?”

Blair giggled. “Jim silly. Can always have hug. No need ask.”

Jim pulled his little Guide to him tightly. “I love you, Blair,” he told him softly.

“Really?”

“Yup.”

“Cool.”

Jim laughed. “Yup. Cool. So do you love me back?” Blue eyes suddenly dark and very vulnerable.

Blair nodded his curly-head. “Yup. Lots and lots,” he replied, giving Jim a very wet, very sloppy kiss on the nose.

Jim feeling better than he had since his little Guide got hurt returned the kiss just as wet, just as sloppy. Earning a bright, happy giggle from Blair. Jim hugged him close. Suddenly remembering he turned to Dr Banks.

“You’re not going to take Blair away from me are you, Dr Banks?” Deep fear in his voice and his eyes.

Dr Banks shook his head. “No. I just need your assurance that this won’t happen to often.”

Steven spoke up from where he stood near his father. “No, it’s not. Jimmy beat the crap out of Mike. He won’t be bothering anyone for a long time.” His eyes widened when he heard Blair growling at him. “Sorry. Sorry. I won’t do it again,” he said hurriedly.

“Do what, son?” William asked, looking at his Steven curiously.

“Cuss. Blair doesn’t like cussing. He bit Jim’s nose yesterday when he did it.”

Jim groaned, hiding his face in his little Guide’s curly hair and waited. It didn’t take long for his friends to start ribbing him.

“Blair bit your nose?” Rafe said with a big smile.

“You’ve had Blair how long, Jimmy boy?” H said laughing. “Already has you wrapped around his little fingers doesn’t he? And he’s what-two?”
Carl just laughed shaking his head.

Jim looked up. “Yeah, yeah laugh it up. Make fun of me. I’ll just sic my little Guide on you and he’ll give you what for. Let’s see who’s gonna be laughing then,” He told them smugly. “Huh, Blair?”

Blair nodded. Yup,” He said, growling at them menacingly.

The whole room broke out in laughter. “So everyone how about some lunch?” Sally said smiling. “Boys stay and join us,” she told Steven and Jim’s friends. “Dr. Banks can you stay. It won’t be anything fancy-soup and sandwiches, but there will be plenty.”

Dr. Banks smiled. “I’d love, to. Thank you.”

Sitting at the table a few minutes later Simon watched as Blair carefully examined Jim’s lunch and the patient look on Jim’s face as he waited. “Jim, I noticed that you were able to fight the pheromones that Blair released-how did you do that?” He asked, picking up his chicken salad sandwich.

Jim took a bite of the pickle Blair was offering him. “Blair let me.”

“What do you mean?”

“If Blair wanted to scent me he would have. There is no way I can fight him. I’ve only had him two days and I already know that.”

“But yet, you were able to fight it off even for a little while. How?”

Jim bit into his sandwich hungrily before answering. “I didn’t fight anything off. Blair let me. If he wanted me scented, then that’s what would have happened. And the scent he was releasing wasn’t even that strong. Not as strong as it was this morning when he fixed my senses.”

Dr. Bank’s eyebrows went up. “Fixed your senses?”

Steven answered for Jim who was playing catch the airplane sandwich with a giggling Blair. “It was the craziest thing. Blair was looking at Jim with the oddest look on his little face. Kinda like he was checking him out to see if everything was working right. It wasn’t, that’s when he scented Jim to fix him. I don’t remember that being in any of the pamphlets the Sentinel hospital gave us.”

“That’s because there’s nothing in there that covers that.” Dr Bank’s replied. “Blair?”

The little Guide looked over at him. “Was there something wrong with Jim this morning?”

“Yup.”

“And you fixed it?”

Blair nodded. “Yup.”

“How?”

Blair gave the same response he did that morning. Shrugging his little shoulders proclaiming. “I Guide.”

“I know, Blair. But how did you know that Jim need help?” Simon asked patiently. Knowing he was dealing with a two year old and therefore needed it endlessly.
“Knew,” Blair told him just as patiently.

“How? Please, Blair this could help many special people like Jim.”

Blair looked up at Jim for confirmation. “Yes?”

Jim nodded. “Yup. If you can tell Dr Banks how you knew I needed help. Take your time.”

Blair looked back at Simon. “Know here,” he replied, his little hand going to his chest.

“In your heart?” Simon asked quietly.

“Yup.”

Simon sighed. “That doesn’t help.”

“Of course it does, Dr Banks,” William said quietly.

“What do you mean?”

“What Blair is trying to tell you is that he knew instinctively that Jim was in trouble.”

“Instinct is not scientifically based,” Simon scoffed, watching as Blair began feeding his Sentinel once more.

Perhaps not, but it goes to show me and the world that my son could not have a better Guide. Even if he’s only two. He knows what Jim needs even before Jim does. My son could not have found a better Guide especially as Jim learns about being a Sentinel. He brought Jim out of a zone last night with the skill and knowledge of someone-maybe ten times his age. He knew, he KNEW what he had to do without any one telling him. And he DID IT without a qualm. Without fear. He may only be two but he is first and foremost Jim’s Guide. Aren’t you, Blair?”


“That presents a whole other set of problems?” Simon told William.

“Like?”

“Because of his age how do we keep Blair from becoming so wrapped up in his Sentinel he loses himself in the process? What becomes of Blair Jacob Sandburg? His hopes, his dreams?”

William smiled at Jim and his little Guide. Both who were looking at him solemnly. “It’s like I told Naomi. He can still have his hopes and dreams and more. Now not only does he have one of the most powerful beings on this planet protecting him, he also has the Ellison name and money backing him. Blair Jacob Sandburg will want for nothing. Ever.”

“Mr. Ellison, Blair is two. With that kind of attitude Blair will grow up being one of the most conceited people it will be my unlucky privilege of knowing.”

William shook his head. “No, Dr Banks. Have a look at my sons. My boys, I’m raising with Sally’s help since my wife Grace died. I am proud of my sons. Damn proud of them. I am raising them to be well-rounded individuals. Who know right from wrong and will be good, strong, loving men. Blair will be raised the same way. There will be problems popping up from time to time I’m sure, but it won’t be anything we can’t handle. Nothing any family couldn’t handle even if one of it’s members is a Sentinel and another his Guide. Right, Jim?”
Jim gave his dad a brilliant smile never prouder of his father as he was right now. “Right, Dad.”

“Right, Steven?” William asked his youngest son.

“Right, Dad,” Steven readily agreed.

“Sally?”

Sally nodded. “Nothing we can’t handle.”

“Right, Blair?” William asked the newest member of his family.

Blair nodded sending his curly-hair flying all over the place. “Yup.”

Not to be left out Rafe, H and Carl jumped in. “We’ll help, too.”

William smiled at them before turning toward Dr. Banks. “See, we have all the help any family could possible need. We will make this work.”

***

After everyone had left Sally went into the kitchen to make a batch of chocolate chip cookies and Steven had gone to their room to read awhile. William in his study working on how to keep Jim and Blair together when Jim went back to school in two weeks.

The ten year old Sentinel and his two year old Guide were currently cuddling on the living room sofa.

Blair resting comfortably on top of Jim playing with his Sentinel’s nose. Jim gently stroking his little Guide’s curly hair.

“Jim?”

“Hmm.”

“You purring?”

The Sentinel thought about it for a moment. “Hmm, yeah, I guess I am.”

“Why you purr?”

Jim kissed Blair’s forehead. “Don’t know. I guess because I’m happy.”

The tiny Guide moved his head from where it lay on Jim’s shoulder to look up at his Sentinel. “Really?”

“Yup.”

“No mad?” Blair asked, eyes wide, almost as if he were afraid.

“Why would I be mad?”

“Cause I ‘tack Mike.”

Jim frowned for a minute. “Oh, cause you attacked Mike?”
Blair nodded. “Yup.”

Jim shook his head. “No, I’m not mad about that. I’m really proud of you.”

“Really?”

“Yup,” Jim replied, pulling Blair closer to him tightly. “I just wish you hadn’t gotten hurt.” Kissing the dark bruise gently.

“I protect my Sentinell, always,” Blair told him solemnly.

“I know you will, baby. But right now you’re so little. You have to be more careful. I don’t know what I’d do if you really got hurt and they took you away from me because I couldn’t take care of you right,” Jim said, voice breaking. “I was really afraid.”

“I protect, my Sentinell no matter what,” Blair told him firmly. No doubt to where he stood in the matter.

Jim sighed. “I know, baby, I know. But you can’t go around attacking everyone that pushes me around.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’m bigger than you and I can defend myself.”


“Blair, you’re only two,” Jim replied, frustrated.

“So?”

“You’re really little, baby.”

“I little, but I no baby. I take care of my Sentinell,” Blair insisted.

“I know that, sweetheart. But you can’t do what you did today?”

“Why?” Blair asked, blue eyes wide, waiting to see why he couldn’t take care of his Sentinel the way he knew deep inside he was suppose to.

“I don’t want you getting hurt.”

“I okay.”

Jim sighed again. “I know you’re okay, next time you might get hurt really bad. And where will that leave me?”

“Huh?”

“Blair, baby-listen to me, please. What happens to me if someone hurts you when you’re defending me and you end up in the hospital? Who will help check my food and scent me when I need it? Who will take care of me?” Jim hated himself when he saw Blair’s little face pale. But he needed for his overprotective Guide to understand.

“Oh,” Blair replied quietly.
“Yes-oh. Do you want another Guide to have me?”

Blair shook his curly-head vehemently. “No. Jim, mine.”

“Okay, then you need to understand that you can’t do what you did this morning again. Do you understand, baby?”

Blair nodded reluctantly. “Yes, Jim.”

“You won’t do it again?”

“No say that.”

“What are you saying then, baby?”

Blair tilted his head to the side as he contemplated Jim. “I take care of my Sentinell, always,” He shrugged his little shoulder. “I get hurt, I get hurt. My Sentinell be safe.”

Jim felt his eyes fill with tears something he seemed to be doing a lot lately. Especially since Blair had come into his life the day before. He really hoped that wasn’t going to be the way things were from now on. He pulled Blair to him holding tightly to this little determined fellow willing to do whatever it took to keep him safe.

“Oh, Blair what am I going to do with you?” Jim told him in exasperation.

“Don’t know,” Blair replied, kissing Jim’s nose sloppily.

Silence filled the room as the cuddled happily together. Finally. “Blair?”

“Hmm.”

“I’ve got a question for you?”

“What?” Blair asked, playing with Jim’s fingers.

“I can’t live without you anymore. You know that, right?”

“Yup.”

“If something happens to you I will die.”

Blair stopped what he was doing to give Jim an incredulous look. “No.”

Jim nodded. “Yup. Without you I will die. So if you get hurt and weren’t around when I needed you I will die.”


“Good baby. You need to understand that to keep me safe you need to keep you safe and besides we will take care of each other from now on. We won’t fight if we don’t have to, but if we do, I’ll do the fighting okay? If it makes you feel better, if it looks like their winning you can go in and kick some butt. How does that sound?”

Blair gave him a brilliant smile. “Really?”
“Yup.”

“Cool.”

Jim laughed. “Learned a new word from Rafe, huh?”

“Yup.”

“Cool.”

Blair smiled at him again. “Silly, Jim.”

“That’s me,” Jim told him. Seeing Blair yawn hugely. “Wow, there buddy I just saw your tonsils. Wanna take a nap?”

Blair nodded his curly head. “Tired,” he replied sleepily.

“Okay. Lay back down and close your eyes. We’ve both had a busy few days and I could use a nap, too,” Jim said, pulling his little Guide close against him.

William watching the exchange from the doorway smiled. Jim and Blair’s relationship was going to be very interesting to say the very least. It certainly wasn’t going to be any walk in the park that’s for sure.

***

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

“What are you saying, Dr. Bank?” William asked as he sat in the Doctor’s office.

“What I’m telling you is that Blair Jacob Sandburg is going to be smarter than all of us in this room put together,” Simon replied, biting down on his cigar-hard. Looking at William Ellison then at his two sons, Jim and Steven. All of them looking at him in blue wide-eyed incredibility. Except for Blair who sat on his Sentinel’s lap reading a book given to him the day before.

Blair had been given an IQ test, stunning the people giving the test by the Little Guide’s attentiveness to detail and photographic memory. He absorbed knowledge like a sponge and always wanting, demanding more.

“Are you sure?” William asked carefully.

“Very.”

“Well, then where does this leave us?”

“Blair will attend school with Jim. He’ll be close but not in the same classroom. He will have special teachers who’s job it is to see he doesn’t grow bored and keep up with the rate he absorbs knowledge. I don’t envy them their job that’s for sure. It’s not going to be easy. He’s smart, really, really smart. He’s just so damn young.” At that Blair’s head popped up and he growled at Simon. “Oops, sorry, Blair. I won’t do it again,” Simon said repentantly, smiling at William when Blair bend his head down to his book. “That may have a lot to do on why he chose Jim as his Sentinel. It may explain a lot of things. This opens a whole new field of study concerning Sentinels and Guides.”

“I won’t have Blair and Jim as laboratory rats. I won’t allow it. They are children and will stay that way as long as possible,” William told him angrily.
“I agree. They will both be allowed to grow up naturally. As much as they can considering. We’ll be monitoring them closely. The information we can gather from them will be invaluable in helping other Guides and Sentinel pairings.”

William nodded in agreement. “Alright, but if I say you’re getting in the way of them leading a normal life as possible, you will back off. I will not allow you to interfer to heavily in their lives.”

“Alright.”

“Then we’re set?”

“Yes.”

***

The first day of school dawned early in the Ellison household as they all scrambled to shower, find where their backpack’s disappeared to and where their shoes had gone. Everyone in panic mode except for Blair, who sat on the bed he and Jim shared waiting patiently for his Sentinel and Steven. A Batman backpack sitting on his lap. He watched the whole whirlwind events of the first day of school with a bemused look on his cute little face.

Rafe, H and Carl had been waiting for them outside of the Ellison house and they’d all walked together. Rafe holding on to Blair’s hand.

Jim had frowned when he’d seen that, but quickly forgot about it when they’d run across more of their classmates.

As the day progressed Jim began to feel odd. Dis orientated and really, really dizzy. Shaking his head slightly to clear it as he made his way to Blair’s classroom to have lunch with his little Guide.

That was when he came across Rafe holding Blair in his arms, who was giggling as Rafe tickled him.

Jim found himself growling. The growling got louder when Rafe hugged his Guide. “Blair come here,” he demanded angrily.

Wide, startled blue eyes looked over at him. “Jim.”

“Rafe, put my Guide down. NOW.”

“Jim?” Rafe asked in confusion.

“Put my Guide down. Now, Rafe. I won’t tell you again.”

Rafe carefully placed the Little Guide down on the floor. “Jim, what is it? What’s wrong?”

“Get away from him, he’s mine.”

Blair looked at him tilting his head slightly as Jim continued to growl, the growls becoming louder and louder the more angry and disoriented the young Sentinel became.

“Blair, come here.”

Blair went. Jim grabbed him when he got close enough. “Mine.”
“Yours.”

“Scent me, now,” Jim demanded, pulling Blair to him tightly.

Blair pulled his curly hair to the side and Jim buried his face with a deep moan of need. Immediately smelling the scent that had become familiar, soothing and welcoming, filling his senses. Calming his raw nerve-endings. He keened softly, rocking himself and his little Guide back and forth.

“Shh, Jim be okay,” Blair said, stroking Jim’s hair. “it be okay. Sniff.”

“Blair. Blair. Help me. Please help me,” Jim pleaded as everything in the room swirled around dizzily.

“I ‘elp. Sniff.”

“I hurt, Blair. It hurt’s.”

“I know. Sniff. It be okay,” Blair told him, releasing more scent.

Jim trembled as he sought it hungrily. Pulling his little Guide to him tightly he buried his head deep into Blair’s warm neck. Moaning softly when Blair started releasing the bonding scent as well.

Slowly Jim became aware of his surroundings to find his father and Dr. Banks kneeling close by.

“W…what happened?”

William smiled gently at his son. “You tell us? We got a call from Blair’s teacher saying you were having trouble. What happened?”

Jim looked around Blair’s classroom in confusion and at Rafe who was close by. Eyes dark in concern. “I…I don’t know.”

“Blair can you tell us what happened to Jim,” Simon asked the little boy still held tightly in Jim’s arms.

Blair nodded. “Yup.”

William and Simon waited and waited and waited until finally… “Well, Blair?” Simon asked with barely concealed impatience.

“Many people, many sounds, many smells,” Blair replied, stroking Jim’s chest with his tiny hands.

“Jim’s senses were overwhelmed by everything in the school?” William asked, moving closer to his still trembling son.

“Yup.”

“Is Jim going to be okay now?”

Blair looked up at his Sentinel. “Yup. No happen again.” He promised solemnly. “I take good care my Sentinell.”

Jim smiled shakily at his little Guide. “I know you will, Blair.”

“Are you alright now, son?”
“I’m still a little wobbly,” Jim replied, pulling Blair close. “I think I need to lie down for a little while.”

“Maybe we should take them both back to the hospital. Jim can rest on my couch where I can keep an eye on him,” Simon said, eyeing the Sentinel/Guide pair. “We’re only half a block away. Not that far.”

“That’s a good idea,” William replied, pulling his still shaky son to his feet.

Jim sighed as he lay on the couch in Simon’s office. Carefully positioning Blair on top of him. He’d refused to let him go during the trip to the hospital. Now he wrapped his arms around his little Guide tightly.

Blair had been releasing the scent in tiny doses during the ride. Now on top of Jim he began releasing it full force. It filled Jim senses to where that was all he could smell and feel. He moaned softly as he allowed it to caress his frayed and shaky senses.

“Shh, it be okay. Sleep. I take care you.”

With that Jim closed his eyes. Knowing his Guide would guard his sleep.

He woke slowly to find that Blair was still releasing the scent. He didn’t feel as wobbly so he guessed that it’d worked. “Blair?”

“I here.”

“What happened?”

Blair sat up on Jim’s chest. Sad blue eyes looked down at him from a very, pale face framed by a head of tangled curly hair. “I sorry.”

“F…for what,” Jim asked, shaking his head trying to clear the fuzz.

“I no take good care of my Sentinell.” Jim watched in shock as Blair’s eyes filled with tears. Something his little Guide had not done even when Mike had hit him in the park.

“W…what?”

“I no take good care of my Sentinell.” The tears fell down the tiny, pale face.

“No don’t cry, Blair. You did take care of me. You’re a good Guide. A really good Guide,” Jim told Blair, wiping at the tears.

Blair shook his head. “No. I did bad.”

“Huh?”

“I should have scent.”

Jim sat up pulling holding his Guide carefully as he did it. “Huh?”

“Many people, many smell. I should have scent.”

“You did.”

Blair shook his head again. The tears falling faster. His bottom lip trembling violently. “This morning before school. I should have scented. Keep my Sentinell safe. No do. I bad, bad Guide.”
Jim pulled Blair tightly to him. His heart breaking at his little Guide’s pain. “No, no. Don’t say that. You’re a good Guide. Please, Blair—don’t cry,” he replied, feeling his own eyes fill with tears. “if you cry you’re going to make me cry, too.”

“I bad Guide. I bad. No deserve Jim,” Blair buried his face against Jim’s chest.

Jim looked over at his Dad and Simon who were quietly watching. “What do I do? Help me,” he pleaded.

“Let him get it out of his system. Then try talking to him,” William suggested softly.

Jim tightened his hold on his little Guide. His own tears falling on top of Blair’s head. Shining like glitter on the bright, curly locks. Finally after what felt like forever to Jim the tears stopped.

“Blair?” Nothing. “Blair, please baby, look at me.”

A little face looked up at him. Big, blue eyes, red and still full of tears. “Jim, no want me?” Blair asked sadly.

“I’ll always want you, baby.”

“I bad Guide.”

Jim gently cupped his Guide’s little face. “That’s not true. You didn’t know I was going to react the way I did to the first day of school. And besides we’re still getting use to one another and this whole Sentinel/Guide thing. There are things that are going to come up. And you helped me. If you hadn’t helped me I’d be in a lot of trouble. You did great, baby. Really great.”

“Jim, no mad.”

“No, baby. Jim no mad. I love you, Blair.”

Tiny arms came around his neck. “I luv you too, Jim.”

Jim smiled at his little Guide. “Better?” he asked, gently running his hands over Blair’s back.

Blair kissed the tip of his Sentinel’s nose. “Better.”

“I could use another nap. Wanna take a nap with me?” Blair nodded. “Okay. Let’s lay down.” Blair curled on top of Jim sighing softly. William listening quietly to his son and little Guide coming up he carefully covered them both with a blanket. “Thank’s, Dad.” Jim told him gratefully before his blue eyes closed. William watched them for a moment running his hands over Blair’s soft, curly locks and then over his son’s in a gentle caress.

“It’s not going to be easy for them, is it?”

“No, but it will get better as they become more in tune with one another,” Simon replied looking over at the sleeping Sentinel/Guide pair. “at least we can hope it will. I don’t think my heart can take to many more crises.”

“Nor mine.”

***

Two hours later Jim with Blair in his lap sat in a chair in front of Simon’s desk. Jim peeling an orange for his little Guide. William sat close to them reading through some manuels Simon had given
him on what was known about Sentinel/Guide pairing.

“This is all you’ve got?” William asked in disgust.

“Afraid so. Information is hard to come by. That’s why it’s critical that we document any thing pertinent with Jim and little Blair.”

“I already told you I won’t have you interfering to deeply into their lives.”

“Yes, I know. We will allow them to grow naturally. But what we can learn from Jim and Blair can help a lot of Sentinel/Guide pairings.”

“I know,” William sighed. “I just wished…”

“I agree, but it needs to be done.”

“Now about the sexual mating rites of the Sentinel…” William said, holding up the manual when he heard a loud gasp. He turned to looked at Jim who as staring at him in blue eyes wide in shock.

“Dad.”

William chuckled as he looked into the horror-stuck face of his son. “It’s going to happen, son.”

Jim covered Blair’s ears. “Dad, he’s a baby. Please, that’s just gross.”

William looked at the little Guide sitting in his Sentinel’s lap happily eating his peeled and quartered orange, unconcerned by the conversation taking place in the room or the fact that his Sentinel was carefully covering his ears. “Yes, he’s a baby right now, but he’s not going to stay that way.”

“Dad, please,” Jim said turning a bright red all the way to his hairline.

William laughed. “It’s not that bad, son. I’m sure you’re really going to enjoy it when the time comes.”

“Dad, please. Blair’s right here,” Jim replied and if possible turning an even brighter shade of red.

“Okay, son. We’ll talk about it at a later date,” William told him, smiling.

“A real later date.”

Blair finally took notice that Jim was covering his ears was looking up at him curiously. “Jim, why you hold ears?”

Jim let go. “I…I hmm…” Unsure of what to say. Glaring at Simon and his father as they laugh at his expense.

Blair looked at the two men quietly laughing and back at his Sentinel. “Why they laughing?”

“H…hmm, their laughing at me, Blair.”

“Oh. No laugh, Jim,” Blair told them disapprovingly. William and Simon promptly stopped, biting their lips hard. “Okay, they stop. Want orange?”

Jim took the piece being offered by his little Guide glaring at the two adults. Who had tears streaming down their faces. “Can I go now?”
“Ah, I don’t see why not. Just take it easy.” Simon told him, chuckling.

“Okay, we’ll met you outside, Dad.” With that he rose from the chair, Blair in his arms and with as much dignity as he could muster walked out of the room, followed by a renewed burst of laughter.

***

HALLOWEEN


“And besides if you don’t want your candy I’ll take it,” Rafe, dressed as Robocup said standing next to Spiderman-aka-Steven.

Jim had apologized to Rafe for the whole first day of school fiasco. Rafe understood that it’d been a Sentinel thing and not something Jim had meant in a hurtful way.

Blair had begun the next day to scent Jim every morning before school to keep him centered. It’d become a routine the ten year old Sentinel had come to truly enjoy. It was a time set aside just for him and his little Guide. He truly relished the time, looking forward to it immensely. He also enjoyed the fact that he hadn’t had another episode like that one again.

“Ha, if Blair doesn’t want his candy I get it. I’m his Sentinel,” Jim replied, knowing fool well he’d be lucky if Blair let him keep his own candy. His little Guide was extremely particular about what Jim ate. And if the Sentinel tried Blair would give him hell about it.

Rafe punched him gently in the arm. “Ha, says you. What are you suppose to be anyway?”

Jim punched him back harder. “I’m a policeman with the Cascade P.D. See my badge?”

“Ow. Okay, if you say so.”

“Yes, I say so. That’s what I’m going to be when I get older.”

Steven began moving from one foot to another impatiently. “Can we go now? We still need to pick up H and Carl.”

“Oh, lets go see how much candy we can get,” Jim replied smiling.

***

“How did Blair do it? We all went to the same houses and he got double the candy we did,” Rafe said in annoyance looking at Blair’s huge pile of assorted chocolates, lollipops, gums and hard candies. Comparing it to his much smaller pile.

They were back at the Ellison house after dropping Carl and H at their respective home, checking their candies at Mr. Ellisons insistence. Who said it was better to be safe than sorry.

“It’s because Blair’s a lot cuter than us,” Jim replied smiling at his little Guide who was sitting in his father’s lap on the big couch, sharing a peach. “Must be all that curly hair and big, blue eyes.”

“I guess,” Rafe grumbled.
“Blair did say we could have his candy.”

“Yeah he did, but that’s to much like taking candy from a baby.”

Jim chuckled. “Yeah, huh? Blair, are you sure you don’t want any of this candy?”

“No want. Want coloring book and crayons.”

“And how did he end up with a coloring book and crayons, when we didn’t?” Rafe asked glaring at Jim.

“Don’t you think you’re a bit old for a Bambi coloring book? Blair might let you color in it if you ask nice. Won’t you, Blair?” Jim teased.

Blair nodded solemnly. “Yup,” Offering William another slice of peach from the plate he carefully held.

“See.”

“Fuck you,” Rafe told him softly so that Mr. Ellison and Blair couldn’t hear. Mr. Ellison would only scold. Blair on the other hand bit and bit hard.

Jim laughed. “Steven do you want in on splitting Blair’s candy?”

Steven who’d been looking through Blair’s coloring book and eating tootsie rolls, startled. “Yeah, hmm, okay.” he replied absently.

An hour later found the four boys out of their costumes, bathed and laying on the floor-Rafe spending the night since it was Saturday and not a school night, coloring in Blair’s coloring book. Trading colors as they colored ‘within the lines’ at Blair’s insistence. Halloween candy in a forgotten pile in the middle of the living room floor. William and Sally watching the boys as they quietly argued over what colors they should be using and where.

***

THANKSGIVING

“I want the turkey leg,” Steven complained loudly as Jim reached for it.

“Why do you get it?” Jim asked glaring at his brother.

“Because you gave the other one to Blair.”

They both turned to look at the little Guide as Blair looked at the turkey leg on his plate quizzically. Unsure about what he was suppose to do with it.

“It’s almost bigger than him,” Steven told Jim chuckling at the look on Blair’s face.

“Yeah, almost. Take the the other one. I’ll share with Blair. There’s no way he’ll be able to finish it by himself. Blair, do you want to share with me?”

“Yup. It very big,” Blair said, poking at it with a tiny finger.

Jim laughed. “Yeah, it is. Here let me cut it into little pieces for.”

“Yes, please.”
The Sentinel looked over at his family and friends all sharing a special meal on a special day. Grateful they were together and supremely grateful for the little boy sitting in his lap watching him take apart the turkey leg they were about to share. He met his father’s eyes.

“Dad.” Jim said, blue eyes glistening with moisture.

“I know, son. I know,” William told him softly his own just as moist as they both looked at the little Guide eating his bite size pieces of turkey. “I know.”

***

CHRISTMAS

“Where’s, Blair?” Jim asked concerned. Unable to find his little Guide amongst the Christmas debris.

Steven looked around. “He was here a minute ago. Blair. Blair.”

The brothers began tossing wrapping paper and bows left and right and they searched for the little Guide.

“Blair. Where are you, baby?” Jim called.

“I here,” Blair answered, a pile of wrapping paper moving slowly over by the tree.

“Isn’t that your wrapping paper?” Jim accused Steven.

“Hmm, yes,” Steven replied guiltily as they both began digging to free Blair.

“There he is,” Jim replied, lifted Blair free from the mountain of wrappings. His little Guide had a bow stuck to the side of his curly hair. “are you alright?”

“I cool.”

Jim smiled as he carefully pulled the bow off of Blair’s curly hair. “I’m glad. You’re the best present I’ve ever had. You know that, baby?”

“I luv you, Jim. Lots and lots,” Blair said reaching up to give his Sentinel a hug.

“I love you too, baby. Hmm, you give the best hugs. I’m really, really glad you found me. Did you like your presents?”

“Like, lots,” Blair replied looking over at his pile of coloring books, books on panthers and wolves, Pajamas with matching slippers, a backpack. More clothes than he could ever wear. Chances were he’d outgrown them before he had a chance to wear them all.

Blair had received presents by everyone Jim could think of and some he couldn’t. The Postman, the lady down the street who hated everyone, but always had a smile and a cookie for Blair. Even the people at the store they went to had given Blair something. The biggest Christmas stocking Jim had ever seen in his life. Filled with candies and every conceivable toy was in there.

Blair had touched everyone’s life not just that of his Sentinel with his gentle, caring nature. Having the cutest little face, framed by a wild tangle of curls and the bluest, widest eyes in existence didn’t hurt either.

Jim would die to protect his little Guide. Would cherish him for the rest of his life. He smiled down into the innocent face looking up at him so trustingly. Knowing without a doubt his little Guide
would do the same for him.
To Love and Protect

Title: To Love and Protect
Author: Angelee
Pairing: Jim/Blair (preslash)
Summary: The little Guide and his Sentinel grow closer and run into a few problems.
Note: Part two in the Littlest Guide universe
Beta: By Amberly and my sister Anna. With may thanks.

To Love and Protect

“No want play date,” Blair complained again as Jim straightened his little Guide’s clothing.
“I know you don’t, baby. But Dad says you need it.”
“Den Will go,” Blair replied, looking over at William balefully. “he idea.”

William bit his lip hard to keep from laughing. Blair was not happy at all at having to go. But Simon and he both agreed that to allow Blair to grow naturally he needed to be around kids his own age group. Not just around adults and ten year olds all the time. So he’d found a neighbor just down the street who looked after kids and arranged for Blair to go to her house a couple of times a week more if there was a need. Everyone knew her and she seemed to be a very nice lady. Plus Jim would never be far from his little Guide.

“Come on, baby—it won’t be that bad,” Jim told Blair, picking him up. He was treated to a wide, blue-eyed glare as Jim carried him out the door.

***

“Hello, Blair. My name is Mrs. Deans.”

Blair just looked at her, pushing himself into Jim’s body. Mrs. Deans reached over to touch Blair’s little arm only to have the little Guide move it away.

Jim gave Mrs. Deans a small smile. “Sorry. Usually he isn’t this way. He didn’t want to come here.”

“They’re always that way the first time. It’ll get better once he gets to know us. Want to met Megan and Casey your play dates, Blair?”

“No.”

Jim looked at his all of a sudden rude little Guide. “Blair.”

Blair looked at him with angrily, flashing blue eyes. “She ask. I tell truth. No want be here.”

“Sorry,” Jim apologized, glaring at his little Guide who glared back unrepentantly.

Mrs. Deans smiled. “That’s alright. Lets have him met Megan and Casey. It should get better.”

It didn’t. Blair steadfast refused to play with the cute little redheads the same age as him. It got worse
when Megan called Blair-Sandy. At one point it looked like Blair was going to throw something at her. He tolerated Casey a little better, but not by much.

Jim was about to pull his hair out or swat a little Guide butt. He finally lifted Blair into his arms and took him to a corner of the room. “What is it, baby? Why don’t you want to play with them? They’re really cute and they seem to like you?”

“You like dem, den you play wiff dem and I go home.”

“Please, baby. Dad wants you to do this. For me?” Jim pleaded softly.

“No want to. And Megan call me Sandy. I no Sandy, I Blair.”

Jim pushed Blair’s curly hair off his face as he knelt in front his little Guide. “What if I tell her not to call you Sandy?”

“No.”

“Please, baby.”

“Why?” Blair pouted, little arms folded across his chest.

“It’ll be good for you to be with kids your own age.”

“No need kids own age. I gots Jim.”

“But, baby-I’m ten years old.”

Blair shrugged his shoulders. “So?”

Jim sighed heavily. His little Guide was extremely stubborn. “Please, baby-for me? Because I’m asking you and it’ll make me very happy.”

“Oh, alright,” he said finally, very, very reluctantly, so reluctantly it made Jim smiled.

“Thank-you, baby,” He said, kissing Blair’s forehead.

“No like.”

“I know. Go play now,” Jim told him, turning his little Guide giving him a gentle push.

Blair did as he was asked. He was even polite about it, but Jim could tell his little Guide was not enjoying himself.

After a while Rafe and H joined Jim. The whole neighborhood knew Mrs. Dean and usually came and went from her house at will. Earning a cheerful ‘Hello’ and an offer of milk and cookies.

“How’s it going?” Rafe asked Jim as he sat next to him.

“Not to good. Blair doesn’t want to be here,” Jim replied watching Blair hand Casey a colorful block.

“Well then why force him to do something he doesn’t want to?” H questioned sitting next to Rafe.

“My Dad insists that Blair needs to be around kids his own age.”

“Why?” Rafe asked, watching the little Guide give Megan a full-fledged Blair glare.
“I don’t know,” Jim sighed heavily. “it’s an adult thing, I think.”

“Oh,” Both Rafe and H replied, nodding knowingly.

All three friends watched the little Guide try his best to do something he really didn’t want to do until Mrs. Dean ask if everyone was ready to go home. Blair practically bounced over to where they were.

“Hi, Rafe. Hi H,” Blair said, blue eyes sparkling happily-now.

“Hey, kid. How’s it going?” Rafe asked, reaching down to tickle Blair gently on the tummy.

“Better now,” Blair replied, glaring at Jim.

“Blair, please…”

Blair cut in, “Go home, now.”

“Alright. We’ll go home now,” Jim replied, reaching for his little Guide who quickly skipped out of the way, offering his arms to Rafe. Who shrugged, picking Blair up.

“Sorry, buddy. You’re out of favor right now,” Rafe told him as he carrying Jim’s Blair out of Mrs. Dean’s house. Jim followed, frowning slightly.

It stayed that way even at dinner. Blair made sure that Jim’s food was Sentinel safe before scooting Steven over slightly to sit with him. Steven looked at Jim raising a questioning eyebrow as he made room for the little Guide. “What did you do?”

“ Took him to his play date.”

“Didn’t you like it, Blair?” Steven questioned, looking down at Blair who’d picked up his fork.

“No,” Blair replied, glaring over at Jim. The young Sentinel sighed unhappily. He’d been glared at a lot today.

“But why? Weren’t they nice to you?”

“Nice.”

“Then why?”

“No want play date,” He crinkled his little nose at the word as if it were something really nasty. “Have Jim and Steven and Rafe and H and Carl. No need,” Another crinkling of that pert little nose. “play date.”

William walked it. “What’s going on?” he asked, sitting down.

“Blair doesn’t like his play dates?” Jim told him, earning another glare from those big, angrily, flashing blue eyes. Jim found himself actually shiver at the look his little Guide was giving him. “Why are you blaming me for it anyway? It was Dad’s idea.” Jim looked over at his father. “Sorry, Dad, but you’re going to have to take the fall for this. I don’t like having my little Guide mad at me.”

Steven smiled at him. “Wuss,” he told him, cutting Blair’s meat into tiny pieces.

“Better believe it,” Jim replied, eyeing Blair longingly. He was really missing his loving, happy and cheerfully little Guide.
“Blair is two, Jim you can’t let him bully you,” William told him, looking over at Blair who was ignoring what was going on around him as he chased a pea around his plate with his fork.

“Yes, I can,” Jim replied heartily.

“Jimmy, that’s not the kind of relationship you need to build with someone you’re going to be spending the rest of your life with.”

“I don’t like Blair being mad at me.”

“I know son, but this is something that’s for his own good. You have to be tough.”

Jim sighed heavily. “Alright, but this is killing me.”

“I know, son. There will always be things we have to do that we don’t like, but we must for the better good. This is you’re first lesson. Talk to him about it later when he’s had a chance to calm down a little.”

“Alright,” Jim replied unhappily.

Jim tried when he was helping Blair with his bath. “Blair?”

Nothing. No response not even an acknowledgement.

“Blair.” Blair had totally frozen him out and Jim found out he didn’t like it. Didn’t like it one little bit. “Please, baby.” Jim stuck his hands in the bubble bath moving the water around. “I miss you, I miss you a lot.”

“I is here.”

“I know you’re here, but you’re not talking to me and I miss my Blair hugs,” Jim told him wiping at his eyes, noticing for the first time he was crying. “I need you. I love you, Blair and I don’t like it when you’re mad at me.”

He felt a tiny, wet hand on his arm. “I luvs you too, Jim.”

“Don’t be mad at me, Blair. It hurts when your mad at me. If I could I’d keep you with me always, never let you out of my sight, but I can’t, you have to do your own thing just like I’m going to have to,” Jim looked up. “I’ll always love you no matter what.”

Blair sighed. “Alright, I do what you want.”

Jim gave his little Guide a shaky smile. “Thank you. Are you still mad?”

Blair shook his head sending water spraying all over the room from his just shampooed hair. “No mad.”

“Can I have a hug then?”

Blair’s arms came up offering himself to his Sentinel. Jim pulled the tiny, wet body to him. “Oh, God, Blair-I missed you so much.”

“I is here.”

“Yeah, you’re here,” Jim replied pulling Blair to him tighter. “You’re here. Blair can I ask you something?”
“Ask.”

“Will you scent me? I need you so much,” Jim asked, shakily.

Blair nodded solemnly. Pulling his wet hair to the side offering his neck. Jim buried his face against his little Guide keening softly as Blair began releasing the scent. After a moment Blair began releasing the bonding scent as well. Jim rocked them both back and forth as he took from Blair what the little Guide so willingly gave. After a long moment Jim pulled away slowly.

“Oh, Blair. Thank-you, baby.”

Blair patted Jim shoulder gently. “It be okay. I is here.”

“Yes,” Jim said, looking down at his t-shirt. “Oh, I’m all wet now.”

“Yup. Jim all wet,” Blair giggled as he pulled at the wet material. “Take bath, too.”

“Yeah, now I won’t need to take one later.”

“Nope,” Blair replied, kissing Jim’s nose. “Jim?”

“Yeah, baby?” Jim asked as he wrapped his little Guide in a huge towel carrying him into the bedroom.

“I go play date. I be nice. I promise,” Blair said solemnly.

“Thank-you, baby. That means a lot to me. What pajamas do you want to wear tonight?”

Wolf ones,” Blair replied, offering a tiny foot for Jim to slide a sock on to.

“Okay. Blair?”

“Yup?” The little Guide offered his other foot.

Jim looked up meeting Blair’s eyes. “Do you love me?” He asked softly, blue eyes filling with tears as he helped his little Guide with his pajamas. He’d taken over Blair’s care since he’d come into his life and it was something he truly enjoyed and miss when Blair was old enough to dress himself.

Blair frowned slightly as if unsure what his Sentinel was asking. “Yup. Lots.”

The tears fell. “Will you always love me?”

Blair nodded. “Always.”

“Even when I do stuff you’re not going to like? Or I ask you to do stuff you don’t want to?”

“For always and always. Even when Jim make me mads.”

“I’m glad,” Jim whispered, unable to hold back the emotions of having someone mad at him he loved more than his own life. Needed to live. He buried his face in Blair’s lap. He could feel those tiny, hands caressing his head gently. Offering love and unconditional support. Blair began to release the bonding scent as if to affirm his commitment to Jim.

Jim found himself crying helplessly. Holding on to the love Blair was giving him. Not knowing what was wrong. Something. Something-he sensed something in the air and he knew it was going to test the bond he had with his little Guide to its limits. He cried, unsure if they were going to be able to
survive it in one piece. But for now his little Guide loved him and for now it was enough. It had to be.

***

BLAIR’S BIRTHDAY PARTY

“So how old are you now, baby?”

Blair looked up at Jim offering his arms to his Sentinel. “I is three. Big boy,” He told his Sentinel proudly.

Jim hugged his Guide close. “Hmm, yup. Three is old. Pretty soon you’ll be able to drive us to the mall and we won’t have to ask Dad or Sally to take us.”

Blair giggled. “Silly, Jim. I gots to be as four.”

“Four?”

Blair nodded solemnly. “Yups, four.”

Jim smiled, blue eyes regarding his cute little Guide. The fear and uneasiness was still there. Growing until it ate at every waking moment, making him needy and fearful. Knotting his stomach until he couldn’t eat. He’d lost weight because of it. He tried to hide it from everyone knowing he wasn’t going to be able to hide it much longer. Yet the fear grew leaving him jittery and so very afraid.

Blair had taken to bonding Jim every chance he could. Picking up his Sentinel’s uneasiness, trying his best to ease it. Wrapping his tiny arms around Jim offering all the love and comfort his two year old heart could give. His three year old heart Jim amended.

“I love you, Blair.”

Blair looked into Jim’s blue eyes now shadowed by dark circles. “I knows. I luv’s you too,” He replied, tilting his head to the side as he solemnly regarded his hurting Sentinel. Tiny hands came up to gently stroke Jim’s hair. “Why you ‘fraid?”

“I don’t know,” Jim answered as he’d done every night and day for the past month, moving his face into the life-giving touch. “I wish I knew, baby. Then I wouldn’t need to be so afraid.”

“I here. I take care my Sentinell.”

Jim sighed softly. “I know you will, baby. It’s just… I don’t know what it is.” He looked out into their bedroom, not really seeing it. “Something. Something bothering me. Hurting me. Hurting us. I just wish I knew what it was. All I know for sure is that it’s getting worse.”

“Jim?”

He looked at his little Guide. “Yeah?”

“Bond?” Blair asked, solemnly.

Jim gave him a shaky smile. “Yeah, baby. With you always.”

The party was a great success. At least the parts of it Jim could enjoy with his stomach tied in knots as it was. Blair refused to leave his Sentinel’s side. Leaving only long enough to bring Jim a hot dog
and punch. Sitting in Jim’s lap offering him food. Smiling happily every time Jim took a small bite just to make his worried Guide happy even though he wasn’t hungry and barely held on to the food. Blair had to release a small amount of scent to help Jim keep the food down.

Blair didn’t leave his Sentinel’s side even when it’d came time to blow out the candles on his birthday cake. Nothing anyone tried would make him leave Jim. Blair was gently stroking Jim hair when…

“Hi, Blair. Happy birthday, son.”

Blair looked over. “Hi,” he told Dr Banks softly.

Dr Banks knelt in front of the Sentinel/Guide pair. “So why aren’t you out there enjoying your party?”

“I Guide,” Blair replied, wrapping a tiny arm around his trembling Sentinel’s neck.

The smile Simon had on his face vanished. “Is there something wrong with Jim?”

“No feel good,” Blair said, sadly.

“Jim, what’s wrong?”

Jim blinked, trying to clear the fog. “Don’t know. I feel funny.”

Simon moved closer. “Funny how?”

“Don’t know. Odd. Something’s off,” Jim replied, pulling his little Guide closer. Relishing the warmth the tiny body offered.

Simon touched Jim’s forehead. “My God—you’re burning up. Let’s get you to the hospital. See what’s going on. William? William, we need to get Jim to the hospital. NOW,” He told Jim’s father who’d come hurriedly at the first mention of his name.

“What is it? What’s wrong?” William asked worriedly, seeing his son bury his face in Blair neck with a weak moan.

“Don’t know, but we need to get Jim to the hospital now.”

“Do we call an ambulance?”

“That probably be the best thing.”

Thus ended Blair’s birthday party. All the people invited watching worriedly as Jim was loaded onto a gurney and taken from the back yard, Blair tucked tightly against his side.

“We’ve got to get to the hospital,” Rafe told H.

“Yeah, if we hurry we can catch a ride with Mr. Ellison, Steven and Sally.” H replied hurrying after the frantic father as he dashed toward his car. Simon having gotten in the ambulance with Jim and Blair.

***
CRISIS

Once at the hospital Jim sat up sniffing the air before taking off like a shot. Leaving Blair on the gurney a puzzled look on his little face.

“What’s going on?” William asked Simon.

“Hell if I know. Let’s find out.”

They all went down the corridor Jim had taken off down. They found him circling a young girl with shoulder length blond hair, about same age as Jim.

“Who’s that?” William asked eyes narrowing as he watched his son’s strange behavior.

“That’s Alex Barnes. She came on line about a month ago. Having a rough time of it, too.”

“What are they doing?”

“I have no idea.”

The young blond girl was eyeing Jim as if he were some sort of treat. Suddenly her fingers came up meeting Jim’s, tangling them together as they continued to move in a tight circle.

Jim was growling slightly as he continued to eye Alex. He pulled her close to burying his face in her neck keening softly.

“What the hell is going on?” William asked again.

“I told you I don’t know. Information on Sentinels this young is almost none existent.”

“Well, go over there and stop whatever it is they’re doing,” William demand, frowning.

“I’m not going to do it. You do it.”

“You’re the Doctor.”

“You’re the Dad,” Simon replied, listening as the two young Sentinel’s growling increased in volume.

“Do you know what it looks like?” Steven asked.

Both adults turned to look at the younger Ellison. Steven held Blair close in his arms as they all watched the odd drama unfolding in front of them. “What?” William asked.

“It looks like some sort of bonding ritual.”

“What?” Simon asked softly.

“Yeah, that’s what it looks like. A Sentinel/Guide bonding ritual.”

“But they’re both Sentinels.”

“Yup, that might be true, but I’m just telling you what it looks like.” Steven looked at Blair to see how the Little Guide was handling all this. He cussed inwardly when he saw tears rolling down that cute little face. *Okay, enough was enough.* He handed Blair to Rafe, the little Guide promptly buried his head against the older boy’s neck crying softly. “This has gone on long enough,” He said
stalking over to where the two young Sentinels were. “What the fuck is the matter with you?” He asked Jim angrily.

Jim looked at him blue eyes dark and dazed. “I…”

Alex growled pulling Jim’s head back against her shoulder. “He’s mine.”

“Like hell,” Steven told her, pulling Jim away from her violently. Cussing loudly when Jim fought him trying to get back to Alex. “Stop it, damn it. You’re Blair’s. Stop it,” Steven said, finally and truly fed up, punched Jim hard in the nose. Hard enough to send the young Sentinel sprawling. Raising a warning finger toward Alex when she tried moving toward Jim.

Jim lay on the floor for a moment before looking up wiping the blood coming out of his nose. “Steven? Y…you hit me,” He said stunned.

Steven nodded. “And I’ll do it again if you don’t act right, asshole. You belong to Blair. Get that straight in your fucking head.”

“Blair?” Jim asked softly, looking around the room. Blair was in Rafe’s arms, crying. His Dad and Dr Banks were looking at him with an odd mix of horror and astonishment. Not to mention H who was glaring at him angrily. Even Sally was looking at him in disapproval. “What have I done?”

“You tell me.”

“I…I don’t know.”

“That’s not an answer.”

Jim’s blue eyes narrowed in anger. “I tell you I don’t know.”

“Well you better fucking well know before I kick you ass all over this room. Do you know what you’ve done?”

“I’ve messed everything up haven’t I?”

Steven looked over at Blair. “That depends. You’re gonna have to do some serious little Guide bun kissing. He may never forgive you for this.”


Blair raised tear-filled blue eyes to William. “Home?” He pleaded in a tiny voice that broke everyone’s heart. Except for maybe Alex who was grinning wildly.


Steven watched as his family and friends trailed out the door before turning toward Alex. “Come between Jim and his little Guide again and I’ll make damn sure you regret ever being born. Bitch.” With that said he followed after the others. Simon staying behind to deal with Alex.

Blair had cried himself to sleep on the trip back to the house. Now sleeping peacefully in Rafe’s arms breath hitching now and then.

“Take Blair upstairs, please, Rafe,” William told the youngster softly. Watching Rafe carry the little Guide toward the bedroom before turning toward his remorseful eldest son.
“What happened, Jim?”

Jim wiped his tear-streaked face with the back of his hand. “I don’t know. I’ve been feeling funny for awhile about a month. When we went to the hospital I smelled something. It was…calling to me, I think. I had to see what it was. It was Alex. Alex was calling to me.”

“Were you trying to bond with her?”

Jim eyes widened in horror. “N…no, Dad. No. Never. I’ve got Blair. I don’t need or want anyone else. Believe me. I only want Blair.”

“Then what the hell were you trying to do?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know.”

“Son, that’s not an answer.”

Jim wiped his eyes. “It’s the only one I’ve got,” He said sadly. “Do you think Blair will ever forgive me?”

“I don’t know. Are you still feeling whatever that was toward that girl?”

Jim tilted his head as he did an internal check. “No.” He gave a wryly smile. “I think Steven smacked it out of me.”

“Do you need me to smack you again?” Steven asked him from where he’d plopped himself down on the couch. Glaring at his stupid brother. “Cause I can smack you around some more. No problem, asshole.”

Jim carefully rubbed his nose. “No, One time was enough. And Blair is going to get you for cussing. You know that right?”

Steven gave him a cheerless smile. “A little bite on the nose is nothing compared to what he’s going to do to you.”

***

A LITTLE GUIDE’S REVENGE

Blair woke from his impromptu nap. All three Ellisons, Rafe and H having gone home with a promise of coming over later, watched quietly as the little Guide made his way down the stairs.

“Blair,” Jim called softly trying to gain his little Guide’s attention.

The curly-haired three year old ignored him to climb carefully in to William’s lap. Where he lay his curly head against the elder Ellisons chest.

“Are you alright, Blair?” William asked quietly, wrapping his arms around the little Guide.

“I is fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yup.”

“Are you mad at Jim for what he did?” He questioned softly as he rocked Blair gently.
Blair nodded. “Mad.”

“Blair, please. Baby…”

William shushed Jim with a hand. “Do you know why?”

“Jim hurt, here,” Blair answered, placing a tiny hand over his heart.

Jim made a mournful sound. Kneeling in front of his father and his little Guide. “Blair, I never meant to hurt you.”

Blair turned his face into William’s chest as if unable to bear looking at Jim. “Did.”

“Is it because you think Jim wanted someone else instead of you?”

Blair nodded. “Yup.”

“Blair, I could never want anyone else besides you. You are my life. I love you,” Jim said, reaching for his little Guide unsure of the response he was going to get. Eyes closing tightly in grief when his touch was rejected once again.

“No love. Go girl.”

“I didn’t go with the girl. Something happened I don’t know what it was. I’m sorry, Blair. I’m very, very sorry. Forgive me, please,” Jim pleaded softly. “It won’t ever happen again. I swear it, Blair. I swear it.”

Blair regarded his Sentinel from where his head lay on William’s chest. Blue eyes wide and questioning. “No love girl more den Blair?”

Jim moved closer. “I don’t know what I felt toward that girl, but love wasn’t part of it. I love you, Blair, only you.”

Blair gave him a tiny smile. “No love Will or Steven?”

Jim moved even closer. “Well maybe them. Even though Steven hit me.”

“Love Rafe, H and Carl?”

Jim gave his little Guide a tentative smile. “Well not really, but I like them a lot.”

Blair nodded. “Likes them lots too. ‘Specially Rafe.”

“I’m glad, baby. Cause they like you a lot, too.” Jim looked up to meet his father’s eyes. William nodded encouragingly.

Jim swallowed heavily moving as close as he could. Terrified that his little Guide would reject him again. “And me? Do you like me at least a little?”

Blair gave him a brilliant smile. “Silly Jim. I luvs you.”

Jim reached out to tentatively touch his little Guide’s arm. Sighing happily when his touch wasn’t shunned. “Really?”

Blair nodded his curly hair. “Yup. Lots.”
“W…will you give me a hug to show me how much?”

Blair regarded him quietly for along time, so long Jim was beginning to dispair that he ever would. Jim thought to himself that he’d messed thing up but good this time. And he wasn’t even sure how he’d managed to do it either. Blair might never let Jim hold him again. Never scent or bond him. Or even spend quiet time together as Blair read to him from one of the dozens and dozens of books, Blair’s groupies as Rafe called them, had given him. Blair might only have just turned three, but he already knew how to read and loved to cuddle next to Jim and show his Sentinel.

Jim loved those times. When Blair would look up at him and smile. His little face lighting up with pleasure as he showed Jim a new word he’d just learned. Or reading a children’s book from cover to cover. It might have been a book with simple words filled with images intended for a very small child, but Jim didn’t care losing himself in his little Guide’s soothing voice. Blair stopping every now and then giggling softly asking Jim if he was purring again. Jim kissing his little Guide’s forehead gently telling him yes he was. Never denying how much he enjoyed the quiet times with his little Guide. If Blair denied it would feel as if his heart had been cut out. Pretty much like now. The longer Blair took to respond the more Jim felt his heart bleed. Sure he was bleeding all over the living room carpet. There wasn’t going to be anything left soon. No blood, no tears. Nothing.

“I…I love you, Blair,” Jim whispered, heartbroken.

“I knows.”

“Will you ever hug me again?”

“Maybes.”

Jim opened his arms to his little Guide. Might as well go for broke. He didn’t have anything left to lose. “Now? Please, Blair? Please, Baby?” he pleaded desperately.

Blair went into them slowly. Jim gathered his little Guide to him carefully. “Hmm, you feel good. I missed you.”

“I thought I lost you,” Jim said, breath hitching.

“No lose. I no mad no more.”

Jim pulled away slightly to look into his little Guide’s blue eyes. “I’m sorry Blair. I never meant to hurt you. I don’t even know what I did or what happen.”

“I knows. I no mad you,” Blair told him, kissing Jim’s nose.

“Huh?”

“I mads stupid girl. She hurts Jim here,” Blair said, a tiny hand touching Jim’s head. “Know now.”

Jim moved his head in to the gentle touch. “Hmm, that feels good. You know what happened?”

“Yups.”

“What? Tell me so I don’t let it happen again. I don’t like it when you’re mad at me. It hurts too much.”

“She Sentinel. Call to Jim like Guide. No can do.”
“Sentinel like me?”
Blair nodded. “Yups.”

“Okay, and…”

“She bad Sentinel, not good like Jim. Take what she no have.”

“Okay, and…”

“Try take good part Jim. Hurt my Sentinell.”


“I don’t understand it either,” William replied shrugging.

“Geez, How can you not understand it? If a three year old gets it why can’t you guys?” Steven told them, shaking his head in disgust.

“Okay, genius why don’t you enlighten us,” Jim said angrily, still annoyed that his brother had hit him and had threatened to do it again.

“Alright, dumbass I’ll tell you. Blair is telling you that…that bit…girl was trying to bond you like a Guide because there’s something missing in her. She couldn’t because she’s not a Guide and you’re already bonded. Though it was hard to tell the way you were acting. That’s why you were acting like such a dork. Huh, Blair?”

Blair nodded. “Yup. Dork.”

“Is that what happen? And don’t call me a dork?”

Steven smiled mirthlessly at him. “Why not? That’s what you were, dork.”

“Dork,” Blair chimed in.

Jim sighed. “I’m going to be paying through the nose for this aren’t I?”

“In more ways than one,” Steven replied smugly.

“ Hmm, yeah.” Jim rubbed his aching nose. “So that was what was making me sick?”


Jim sighed again. “Learned a new word, didn’t you?”

Blair smiled up at his Sentinel. Yup, dork.”

Jim glared at Steven when his brother broke out in laughter. “I hate you.”

“Yup, okay,” Steven replied, unrepentantly still laughing. “Dork.”

Jim ignored him. “Is it over, Blair?”

Blair nodded. “Over.”
“Are you sure? I don’t want to go through anything like that again.”

“I sure. No let icky girl hurt my Sentinell ’gain. Know how stop.”

Jim cupped his little Guide’s face in his hands. “You know how to stop her?”

“Yups.”

“How?”

Blair smiled at him. “No worry. I take cares.”

Jim frowned, but let it go as his stomach growled loudly. “I’m really hungry all of a sudden. Want to get something to eat, Blair? And then maybe take a long nap? A really long nap.”

“Yups.” Jim picked up his little Guide heading toward the kitchen only to be stopped when Blair called to his brother. “Steven?”

“Yeah, kid?”

“I luvs you.”

Steven eyed the little Guide in astonishment. “You love me?”

Blair nodded his curly head solemnly. “Yups, lots.”

“O…oh, that’s cool,” Steven replied, swallowing heavily. “I…I love you, too.”

“Down,” Blair told his Sentinel. He went in front of Steven and offering his arms. Steven hugged him awkwardly. “I luvs you and William lots and lots.” He pulled away. “No cuss no more. Not nice,” He added, biting Steven gently on the nose before going to Jim, who quietly picked him up carrying his little Guide toward the kitchen and food.

Steven looked at his Dad who was quietly watching eyes full of tears. “T…that’s some kid,” he said, rubbing his nose lightly.

“Yes, he is,” William replied quietly. “and I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

***

Later that afternoon Simon came over to check on Jim. Only to find the Sentinel and his little Guide sleeping, wrapped tightly around one another.

“Did you find out what happened?” Simon whispered, staring down at the Sentinel/Guide pair.

“Yes. Blair says that Alex tried to bond Jim as if she were a Guide. Trying to replace something in her that was missing. I hope you delt with her.”

“She had to be sedated. Went kind of crazy when you left. She can’t find a Guide. There are Guides available, but no one wants her,” Simon sighed, softly.

“I can see why. She almost destroyed Jim and Blair.”

“Was Blair mad at Jim?”

“Not really mad, more like hurt.”
“Hmm. Is everything alright now?”

“Yes.”

“Blair’s a special little boy isn’t he?”

“Very much so. He’s so giving and understanding for someone so young, so very young. Did you know he likes to read to Jim?”

Simon smiled. “Really?”

William nodded. “You should see them. It’s the cutest thing you ever saw. Blair cuddling up with Jim reading to him. And Jim not caring that it’s a children’s book.” He sighed. “You should see the look on my son’s face. It’s as if…it’s as if Blair is feeding a part of his soul just by reading to him, just by being with him. He truly enjoys having his little Guide around. Not caring in the least that he’s responsible for a three year old. Sally keeps offering, saying she wouldn’t mind at all taking care of Blair. I wouldn’t either. He’s is a delightful little boy, but Jim won’t hear of it.”

“They’ve gotten really close haven’t they?”

“You have no idea,” William chuckled softly so as not to wake the two sleeping boys. “and they’re getting closer. Blair has Jim wrapped around his little finger so tightly it makes my son crazy. Jim hates it when Blair gets mad at him, just hates it.”

“I bet.”

“Yes. And Blair more than makes up for it. Everything that he is he gives to Jim. His love, attention, commitment and complete devotion. And Jim eats it up.”

Simon eyed the little Guide wrapped tightly in his Sentinel’s arms. “I’m not sure that’s a good thing. We don’t want Blair to be so involved with Jim that he forget himself and becomes another Jim Ellison.”

“Odd thing that, you’d think that’d be happening, but it’s not. Blair Jacob Sandburg is a entity unto himself. No one can push Blair around not even his Sentinel.” William turned to Simon, smiling. “He’s got all of us jumping through his hoops. Willingly I might add,” He chuckled.

Simon smiled. “That he does. You should see how he has the nurses at the hospital. Everytime Blair goes in its as if they’ve seen Elvis. They get all googoo-eyed over a two year old. Oops, three year old now. It’s the oddest thing. Blair just thanks them nicely for the books and little gifts they give him with an odd look on his cute little face as if wondering what all the fuss is about.”

“It is the same wherever we take him. He gets the same response. Rafe calls them Blair’s groupies.”

Simon chuckled. “Fitting.”

“Do you think it’s a Guide thing?”

“Don’t know. I haven’t seen any other Guides quite like Blair. I think it might just be a Blair thing.”

“Probably is. Would you like some coffee? I think we still have some birthday cake.”

“Coffee sound great. And I sure wouldn’t turn down cake. We need to take Jim and Blair back to the hospital once they wake up to see if everything is okay.” Simon followed William out of the bedroom. “So have you heard from Naomi?”
William closed the bedroom door carefully. “No. I have people looking for her with no luck. I was hoping to find her. Blair needs his mother in his life.” He sighed. “Still nothing. It’s as if she just dropped off the face of the earth.”

“She didn’t take Blair’s rejection well.”

“No she didn’t.”

Their voices faded as they made their way down the stairs.

***

Jim opened his eyes slowly to find Blair sitting on his chest looking at him curiously. “Blair?” He said hoarsely. “What is it, Baby?”

“Jim luv Blair?”

Jim frowned. “You know I do. Why are you asking? You think I don’t love you?”

“Need know.”

“You need to know? B…but why? I tell you all the time that I love you.”

“Need know, fight stupid girl.”

“Huh?”

“Need know, fight stupid girl,” Blair repeated.

Jim sat up, making sure that Blair didn’t tip over. Pulling his little Guide close. “I don’t understand, Baby. What are you telling me?”


“Ow! I love you, Blair. I love you more than my life. With all my heart and soul. I’ll love you for the rest of my life. For always.”

“I luv you too, Jim.”

Jim flipped Blair over to where he lay on the bed looking up at him. Those wide blue eyes were filled with such love and trust Jim felt his eyes fill with tears. Again. When did he turn into such a crybaby? He ducked his head in shame.

“I’m sorry I’m so needy, Blair. That I have to constantly ask you if you love and need me. I’m ten years old and I shouldn’t be such a crybaby.”

“Jim, no crybaby. Need his Guide. Need me.”

“I know. But other kids my age wouldn’t be asking for so much reassurance.”

“You Jim. Not otter kids.”

“Is it because I’m a Sentinel?”

“Yups,” Blair replied, tugging on Jim till he caught on as to what his little Guide wanted of him. He
laid his head against Blair’s chest listening to the gently beating of the tiny heart that was anything but.

Jim sighed softly. The heartbeat was soothing in a way that went deeper than when Blair scented him. He could feel Blair’s hands gently stroking his hair. He never remembered feeling so loved. Not even when his Mom was alive and rocked him to sleep after having a nightmare. Blair loved him, Jim could feel it. It poured out of that tiny body in giant, warm, caring waves.

“W…why do you love me, Blair?” Jim asked quietly.

“Jim mine,” Blair told him just as quietly.

“You love me because I’m yours?”

“Mine to luv and take care.”

Jim sighed again, moving slightly to where his ear lay right over Blair’s heart. Allowing the gentle thumping to warm his soul and the tiny hands stroking his hair to heal the hurt of the past month. “Even when I’m a wuss?”

“Wuss and dork.” Blair agreed and added.

“I’m going to kill Steven one of these days or at least beat the crap out of him.” Blair growled softly. “Sorry, Blair?”

“Yups?”

“Do you think we’ll be together forever.”

“Yups.”

Jim looked up at him, meeting those beautiful blue eyes. “How can you be so sure?”

“Can.”

“But how?”

“Know here.” Blair motion to where his heart lay, where Jim’s head still rested comfortably.

“Oh, does that mean we’ll never need anyone else?”

Blair crinkled his little nose. “Must. Make go play dates.”

Jim chuckled. “Yeah, huh. But that’s Dad and Simon’s idea.”

“Yups. Will and Simon dumbs. No need otters.”

“Huh? Oh, no need others?”

“Yups.”

Jim rubbed his head against Blair’s cloth-covered chest. “No we don’t need anyone else, but its nice to have friends and family.”

“Yups.”

Jim looked up at his little Guide. “Do you miss your Mom, Blair?”
Blair sighed. “Yes, miss Mommy.” The sigh was so sad it broke Jim’s heart.

“I’m sorry, Blair.”

“No cry again,” Blair told him sternly, pushing his head back down. “No be sorry. Mommy go, Jim no make do. ‘Sides I gots the bestest Sentinell in the whole world.”

Even though Blair told him not to cry Jim felt his eyes fill with tears. He was going to have to talk to Dr. Banks about that. All this crying couldn’t be normal. Could it? He fought back the tears. “If you got the bestest Sentinel in the whole world. Know what I got?” He asked, slightly weepy.

“Nopes.”

“I got the bestest Guide in the whole, wide universe.”

Blair giggled. “Silly Jim.”

“Yup. Simon and Dad are waiting for us to get up so they can take us back to the hospital and check us out.”

Tiny hands continued to stroke his hair, rhythmically and lovingly. “Yups.”

“Hmm, we should get up.”

“Yups.”

Neither moved. After awhile Jim reached down for the covers and pulled them over the two of them.

***

“Did you go check on them?” William asked Steven.

“Yeah.” Steven rolled his eyes. “It’ll be awhile, they were being really mushy with one another and then they went back to sleep.”

Simon chuckled. “How do you feel about that?”

Steven sat down reaching for the piece of cake that Sally had cut for him. “What the mushy part or the going back to sleep part?”

“The mushy part.”

Steven shrugged, picking up his fork. “Don’t care. That’s just the way they are.”

“Is that the way your friends feel too?”

“Yeah. Jim is a Sentinel and if a little mush keeps him from going any crazier than he already is—it’s cool,” Steven replied, chewing happily on a piece of cake.

William smiled at his son. “We saw what you did back at the hospital, Steven. I’m very proud of you.”

Steven turned a bright shade of pink. “Aw, Dad-don’t. You’re going to embarrass me in front of Dr. Banks.”

“There’s nothing to be embarrassed about Steven. You did a good job defending your brother and
Blair from a threat,” Simon told, him reassuringly.

Steven shrugged again. “No big deal. Jim is my brother and Blair could be considered my baby brother. I’m not going to let anything hurt them if I can help it.” Sally placed a tall glass of milk next to him. “Thanks, Sally.”

Simon took a drink of his coffee. “Do you think they’re going to be sleeping for much longer.”

“Don’t know. Jim was listening to Blair’s heartbeat and looking real comfortable.”

Simon frowned. “We need to be more vigilant. Jim wasn’t feeling well for a month and we didn’t notice anything. There’s something really wrong with that picture.”

William agreed. “You’re right. How could that have gotten past us? Jim lost weight and we didn’t even notice.”

“I think it’s going to take all of us to take care of this Sentinel/Guide pair. Make sure something like this doesn’t happen again,” Simon said.

“Yeah, that was scary,” Steven declared, taking a deep drink of his milk. “I’ll talk to the guys make sure they keep aware.”

All four including Sally who was at the kitchen sink looked up toward where Jim, Blair and Steven’s bedroom lay. The responsibility of taking care of such a young Sentinel/Guide pairing hitting home-hard.

***

Two hours later Jim and Blair were up and a little more coherent. At least enough to go back to the hospital to have Simon check them out. In the waiting room suddenly Jim’s nose went up into the air. Blair knowing to expect it took Jim’s hand in his and placed it over his heart. Reminding the young Sentinel of what was truly important.

Jim smiled at the little Guide in his arms. “Thank-you, Blair.”

Blair tilted his head to once side regarding him solemnly. “No act dork,” He was told sternly.

Steven broke out in laughter. “Oh, man-little fellow has your number but good.”

Jim frowned at him. “I hate you,” he told his brother.

Steven sniffed, unimpressed. “Oooh, I’m scared.”

Jim narrowed his blue eyes menacingly. “One day when you least expected it, I’m going to get you but good.”

Steven shivered. “Oh, now that’s scary. Tell me another one. Could use a good bedtime story, big butt.”

“Blair, did you hear that? Steven cussed at me?”

Big, blue eyes regarded Steven. “Big butt, cuss word?”

Steven looked at him innocently. “No, Blair it isn’t. It’s the truth. Jim has a big butt. See for yourself.”
Blair hoisted himself further up in Jim’s arms to look over his Sentinel shoulder. “Yups, big butt not cuss word. Jim got big, big butt,” He concluded, righting himself. He looked at Jim who’d turned a bright shade of pink. “No feel bad, luvs you anyways,” He told him kissing him consolingly on the cheek. “Even wiff big butt.”

Jim glared at his brother who was laughing hysterically. “You are so, so dead.”

Simon and William watched the boys antics smiling at their interaction. Suddenly the smiles and laughter vanished when Alex Barnes walked into the room. Arrogantly to Steven’s eyes. She started walking toward where Blair and Jim stood. Jim already trembling.

“Didn’t I tell you to stay in your room,” Simon hissed at her. She was a pretty girl on the outside but inside she was truly ugly. That was one of the reasons no Guide wanted her. And really Simon couldn’t blame them.

“But why? When the party’s out here and so’s Jim,” She said smiling almost cruelly. Ignoring the fact she was causing Jim considerable pain.

“Go back to your room, now.”

Alex tossed her blond head. “No. Hello, Jim.”

“Down,” Blair demanded angrily of his Sentinel.

Jim flinched slightly. “Blair?” Blinking his eyes trying to fight the way Alex was making him feel, it hurt. It really hurt.

“Down. Now.”

Jim did as Blair demanded hurriedly. “Blair, baby…”

Blair looked at him solemnly. “Jim, love Blair?”

“More than my life,” Jim said shakily. All of a sudden his strength left his legs, he fell to his knees in front of Blair.

His little Guide nodded solemnly. Going to him he took one of Jim’s hands in his and held it to his chest over his heart. Tilting his head he regarded his Sentinel until Jim realizing what Blair was asking of him. He nodded slowly as he zeroed in on the beating his little Guide’s heart.

Jim sighed softly as it’s gentle rhythms began replacing the tainted callings of Alex with warmth and overwhelming love. After a long moment he felt strong enough to look up at Blair. “B…better. I’m better,” He told his worried little Guide.

When Steven had seen Alex he started forward only to be held back by Simon. “No,” He was told sternly.

“But they need help.”

“I want to see how Blair defends his Sentinel. There’s valuable information in what we’re about to see.”

“But Blair’s only three. He needs help defending what’s his.”

“He might be three, but he won his Sentinel at two. If he needs help you can go in, but not until we see if he needs it.”
Blair looked over at them. “Steven.”

“Yeah, kid?”

“Help, Jim?”

Steven looked at Simon. “Go, but don’t interfer.”

Once Blair made sure that his Sentinel was safe the little Guide turned toward the threat. “No touch my Sentinell,” He warned her.

“And who’s going to stop me? You?” Alex scoffed.

Blair nodded. “Me.”

“Right.”

“I stop. I protect.”

Alex came closer. “Huh, Huh. Jim’s mine. You know it. I know it. Jim knows it. All I have to do is reach out and take him.”


Alex shrugged. “So?”

“Alex bad. No hurt more.”

Suddenly Alex screamed. Without Blair having laid a finger on her. Jim gasped. “What is it?” Steven asked, tightening his arms around his brother.

“Blair.”

Steven looked over at the little Guide who was calmly standing there. Not doing anything-just standing. “Blair? What about him?”

“He’s defending me.”

“How? He’s not doing anything.”

“He’s scenting.”

Steven frowned. “What are you talking about?”

“Remember how he scents me? I’ve told you it’s a clean, welcoming fragrance?”

“Yeah.”

“He’s sending out something that’s the complete opposite. A scent that’s really gross.”

“But what about you?”

“He’s protecting me from the worse of it, but I can still smell it a little,” Jim replied crinkling his nose. “It’s something between a skunk and something that went really, really bad.”

“I didn’t know he could do that.”
“Me neither.”

Alex continued to scream hands going to her nose, rubbing at it frantically. Her eyes were watering violently as if something vile had been poured into them. Suddenly she fainted hitting her head against a chair as she went down.

Blair turned back toward his Sentinel. “Jim?”

“Yeah, Baby?”

“No hurt?”

“No, Baby—you didn’t hurt me.”

Simon and William came up to them. “Blair, what did you do?” Simon asked curiously.

Blair offered his arms to Jim. “Protect my Sentinell.”

Jim buried his face in Blair’s hair. “Hmm, baby-you did good. Really good.”

“What? What did he do?” Simon just about yelled in frustration.

William looked over at the fallen Alex. “Aren’t you going to help her, Simon?”

Simon spared Alex a tiny glance. “Yeah, eventually. Then I’m going to have her shipped to Alaska. I hear there’s a Sentinel facility over there. Got a couple of people there and what kind of trouble could she cause? First off-what did you do, Blair?”

Blair was rubbing Jim’s chest soothingly. Releasing the scent Jim was coming to associate with warmth and total love. “I scent,” Blair told Dr. Banks softly.

“The same way you scent Jim.”

“No. Scent icky.”

“Huh?”

Jim pulled Blair closer to him. Burying his face against his little Guide’s warm neck. “Hmm, Blair.”

Simon rolled his eyes as Blair lost himself in comforting his still shaky Sentinel. “Damn. I’m never going to get a straight answer this way.”

“I’ll tell you what Jim told me. Might be awhile before they quit being mushy,” Steven offered, moving over slightly to give the Guide/Sentinel pair room.

“What? What did he do?” Simon just about yelled in frustration.

“Jim said that Blair was sending out a scent between a skunk and something that went really, really bad. We didn’t know he could do that?”

Simon bit his lip thoughtfully. “I didn’t either. Hmm stands to reason though. If he could send out a scent to calm and bond a Sentinel he could also send out one to aggravate or to repel the attentions of an unwanted one.” He looked over to Alex who still hadn’t woke up. “Worked really well, too.”

“Yeah, it did. Shouldn’t you do your doctor thing and take care of her?” William asked again.
“Yeah, I guess,” Simon replied reluctantly. “You might as well take Jim and Blair home. I don’t want them anywhere near Alex until I do something with her. I’ll go over later to check on them.”

Steven, Simon and William turned to look at the Guide/Sentinel pair tightly wrapped around each other. Steven rolled his eyes. “If they ever quit being mushy. Come on you two quit it. Lets go home. I’m hungry and Sally’s making pot roast.” Blair and Jim didn’t move fast enough so Steven reached over and pulled the little Guide away from his Sentinel gently. “I. Am. Hungry. Lets. Go. Be mushy at home. I want food.”


“Yeah, yeah. I love you too, lets go,” Steven told him handing Jim his little Guide when he was a little steadier.

William smiled at his three sons as they made their way to the door. “Another crisis averted,” he told Simon. “Want to come over for pot roast?” he asked the man who’d become a close friend.

Simon had been glaring at the still unconscious Alex, turned to William. “Pot roast? Hmm, yeah. What time?”

“Six-thirty.”

“I’ll be there. It’ll give me time to take care of Alex. Girl has been nothing but trouble since she came here.” Simon sighed heavily.

“Hmm, yes. I better catch up to my boys before Steven starts pouring salt on Blair and starts in on him as an appetizer,” William chuckled. “See you at six-thirty.”

Simon watched him go smiling, the smile disappearing as he turned to Alex.

A NEW ADDITION

“So what time is Sally going to pick us up?” Steven asked as they made their way to the mall exit. Trying not to drop his packages.

“Two-thirty,” Jim answered, catching one of Steven’s bags as it fell.

Sally had dropped them off at the mall so they could do some shopping for the new school year. Rafe, Carl and H were with them all overloaded with bags. Even Blair had a couple. At least some that weren’t to heavy for a three year old.

It’d been two weeks since the Alex incident and Jim had found that even though Blair had forgiven him Rafe, Carl and H hadn’t. Even after he’d explained to them that it wasn’t his fault. He was still being subjected to glares and hard hits to the arm and some nasty comments. He understood, truly he could, but they were his friends too as well as Blair’s and the punches to the arms were starting to hurt.

Just then Rafe punched him again. Jim turned to glare at him. “Ow! That hurt.”

“Too bad asshole. You should have thought about that before you hurt Blair,” Was the unrepented reply.
“He forgave me. Why can’t you guys?”

“He’s three years old and he can’t kick your ass, but we can,” H told him.

“Blair can to kick my ass. He does it all the time,” Jim replied, eyeing his little Guide affectionately. “don’t you, Blair?”

Blair smile up at him. “Yups.”

“That may be true, but just watch it,” Carl said frowning. “hurt him again like that and you’ll answer to us.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Geez, I’m getting it from everywhere.” Just then Blair made a sound. A sound he’d never heard come from his little Guide. Jim turned to find Blair kneeling in front of a box just outside the mall entrance near where they were suppose to wait for Sally. “What is it, Blair?”

The little Guide looked up at him. “Kitties.”

A man smiled at them as they all moved to look inside the box. “My cat had kittens. They’re free to good homes.”

Blair looked up at him with such a wistful, hopeful look on his cute little face. “I don’t know, Blair. We’ve got to ask Dad.” Jim sighed unhappily as Blair’s face fell.

“Oh, quit being such a wuss. Get the kid a kitten,” Steven told him shoving Jim hard.

“Ow! We can’t just go home with a kitten. Dad’ll kill us.”

Steven rolled his eyes. “Wuss. That’s why we go prepared. How much money you got left? I’ve got ten.”

“Hmm, I’ve got ten, too. Why?”

“We prepare. If we go home with everything the kitten needs. You know-food, litter and all the stuff they need, we stand a better chance of pulling this off. And then we get Blair to give that real cute face. You know the one that charmed old lady Reynolds into giving us our ball back when it flew into her yard. Can you do that, Blair?”

They all laughed when Blair gave them the exact look. Wide-blue eyes looking up at them beguilingly from a pale face framed by a tangle of wild curls. That same look could charm a snake out of a tree according to Jim and Steven’s dad. Now they were going to use it to win Blair a kitten.

Steven smiled at him. “That’s it. Use that on Sally and Dad and you’ll have yourself a kitten. We got to make our case. Give me your money, Jim. I don’t know how much all that kitten stuff’s gonna cost.”

“I’ve got five,” Rafe chimed in.

“Let me check, “ H said going through his pockets. “I’ve got five, too.”

“Hey, look I’ve got twenty,” Carl said, offering the extremely rumpled money.

“Cool,” Steven replied, taking it. “If we don’t use it, you’ll get it back. You’ll get it back anyway. We pay our debts. How much time we got left before Sally gets here?”

“Fifteen minutes,” Jim answered, looking at his watch. “Are you sure we’re going to be able to get
away with this?

“Piece of cake, Blair?” Blair looked up at him. “Pick your kitten, kid. I’ll be right back with the stuff we need, the pet store is near where we’re at.” Steven blinked momentary blinded by the brilliant smile the little Guide gave him before he ran off into the mall.

Jim knelt near Blair and the box of kittens. “Which one do you like, Blair?”

“Diss one,” Blair replied, carefully holding up a fuzzy grey and white kitten.

Jim smiled at him. “Cute,” He said, stroking the kitten’s soft fur.


Jim nodded. “I think so. Steven has it all figured out and if all else fails-we beg.” It wasn’t as if Blair asked for that much. Actually his little Guide very rarely asked for anything. If Blair wanted a kitten then Jim with Steven’s help would find a way to get him his kitten. “What are you going to name him?”

“Wofie,” Blair replied solemnly, holding the kitten close.

Jim tucked a stray curl behind his little Guide’s ear. “Wofie is a good name, Baby. A really good name for your kitten,” He said softly as he gazed into the beautiful blue eyes of his little Guide. Vowing to himself Blair would want for nothing, ever. After all Blair loved and protected his as no one else ever could. See that he got the kitten he wanted wasn’t that much of a big thing. Jim kissed Blair’s forehead. No big thing at all.
“Hey, Baby—whathyadoin’?” Jim asked as he came down the stairs.

“Coloring wiff Steven.” Came the calm response. Not taking into account that the little Guide had a gray and white kitten named Wofie happily sitting on his back, nibbling on his curly hair.

“Oh,” Jim looked around. “Where’s Steven?”

“Went kitchen for milk and cookies.”

Just then Steven walked through the door precariously carrying a tray and two glasses of milk. “Hey, Jim. Want some cookies? Sally just made them. They’re butterscotch. Get your own milk, I’m not sharing mine.”

“Blair will share his. Won’t you, Blair?”

“Yups.” Just then Blair sneezed, sending the kitten tumbling to the floor. Good thing the floor wasn’t that far. It had been surprisingly easy to get the kitten accepted into the household, especially when Sally and Jim and Steven’s dad had found out it was for Blair. No surprise there.

Jim frowned. “Are you okay, Baby?”

“I good,” Blair replied, sneezing again.

“Are you sure?” Jim asked, picking up his little Guide, looking at him critically.

“For heavens sake, Jim, he only sneezed,” Steven said him, rolling his eyes.

“Twice. He sneezed twice. Blair never sneezes. Maybe we should call Dr. Banks. Do you think Blair’s hot? He feels hot.”

Steven felt Blair’s forehead. “I don’t know. Hey, you’re the Sentinel, you tell me.”

Jim frowned as he concentrated, his eyes widening in alarm. “He is. He is. Steven, what are we going to do? Blair’s sick. We’ve got to do something.”

“Sally?” Steven suggested.


Sally came running into the living room. “What is it? What’s wrong?”
“Blair. Blair’s sick. Do something. He’s burning up,” Jim said, panic clear in his voice.

Sally gently felt Blair’s forehead. “He’s just a little warm, Jim. He may have caught the cold that’s going around.”

“Do something, Sally. Call Dr. Banks. Hurry, call Dr. Banks,” Jim begged, wrapping his arms protectively around his little Guide. “He’s a Doctor, he can help.”

“Jim, there’s no reason to call Dr. Banks. We can handle a simple cold.”

“There’s nothing simple about Blair catching a cold. Dr. Banks. We need Dr. Banks. Please, Sally.” Just then Blair sneezed again. “Hurry, Sally—he’s getting worse.”

“Maybe you’re right. I’ll give him a call.”

Twenty minutes later found Dr. Banks examining Blair, who sat quietly on the couch. His panicking Sentinel hovering nervously nearby. “He’s caught a cold.” Simon said. “More than likely from the other kids in school.”

Jim frowned. “I’m going to kick some ass tomorrow.”

“Jim…”

“No, no. Don’t try and stop me. They made my little Guide sick and they shall pay for it with their very lives.”

Steven who’d been watching broke out in laughter. “Aren’t you being a little melodramatic?”


Blair rubbed his face against Jim’s chest. “I no feel good.”

Jim gently stroked Blair soft hair. “I know, Baby. I know,” he said softly. “Dr. Banks is here. He’ll make you feel better. Right?” he asked Simon, putting all his confidence in the man that had become a good family friend.

“There’s not much I can do. Give him some antibiotics for the throat infection, cough medicine if he starts coughing. That’s about it,” Simon told the young Sentinel who was looking at him so very hopefully, as if he could make his little Guide better by magic. Simon sighed as disillusionment slid onto that very young face. “I’m sorry, son. But a cold is one of those things that has to work its way through.”

Suddenly Blair sneezed again, and again and again. “Oh, God, Baby—are you okay?”

“No feel good,” Blair said pitifully.


Simon almost smiled. Jim was going completely overboard over a simple cold. It was going to be interesting to see how the young Sentinel would handled chicken pox, measles and all the other childhood diseases coming Blair’s way.

Simon patted Jim’s shoulder. “Okay, son. I’ll do what I can. I’m not a miracle worker, though. I can’t make the cold just up and go away, but we can ease the symptoms somewhat. Sally, do you
have any children’s Tylenol we can give Blair?”

Sally nodded. “Coming up.”

Jim stroked his little Guide’s hair gently. “How long is this cold going to last?” he asked Simon.

“Anywhere from three days to a week.”

Jim’s eyes widened in alarm. “Three days to a *week*?”

“Yes,” Simon replied as he offered the tablets to Blair with some sips of water. Watching as the little Guide accepted them, swallowing painfully. Jim winced when he saw that.

“Oh, God,” he said shakily.

Steven knelt by them. “It’ll be okay, Jim. I’ll help.” He said sympathetically. He watched as Jim’s eyes filled with tears.

“Blair’s sick,” He was told heartbrokenly.

“I know,” Steven replied softly. “I know.”

***

Three hours later found Blair and Jim huddled together on their bed. The little Guide shivering as his fever rose and Jim going out of his mind with worry.

“Are you feeling any better?” The Sentinel asked hopefully.

Heart falling when he was told, “No,” raspily.

“Do you want some of the chicken soup Sally made?”

“No.”

“Please, Blair. Just a little, for me?” Blair sighed unhappily, but nodded. “Thank you, Baby.” Jim reached over for the soup that sat on the bedside table between the two beds. Offering Blair a small spoonful of broth, wincing in sympathy as the little Guide did his best to swallow it. Knowing Blair was only doing this because he’d asked.

Not knowing for sure if this was hurting Blair or him the most as watched him struggle with another spoonful of broth. His eyes filling with tears, again. He really was going to have to talk to Dr. Banks about that. Not now though, ‘cause right now he had reason for tears his little Guide was sick.

“Do you want a noodle?” he asked softly.

“No.” Wide, solemn, fever-glazed blue eyes looked up at him. “No hungry.”

“I know, Baby. I know, but I promised Sally and Dr. Banks that I’d get you eat. It’ll keep the medicine from upsetting your tummy. Can you try and eat a little more? Please, Baby?” Jim knew he was taking unfair advantage of his little Guide, but it was for Blair’s own good. And watching Blair try to swallow hurt him as much as it did Blair.

“Does it hurt a lot?”

“Hurt,” Blair replied, swallowing the noodle painfully. “No more, please.”
“But, baby—that was only one noodle.”

“No can. Hurts.”

Jim bit his lip hard as he tried to figure a way to get his little Guide to eat a little more. Suddenly it came to him. It was a bit gross, but for Blair he’d do anything. Anything to make him feel better. “Blair, if I try something will you go along with it? It might seem a little icky, but it might make it easier for you to swallow.”

“I try,” Was the solemn promise.

Jim nodded. “Okay.”

He placed a couple of noodles carefully onto the spoon and put them in his mouth, chewing until they were mushy enough for a little Guide with a sore throat to swallow. He moved closer to Blair offering it carefully.

Blair tilted his curly head looking at him curiously. “I no baby bird,” he said hoarsely, but he opened his mouth and took the noodle mush Jim offered. Swallowing very, very carefully.

Jim watched with satisfaction as Blair swallowed it a lot easier than the noodle he’d chewed on his own. “More?”

Blair nodded. “More.”

Jim did it again, chewing the noodle until it was almost liquid before offering it to Blair. He continued to feed his little Guide this way, alternating with spoonfuls of broth until the whole cup was gone.

“You did it, Blair. You finished the whole cup,” Jim said proudly. “Do you feel better?”


“Good. Wanna take a nap?”

“Nap,” Blair said, cuddling close to his Sentinel.

Jim wrapped himself protectively around his little Guide, pulling him close against him. Face buried deep in Blair curly hair, not minding in the least that his little Guide’s natural scent was tainted slightly by the fever. Blair could be covered in the grosses things imaginable and Jim would have done the same thing. Nothing and no one would keep him from what was his. Not even a stupid cold. With that thought he drifted off to sleep.

***

“Did you check on them?” Simon asked Steven, as he took a swallow of the fine coffee Sally had just poured for him.

“Yeah,” Steven replied, sitting next to him at the kitchen table. “They’re sleeping now. Jim was feeding Blair like he was a hurt baby bird. It was the oddest thing. Kinda cute in a really gross sort of way.”

“You read the pamphlet about Sentinels and Guides didn’t you, Steven?”

“Yeah. Why?” Steven asked as he took a bite of his almost forgotten butterscotch cookie.
“Because the bond between Blair and Jim is only going to get closer. Closer than most married people.”

“Huh-huh, that’s what I read too.”

“I’ve been studying Sentinels going on thirty years now. And it only gets more interesting. Blair and Jim are unique. So far, they’ve blown everything I’ve ever learned and seen right out of the water.”

“That icky scent thing Blair did to Alex?”

“Yeah, in part.”

“What happened to her anyway?”

Simon smiled almost evilly. “She’s in Alaska. I sent her there the same day she tried to take Jim. If your Father asks it was *after* I stitched her up. Ended up taking six stitches on the forehead, from where she fell and hit her head on the chair.”

“Cool,” Steven said unsympathetically.

“Yeah,” Simon agreed just as unsympathetically. He really hadn’t liked her at all and it was rare for him to outright dislike someone so intensely—especially a Sentinel. “Well anyway, Blair and Jim are adding a whole new chapter to the Sentinel/Guide studies. By the time they’re grown up it may be a complete book.”

“I bet,” Steven replied, taking a swallow of his milk.

“Yes. They bonded very young, especially Blair. So I’m not sure how much of the information in the pamphlets is going to be accurate where it concerns them. What I suspect will happen is that Blair and Jim’s bond will only get stronger and be almost unbreakable unless one or the other decides to break it. Even that might be a little iffy. Blair stands a better chance of breaking if he wants because he’s the one that initiated it.”

“Would he do that?” Steven asked curiously.

“He might. If he got angry enough.”

“So are Jim and Blair married or something?”

Simon smiled at him. “Yes. I think you could call it a marriage of sorts. They’re never going to want anyone else. No matter how much someone tempts them.”

Steven looked at Simon, blue eyes wide. “You do know I’m only nine-right? Am I suppose to be knowing any of this?”

“I don’t see why not. Most of it you read in the pamphlets. It’s not like it’s any big secret.”

“That’s true. Can I ask you something?”

“Sure. I’ll answer it the best I can.”

“There’s something that’s been bugging Jim, but he keeps forgetting to ask you about it.”

“Really? What?”

“He’s been crying a lot lately. Ever since he bonded to Blair. Is that normal?”
Simon took a drink of his coffee. “Yes. It’s perfectly normal. When a Sentinel comes online everything is hypersensitive. Adding to that—there’s the unfamiliar dependency on someone for your sanity and your very existence. So yes, it can bring on the tears until they learn control. I remember one Sentinel who cried day and night for two solid years.”

“Oh, God - poor Jim.”

“From what I’ve seen Jim doesn’t have it that bad. It should start easing up.”

“He’ll be happy to hear that. Jim and Blair have been together almost two years, I think,” Steven said, biting into another cookie.

“Hmm, yeah I think it’s about that.”

“Yeah, well, he doesn’t like being such a crybaby.”

Simon smiled at him. “What ten year old would? Jim has a birthday coming up, doesn’t he?”

“Yeah, next week.”

“Is he going to have a party?”

Steven nodded. “Yup. He’s getting a jumping balloon. I think he’s even gettin a piñata. Hopefully it’ll turn out better than Blair’s party.”

“Amen to that,” Simon agreed heartily. Suddenly a gray and white kitten jumped into his lap, startling him. “Wow! Who do we have here?”

Steven took another drink of his milk. “That’s Wofie. Blair’s cat.”

Simon stroked the soft fur, earning a gentle purring from the tiny kitten. “Sure is cute.”

“Young,” Steven replied offering the kitten a piece of cookie. They both watched laughing when he delicately began nibbling on it. “Blair saw him outside of the mall the other day, when we went to get clothes for school. Really wanted him, too.”

“And your Dad agreed?”

“Piece of cake. All Blair had to do was look at him with those big, blue eyes of his and the cat was his for the keeping.”

“Yes, and you coming home with everything Wofie needed didn’t hurt either,” William said, walking into the kitchen.

“Hey, Dad. How was work?” Steven asked, smiling at his father.

“It’s there,” William replied, snatching a cookie from the platter. “How was your day?”

“Alright. Blair caught a cold.”

“Oh.” William looked over at Simon. “Is that what brings you to our humble abode, Simon?” He asked, offering the Doctor his hand.

Simon accepted it. “Yes. That and Sally’s excellent food.”

Sally smiled. “Can I set an extra plate for you? We’re having meatloaf tonight.”
Simon sighed happily. “I’d love to. Being a divorced man, you get awfully tired of sandwiches and TV dinners.”

“You have a standing invitation to come over any time,” William told him.

Simon narrowed his eyes. “You wouldn’t perhaps have ulterior motives, would you?”

William smiled at him innocently. “Nope. But having a Doctor in the house won’t hurt any when you have the youngest Sentinel/Guide pair in known history also in the house.”

Simon laughed. “I knew it, but that’s okay. For meatloaf I’ll let it slide. But who knows about tomorrow,” He added warningly.

“I have been duly warned.”

Just then an extremely rumpled Sentinel with his just as rumpled and feverish Guide in his arms entered the kitchen. “Blair, how do you feel?” Simon asked softly.

“I hurt.” They all winced at the extremely hoarse reply.

“Yeow, “Steven said cringing in sympathy. “that *does* sound like it hurts.”

“Hurts,” Blair agreed as Jim sat down, carefully cuddling his hurting little Guide close. Blair buried his head into Jim’s chest, sighing sadly.

They all watched as Jim looked at them blue eyes filling with the ever-present tears. “Isn’t there anything we can do? Blair’s in pain.”

“He’s already on antibiotics. We’re just going to have to wait,” Simon told him softly.

“Hey, Jim-I asked about your crying all the time. Simon says its normal for a Sentinel. And that it should stop after a while.”

Jim turned to Simon. “Really?”

Simon nodded. “Perfectly normal.”

Jim smiled at the Doctor. “That’s great. I was beginning to think I was going to have to carry around Kleenex forever.” Just then Blair rubbed his face against Jim letting him feel the heat coming off him. “Want some juice or water, Baby?” He asked, desperately wanting his little Guide to feel better.

Blair shook his head. “Nope. Hurt.”

“Maybe if you drank it the way you did the soup?” Jim offered gently, stroking Blair damp curls away from his face.

“No want.”

“Okay. Later maybe?”

Blair nodded. “Later.” He looked over at Simon and William. “Jim feed like baby bird,” he said with awe, as if unable to believe his Sentinel would do such a thing for him.

They all watched as Jim turned bright red. “It got him to eat,” he said defensively.

“We didn’t say anything,” Steven replied, giving his brother a huge smile.
“You do know that now you’ve set yourself up to get a cold too,” Simon told the young Sentinel.

“I know, but it got Blair to eat. That’s all that matters.”

“Hmm, this may be the first cold you’ve gotten since coming on line. Let me hear you say that when you get sick.”

Blair began coughing hoarsely, shifting the attention unwitting back to him. “Are you okay, Baby?” Jim asked worriedly, watching in horror as his little Guide seemed to be coughing up a lung.

When the coughing stopped, Blair buried his head weakly in Jim’s chest. “Ow!” He said hoarsely.

Jim wrapped his arms around his hurting little Guide. Trying his best to offer comfort. “Oh, God this is going to kill me,” He told them shakily.

Simon touched Jim’s arm. “Blair is going to get sick, Jim. He’s a tough little boy, he fought for you and won. He’s not going to let a little, bitty cold win. Are you Blair?”

“Nope,” Blair replied, sniffing.

William offered Jim his handkerchief, who promptly cleaned his little Guide’s runny nose. “And besides, according to his records, Blair hasn’t had chicken pox or measles or any of the other childhood diseases. You have them to look forward to,” he told his son.

“Oh, God,” Jim replied, horrified.

“Don’t worry. We’ll help you,” Simon promised. “You’re not going to be doing this alone.”

Jim met his eyes. “I can feel his lungs congesting and his temperature going up. How am I going to deal with this?”

“You do what is best for Blair,” Simon advised.

“But I’m only ten years old—how am I suppose to know what is best for Blair?” Jim asked overwhelmed, panicking all over again.

“What does your heart tell you to do?” Simon asked softly.

Jim rocked his sick little Guide gently, as he thought about the question. “Love my Guide and take care of him to the best of my ability,” he answered after a long thoughtful moment.

“There you go,” Simon replied. “Not so hard even if you are only ten.”

“Okay. Okay.” Jim replied resolutely. “I can do this.”

William smiled at him. “There was never a doubt, Son.”

Jim returned the smile a little more confidant. “I can do this. I’m his Sentinel. I can take care of my little Guide. I can do this.”

“Yes you can,” William reaffirmed. “And we’ll help you in any way we can.”

“Okay. Okay—we can do this. We can,” Jim said, looking into the feverish face of his little Guide. “Right, Blair?”

“You’re tired? Want to go lay down again?” Jim asked him, pulling Blair closer.

“Yes, please.”

Jim stood with his little Guide his arms. “Okay,” he looked at the three face watching him quietly. “I can do this?” He questioned hesitantly, seeking reassurance.

All three nodded. “You can do this.” William answered for them. “You can,” he reaffirmed. “If you need help just asked.”

“All Okay. Okay.” Jim replied as he carried his little Guide out of the kitchen. “I can do this.” He whispered to himself.

***

Three days later found Jim on the bed he shared with his little Guide.

Completely and totally miserable.

Simon had been right, having a cold and being a fully online Sentinel was way worse “Oh, God-just shoot me. Put me out of my misery now and just shoot me,” he wheezed pitifully. His head hurt, his nose hurt and his lungs felt like they were on fire. He wanted to die.

“Well, Dr. Banks did warn you that you might catch Blair’s cold if you kept feeding him like you were,” Steven told him, laying a cool, wet washcloth on his brother’s flushed face.

“Yes, I know, but it was the only way I could get him to eat.”

Blair sat on the bed quietly watching his suffering Sentinel. “Jim gots sick ’cause of me?” He asked in a small voice.

Jim sat up quickly displacing the washcloth. “No, Baby. Don’t even think that. Me catching a cold isn’t your fault,” he said hurriedly as he watched Blair’s wide, blue eyes fill with tears.

“No get sick till Blair catch cold, give his Sentinell,” his little Guide said, a tear falling down his pale little face. “Not good Guide.”

“Come here,” Jim said reaching for Blair, who moved away quickly. “Please, Blair, come here. Don’t make me chase you. I don’t feel good. Come here.”

The little Guide went into his lap reluctantly. “I sorry,” Blair said sadly, lower lip trembling unhappily.

Jim gently moved Blair’s curly hair away from his pale face. “There’s nothing to be sorry for, Baby. I’m not blaming you for me being sick.”

Blair looked up at him, eyes filled with tears. “No?” He asked hopefully.

Jim caressed his cheek with a finger. “No. And besides, I’m feeling lots better. I’ll be good as new for my birthday on Saturday. You could do something to make me feel lots better though,” Jim told his little Guide softly.

“Really.”

Jim lay back on the bed taking Blair with him. “Hmm, yeah. You could take a nap with me. I know you’re still not feeling good and I could really use a Blair cuddle to make me get better a lot faster.”
Blair looked up at him from where his head lay trustingly against Jim’s chest, little arms going
around as much of Jim’s body as they could. “I do, I hug. Feed like baby bird?” he offered solemnly.

Jim chuckled hoarsely. “Thank-you, Baby, but I’m not hungry right now. Later?”

Blair nodded, blue eyes closing slowly. “Later.”

“I’m going down stairs. See if Sally needs any help with your birthday stuff,” Steven said from
where he sat on his bed.

Jim nodded. “Okay.”

“Do you need anything?” Steven asked, as he covered the Sentinel/Guide pair with a blanket.

“No. Everything I need is right here,” Jim replied, tightening his hold around his little Guide.

***

FEEDING TIME

Jim woke much later, to find his little Guide missing. He wasn’t to worried, because he knew Blair
was fine and carefully climbing the stairs that lead to their bedroom.

He sat up, leaning against the headboard to watch Blair walk into the bedroom, a mug cradled
between his tiny hands.

“What ya got there, Baby?”

“Soup.”

“Sally let you carry hot soup up the stairs?” Jim asked frowning.

“Not hot. Sally no want Blair get burn.”

“Oh, well that’s good then.”

Jim watched as Blair very carefully placed the mug on the bedside table between their two beds and
reached into the back pocket of his jeans and pull out two packets of crackers from one and a spoon
from the other.

“What ya doin’, Baby?” he asked curiously.

“I take care my Sentinell.” Jim smiled as Blair struggled to open one of the packets of crackers.
Finally, unable to open them he gave them to Jim. “Open. No can do,” he said with disgust, making
Jim smile.

Jim opened it, handing them to his little Guide, watching silently to see what Blair planned to do.
Blair went to where he’d laid down the mug taking it to Jim. “Hold,” he demanded, as he picked up
the spoon.

Blair took out one of the crackers. Carefully placing it in his mouth began chewing it. After a long
moment he climbed on the bed, straddling his Sentinel’s thighs he moved close, almost making Jim
spill the soup.

Jim went a little cross-eyed when Blair carefully placed his mouth over his. Stunned, he didn’t move
until Blair made an impatient little noise. Obediently, Jim opened his mouth and a little tongue
pushed the mushed cracker into it.

Blair was feeding him, just like he’d done for him days earlier. Jim was shocked and touched by it. Blair moved away slowly to take the mug out of his hands, carefully offering him a drink of the lukewarm chicken soup. Jim took a small swallow, smiling when his little Guide gave a small sound of approval.

“Thank-you, Blair,” he told him softly. “It’s very good.”

“Hurt?” Blair asked him sympathetically, tiny hands stroking his throat.

“Hmm, a little, “Jim murmured softly, enjoying the gentle touch of his Guide immensely. He sighed in disappointment when Blair removed his hands away to reach for another cracker.

Blair, with the patience of someone a lot older kept feeding his Sentinel until no crackers remained and all the soup was gone.

It was odd, really odd, but it felt good being taken care of by his little Guide. But Jim never had anyone’s tongue in his mouth before. He wondered fleetingly if that was what it was like to be kissed. That thought fled quickly when Blair began releasing the scent.

“Oh, Blair,” Jim whispered softly, pulling his Guide close. He keened softly, rocking the two of them gently. He buried his head against Blair’s neck, the keening increasing in volume as his little Guide began releasing the bonding scent as well. Affirming that Jim would always belong to him.

He would never, ever get enough of this. Not ever. He gently stroked Blair’s curly hair away from his face as he allowed the combined scents to caress his oversensitive nerve-ending, before burying his head against Blair’s neck once more.

Jim moaned softly when he felt a tiny hand stroking his head gently. “More, Blair. Please, Baby, more,” he pleaded softly.

Blair released more of the combined scents, causing Jim to moan burying his head tightly against his little Guide’s neck. “Oh, God that’s so good. I love you, Blair.”

“I luv you, Jim. Berry, berry much.”

Jim laughed shakily as he pulled away slightly. “That much?”

Blair smiled at him. “Yups.”

“How much is berry, berry much?” Jim asked, running his hands over a tiny back.

Blair began kissing his face over and over again. Leaving it slightly more than moist from the sloppy kisses. “Oh, that much?” Jim said laughing quietly.

“Dat much. Blair luvs Jim much.”

“That’s good, ‘cause Jim loves Blair berry, berry much too.”

Blair’s eyes twinkled mischievously. “How berry much?”

The room filled with the happy giggling as Jim kissed Blair’s face giving the little Guide kisses just as wet and just as sloppily as the ones he’d been given.
“So how are you feeling, Jim?” Rafe asked, as he handed his friend a gaily wrapped present.

“Better,” Jim replied, taking the gift and placing it with the others on the table set aside just for presents. “Thank you.”

“Got quite a haul there, Jim.”

Jim smiled as he looked at the straining table. “Yeah, huh?”

“How’s Blair doing?” Rafe asked, eyeing the little Guide who was helping Sally lay out paper plates for the food that was going to be delivered in about twenty minutes. Jim had decided he wanted pizza and chicken wings.

“He’s better, too. Got a bit of a runny nose left, but other than that he’s doing great,” Jim replied.

Blair turned toward them, as if sensing they were talking about him. He gave his Sentinel a huge smile, sailing across the yard he flew into his arms. “Jim,” he said happily.


“Blair help Sally. Happy Birfday, Jim,” Blair answered, as he peppered kisses all over Jim face.

Jim laughed. “Why thank you, Baby. So what’d you get me? I know you and Steven have been plotting something.”

Wide, innocent blue eyes looked at him. “No plot. Get Jim the bestest present in whole world.”

Jim smiled. “Don’t think that’s possible, Baby. *You’re* the bestest present in the whole world,” he told him, giving his Guide a hug. “All I could ever want or need.”

“No want present?” Blair asked, in disbelieve.

Jim laughed again. “Didn’t say that.”

“Hey, Squirt,” Rafe said, softly.

Blair smiled at him. “Hi, Rafe,” he replied shyly.

Rafe reached out and touched Blair’s soft curls. “Do you feel better?”

“Yups. Jim feed like baby bird, make all better. I do for my Sentinell make better, too. Huh, Jim?”

Rafe watched Jim turned bright red. “Huh?” he asked curiously.

“You don’t want to know,” Jim told him hurriedly, turning even redder. “Hey look, foods here. Let’s eat. Hey, Blair after we eat do you want to get in the jumping balloon?”

Blair nodded happily. “Yups.” He said, looking over at the Batman jumping balloon.

Blair sat between Jim’s legs, sharing a plate with Rafe, offering a piece of chicken to his kitten—giggling happily when Wofie delicately grabbed it with his paw.

“Hey, Blair look—there’s Megan,” Jim told his little Guide.
Blair looked over to where his fellow playmate was having Sally fix a plate of food for her. “So?” he said, frowning.

Jim rolled his eyes. Noticing Rafe laughed. “Still no better on the playmate front?”

“You could say that. Blair hates her with a passion. He hasn’t gone in a couple of weeks because of his cold, but he still doesn’t like her very much.”

“Then why does your Dad make him go?”

“It’s suppose to be good for him. Better than hanging out with a bunch of eleven years olds.”

Rafe’s dark eyes flashed. “Hey, I don’t happen to see anything wrong with hanging out with a bunch of eleven year old. Do you H?”

“Nope,” H replied, as he sat down next to them on the grass. A huge plate of food carefully placed on his out stretched legs.

“I know, but Dad says it’ll do him good, even though Blair hates it.”

“Adults are weird,” Carl said, sitting next to Jim, stealing a buffalo wing from H’s plate.

“Hey, get your own,” H protested, reaching for it. But before he could retrieve it-it was in his friend’s mouth.


H sighed. “I hate you. And since your stealing my food, go get me a soda and I’ll consider letting you keep stealing my food.”

“Oh,” Carl replied amicably. “Anyone want anything?” He asked rising to his feet. Taking order from his friends, he ambled off to the drink table.

“Hey, did you hear that the zoo has a new elephant named Mona?” H told his companions.

“Yeah, Dad was saying something about that,” Steven replied as he joined the group. “I haven’t been to the zoo in forever.”

Jim offered his little Guide pizza - torn into a size just right for tiny hands. “Maybe we could go next week. I don’t think Blair’s ever been to the zoo. Have you Blair?”

Blair looked up at his Sentinel. “What is zoo?”

Jim smiled at his friends. “See. It’s a place where they have lots of animals.”

Blair’s wide blue eyes got wider. “Do they gots pantes and wofies?”

Jim smiled. “Panthers and wolves? Yeah, I’m sure they do. Want to got next week?”

Blair launched himself at his Sentinel. “Yes. Yes. Go zoo. See pantes and wolfies.”

“Oh,” Jim said, barely deflecting a tiny foot from hitting him in a sensitive area. He gave his little Guide a hug before sitting him in his lap. “But Blair you got a Wofie right there,” He said, pointing to the tiny kitten now sharing food with H.

Blair made a tiny disparaging sound. “Wofie-kitty, not really wolfie. Want see real wolfie. I give
kisses,” he offered in bribe, kissing Jim’s face, not taking into consideration that his face was covered in BBQ sauce.

Jim laughed. “Okay, okay. You don’t have to kiss me. I’ll take you anyway, but if you wanna give me kisses I won’t say no even if they are BBQ flavored.”

Blair giggled. “Luv you, Jim. Lots and lots.”

“I love you too,” Jim replied, giving his tiny Guide another hug.

“Hey, Blair, if you give me a BBQ flavored kiss, I’ll go with you to the zoo, too,” Rafe said smiling.

Blair reached over and gave Rafe a loud smacking kiss on the nose. “Der? Go too?”

“Yup, I’ll go too,” Rafe told him.

Jim watched an impassive look on his face, nothing showing except for a slight tightening of his blue eyes. Emotions coursing through him so rapidly, he wasn’t sure exactly what he was feeling. Just that he didn’t like what just happened one little bit.

“Can I ask a favor of you though, Blair?” he asked, none of the churning emotion showing in his voice.

His little Guide’s attention quickly turned back to him. “Ask.”

“Can you be try and be a little nicer to Megan and Cassie?”

His little Guide frowned at him “No,” Jim was told uncompromisingly. “No like Megan.”

“Please.”

“No,” Blair smiled at his Sentinel mischievously. “Take zoo any way,” He told him confidently.

“Oh, yeah-what makes you so sure?”

“Jim luv Blair and Blair give good kisses.”

Jim moaned as everyone laughed. “He’s got you there, Jim,” Rafe told him, chuckling. Rubbing his nose with a napkin.

Jim cupped Blair’s little face, kissing his forehead, affectionately. “You’re going to get me in a world of trouble, Baby. You know that?”

“Yups,” Blair said happily. “Take zoo? See panters and wofie’s?”

Jim hugged Blair close, forgetting all about what he was feeling when Blair had kissed Rafe. Losing himself in the love his little Guide so willing offered. “You know I will you, little turd,” he answered, resignedly. Knowing he’d already lost the battle, without ever having fired a shot.

“Yippy, we go zoo.”

“Yeah, we go zoo. Do you want more buffalo wings before we go play in the jumping balloon?”

Blair shook his head. “Nope, tummy full. Soda, please”

Across the yard Simon had just walked through the back gate carrying a present. Smiling at the
activity happening all over it. This birthday party had turned out a lot better than Blair’s if the screaming and yelling children running all over the backyard were any indication.

“Hey, Simon. Welcome,” William said, coming up to him offering his hand.

“William. Great turn out.”

William smiled. “Yeah. Come have pizza and buffalo wings.”

Simon found a empty chair under a large tree where he could watch the children laughing and truly enjoying themselves. Taking a bite of a buffalo wing he looked over to see Blair cheeks a bright pink as Jim pushed on the brightly colored jumping balloon floor sending the little Guide high into the air. His squealing of delight ringing happily in the air.

“Can I join you?” William asked softly, holding his own plate.

“By all means,” Simon replied, motioning to the free chair.

“They’re having a great time aren’t they?”

“Yeah, they are,” Simon replied. They both watched as Jim took Blair into his arms- jumping high, he tumbled them both, his little Guide held protectively against his chest as they landed on the jumping balloon floor. Simon smiled when he heard Blair’s excited exclamations of.” More, Jim more. Higher go higher.”

“I’m glad we decided to allow them to grow naturally,” William said softly.

“Yeah, me, too.”

“That brings me to what I’d like to talk to you about.”


“I remember you saying a while back that you were divorced.”

“Yes.”

William cleared his throat nervously. “I have a proposition for you.”

“Oh,” Simon said curiously.

“I know that you rent an apartment…”

“How would you know that?”

William had the grace to look guilty. “I …hmm did some research. Don’t be angrily. Let me explain.”

“I’m not angry. Tell me why you would want to research me. If there was something you wanted to know all you had to do was ask.”

“It was something I learned from my son, Steven, when they bought Wofie home. They made sure that they had all the angles covered so there was little chance of being told no.”

“Oh.”
William looked over to where his son and little Guide where happily playing. “Having the youngest Sentinel ever, with an even younger Guide under your roof is a tremendous responsibility.”

“Yes, I know.”

William turned haunted blue eyes toward Simon. “No, I don’t think you really do. I’m so worried that I’ll do something wrong and scar them for life. I don’t want that. I want what is best for them. For all my sons. Blair included. I don’t think I’ve told you this yet, but I’ve been unable to find any trace of Naomi. I’ve called off the search and have started adoption proceedings. I consider Blair one of my sons, but I want it in writing, Iron clad and unbreakable. Not that anyone could because Blair is my son’s Guide.”

“I can understand that.”

“Can you? I think maybe you can. Do you have any children, Simon?”

Simon nodded. “Yes. A son who lives with his Mom. I’ve been trying to get visitation rights, but my ex-wife is being very difficult about it.”

“Hmm, I’m sorry about that. If I can help please let me know. My lawyers are at your disposal.”

“Thank-you, I do appreciate that. But didn’t you want to ask me something?”

William smiled at him. “Yes. I have a large house don’t you think?”

Simon furrowed his brows. “Hmm, yes it’s a very nice house.”

“It’s got six bedrooms. Did I tell you that? And an empty room on the lower level that could easily be turned into another office.”

“That’s nice, but what does that have to do with me?”

Steven came up taking a large, refreshing drink of soda from the glass he was carrying, hot and sweaty from jumping in the balloon. “What my Dad is asking, very badly, is if you would move in here with us and help us look after Jim and Blair?”

William pulled his son toward him. “I was getting to it, Steven,” he chided gently.

“Yeah, Dad, but by the time you got around to it Jim, Blair and I will be collecting social security.”

“Hmm, yes. What do you say, Simon? We could really use your help. I won’t charge rent. And you’ll be closer to Jim and Blair. You’ll be able to watch over them all you want. Well, within reason. Please?”

Simon eyed the father and son closely. “Thought about this a lot haven’t you?”

“Yes. I have Sally’s help, but and in-house expert on Sentinels and Guide will ease my mind greatly. I’m even willing to pay for your services.”

“That won’t be necessary.” Simon looked at Steven. “What say you, Steven? Would you mind me living here with you?”

Steven smiled at him from the protective circle of his father’s arms. “It was my idea. Dad just went about it all wrong. Told him to get the room that’s going to be your office ready and the bedroom so that’d you’d feel all guilty about all the money my Dad spent and you’d move it. But he didn’t want to do that. Said it’d be better to wait and ask you first.”
“Have it all figured, out don’t you?” Simon laughed.

“Yup. It worked for Wofie.”

Simon looked down at the kitten playing happily at his feet. “Yes.”

“Does that mean you’ll do it?” William asked softly.

“Yes, it does. And I hope none of us grow it regret it.”

Steven shook his head. “It’ll be great. And you’ll get to eat Sally’s food everyday instead of just once in awhile.”

Simon laughed. “Yeah, that’s a big plus.” He looked at William. “Are you sure about this, William? It’s a big step.”

“I’ve never been surer about anything in my life. And I could really use the help. Like I said before there is Sally, but an expert on Sentinels and Guide’s in-house would be a Godsent. Thank you, Simon. I will sleep better at night knowing you’re under the same roof in case something comes up and I’m sure it will.”

Simon frowned. “Why didn’t you say you were worried?”

William shrugged. “I don’t really know. Stupidity on my part mostly and not knowing quite what to do until Steven came up with a solution.”

“Yeah, well I got tired of hearing Dad roaming the hallway late at light. Back and forth, back and forth. It was starting to make me crazy.”

Simon looked over at Jim and Blair who were cuddling in the jumping balloon. The little Guide happily kissing his playfully protecting Sentinel. “Have you told them?”

William smiled. “Yes, they know I was going to ask you and they love the idea.”

“Great. How soon can I move in?”

“When ever you want.”

“Tomorrow soon enough?”

“Perfect.”

The piñata broken and all the candy joyfully grabbed by laughing children. Jim not allowed to help Blair because of his unfair advantage. Blair whacked the Batman Piñata hard enough on his own to break it in half, surprising everyone. He’d even gathered some of the fallen candy-not really wanting it he saved it for his Sentinel.

Batman cake all sliced served with chocolate ice cream, Happy Birthday sung, they now all sat around as Jim opened his presents. Jim laughing as Blair helped him tear the wrapping paper. Joking with H he lost track of his little Guide until…

“Jim.”

He looked over to find Blair carefully walking toward him holding something carefully in his arms, Steven at his side.
“What ya got there, Baby?”

“What ya got there, Baby?” Blair very, very carefully handed it to his waiting Sentinel. A tiny, black kitten with a bright blue bow around his neck. “You like?” he asked anxiously.

Jim picked up the kitten to look at it. It stared back at him with blue-eyed curiosity before reaching out a paw and gently tapped his nose. Jim laughed. “I love him. Thank-you, Blair.”

“Steven help pick.”

Jim smiled at his brother. “Thanks, Steven. I love him. Did you have any trouble getting him past Dad and Sally?”

“Na. Blair gave them the ‘look’ and they melted before its power.”

Jim carefully placed the kitten on the ground where Wofie promptly came over to inspect him. They smelled each other noses for a long moment before Wofie jumped the new kitten playfully.

“It looks like they’re going to get along,” Jim told his brother and little Guide, watching as the two kittens tumbled around each other.

“Yups,” Blair replied climbing into his Sentinel’s lap. “Happy Birfday, Jim.”

“Thank-you, Baby.”

“What you name kitty?” Blair asked him, wrapping his arms around his neck.

“Hmm, don’t know. What would be a good name for him?”

Blair shrugged. “Hmm, Blackie?” He suggested.

“Sounds good to me. Blackie it is,” Jim told him kissing Blair’s cheek, pulling him close with a happy sigh.

***

STICKY LITTLE GUIDES

Jim sneezed for the fifth time since Simon had dropped them off at the zoo, declining to go with them, saying he still had stuff to unpack back at the house and he would be back for them later.

Steven handed him a Kleenex. “You wanted to bring Blair to the zoo.”

Jim took it. “Yeah, zoos smelled before, but its way worse when you’re a Sentinel. The smell of elephant poop alone is enough to knock me off me feet.”

“Can’t you dial back or something?”

Jim rubbed his runny eyes. “I’ve tried. It’s not working.”

“Up,” Blair demanded. He’d been walking, telling Jim he was a big boy and could walk by himself as soon as they’d gotten out of the car. His little Guide had been holding Rafe’s hand and Jim wasn’t sure how he felt about that, but right now he was to miserable to care.
Jim reached down and picked up his little Guide, sighing softly when Blair released scent. Not a lot, but enough to block the smells that were giving him trouble. “That’s better. Thanks, Baby.” he sighed, relieved not to be smelling elephant poop, not to mention wolf poop, horse poop, any poop at all.


Jim kissed his nose. “Your Sentinell. Can I carry you?” he asked softly, wanting to be close to his little Guide.

“Yups,” Blair readily agreed.

Two hours later found Jim, Blair, Steven, Rafe, H and Carl all sitting in the food court enjoying a variety of snacks. Blair had loved the zoo, especially seeing the panthers and the wolves. Blair had a real fascination with them. They’d spent forever watching them. Blair’s beautiful blue eyes wide as he watched the powerful creatures roaming their separate enclosure.

Now Blair sat in his own chair surrounded by every form of panther and wolf the gift shop had. Well, there was a tiny figure of a prairie dog, but it was overwhelmed by all the panthers and wolves. Jim was sure the poor, little stuffed prairie dog was trembling in fear.

“I’ve got to go to the bathroom. Will you be okay for a minute, Baby?” Jim asked his little Guide.

Blair looked up at him, smiling. “I cool.”

Jim caressed Blair’s soft curls. “Okay, be good. I’ll be right back?”

When he came back it was to find Steven, Rafe, H, and Carl having fits. When they saw him they suddenly became very, very quite. Standing very still in front of Blair.

Jim narrowed his eyes suspiciously. “What are you guys up to?”

Steven cleared his throat. “Hmm, nothing.”

“Nothing my butt. What are you guys hiding and where’s Blair.”

“He’s here,” Rafe supplied helpfully.

“Where?”

“Here. Sitting right where you left him.”

“Oh.” Jim moved closer noticing his friends were becoming even more nervous and they wouldn’t move away from the chair Blair was sitting in.

“Blair, are you okay, Baby?”

“I good,” was the muffled response from behind all those bodies hiding him.

“Okay.” Jim narrowed his eyes once again as he tried to figure out what was going on, making his friends shift anxiously. Steven had told him once that look could freeze someone solid at fifty paces. “What I need is for you guys to move away from my little Guide so I can get to him.”

H smiled at him nervously. “Hmm, don’t think that’s such a good idea.”

“Why?” Jim asked with patience he wasn’t feeling. And they all knew it as they moved from one
foot to the other apprehensively.

“Well you see we had a little bit of trouble when you left,” Carl whispered.

“What was that? Say that again. I didn’t quite hear it.”

“Hey aren’t you a Sentinel? Aren’t you suppose to hear things for like miles?” Carl asked, smiling timidly. Looking at the unsmiling face of his friend he coughed uncomfortable.

“Oh, I heard you. I’m just trying to decide which of you I’m going to kill first if you don’t move away from my little Guide.”

“I don’t think it matters, you’re going to kill us any way,” Steven said resignedly.

“Why is that?” Jim asked dangerously.

“Well, you see it’s like this. Blair wanted to trying something he’s never had before and well it kinda got out of hand,” Steven supplied unhelpfully.

Jim crossed his arms. “Hmm and…”

Heads lowered they all separated to allow Jim to see his little Guide. Jim’s blue eyes widened in shock. He then turned three shade of red and looked like he was going to hyperventilate.

“Are you okay, Jim? You’re not zoning are you?” Steven asked anxiously, hesitantly reaching out to touch his brother’s arm.

“N…no. I’m fine. But for some odd reason I don’t think Blair.”

Four heads lowered to the floor in shame. “We’re sorry,” Rafe said contritely.

“Hmm,” Jim replied, moving toward to his little Guide slowly. “Are you okay, Baby?”

“I good,” Blair answered serenely, contently eating from the bag in his lap. Surrounded by other bags. Open and spilling their sweet treasure all over the table. All over everything.

“Whose idea was this?” Jim asked his brother.

“M…mine. H…he wanted to try it. I didn’t see the harm. I only turned away for a moment to get some napkins. I swear.”

Jim kneeled on the floor in front of his little Guide. “Blair?” Bright blue eyes looked up at him from a face covered in pink and blue cotton candy. It was everywhere, his clothes, hair, everywhere. Strands were even clinging to his shoes. “How did this happen?”

Tiny shoulders shrugged. “Don’t know. Cotton candy berry good. Want some?” Blair asked, lifting a sticky, blue hand, offering some of the quickly melting candy.

“Hmm, not right now. Thanks, Baby.” Jim looked over at his friends who were quietly watching. “What did you guys do? Dip him in it?”

“We don’t know how this happened. Really we don’t?” Rafe told Jim, trying unsuccessfully to pull off some of the cotton candy coating Blair’s hair succeeding in only in making it worse. “It just-happened.”
Jim looked at his guilt-ridden friends and then at his cotton candy-covered little Guide. His face streaked pink and blue and in some places purple, where it was melting together. He’d never seen his Blair look cuter. He bit his lip hard to keep from laughing. “You guys better hope that it comes off, if not, you’re all going to be changing cat litter until it does.”

All four moaned. Unable to hold back any more, Jim started laughing, picking up his little Guide. “Oh... God-Blair you look so cute. It seems even cotton candy likes you. *A lot.*

Steven, Rafe, H and Carl moved closer laughing too, relieved they weren’t going to get killed. “Just because I’m not mad at you guys doesn’t mean you’re off the hook.” he told them warningly. “Because if it doesn’t there’s a couple of litter boxes with you guy’s names on them. Come on Blair, let’s go see how much of this stuff comes off.” He told his little Guide. Smiling as he listened to his brother and friends moan unhappily in the background.
Hide and Seek

“What are you doing?” Steven asked from the couch he was sharing with the kittens. Wofie was on his stomach and Blackie stretched out on his legs. Jim had just walked, no more like ran into the living room acting all squirrelly. Looking around the house like it was on fire or he was desperately looking for something or someone. Steven put his comic book down to stare at his weird brother. Sitting up he carefully placed Wofie and Blackie on the back of the couch.

“Playing hide and seek with Blair.”

Steven sat up. “Isn’t that a little unfair considering you’re a Sentinel?”

Jim had the oddest look on his face. “You’d think so, but even with me being a Sentinel I still can’t find him.”

Steven sat up straighter. “What do you mean you can’t find him?”

Jim gave him an annoyed look. “Just what I said, I can’t find him not even using my heightened senses.”

“Well, that’s weird.”

“You’re telling me.”

“Hi fellas. What are you doing?” Simon asked curiously, walking into the living room carrying a file. He’d been moved in for a while now and was quite at home in the Ellison household. In fact he loved being here. He’d never known a house so full of love and laughter.

“Jim’s playing hide and seek with Blair,” Steven answered.

“Hmm, isn’t that a little unfair?”

“You’d think so,” Jim said, uncertainly.

“What?”

“I can’t find him.”
“You’re a Sentinel, how can you not find him?”

Jim had a really lost look on his face. “I don’t know. I think he’s figured out a way to block me.”

“That’s not possible,” Simon said, moving closer to the unnerved Sentinel.

“Then why can’t I sense him at all?”

“Hmm, let’s try again. First use hearing. Filter everything out. All the house noises, all the people in it. The animals as well. See if you can hear his heartbeat. Anything?”

Jim had tilted his head to the side. “Nope. Not a thing.”

Simon frowned. “That’s really weird. Okay try smell. Filter everything out just like before and see if you can smell the scent that is uniquely Blair’s.”

Before Jim could filter all the scents he gagged. “Whew, man-gotta change the cat litter. That’s really disgusting,” he said, wrinkling his nose. Silence for awhile as he tried to locate his missing little Guide, before he turned to Simon. “Nothing.”

“Maybe if you piggybacked scent and hearing?”

Jim tried. “Hmm, nope. Nothing. I’m telling you, he’s blocking me.”

“He can’t be blocking you. It’s just not possible.”

Jim smiled tightly. “Well you did say that Blair was different.”

Simon rubbed his eyebrow contemplatively. “Yeah, I did. But how the hell is he able to block you?”

Jim shrugged. “Don’t know. I have a better question for you.”

“What?”

“How the hell are we going to find him?”

“Well, the normal way I guess. We go Blair hunting,” Simon told him.

“I already did that. I’ve looked everywhere,” Jim said impatiently.

“Don’t get snippy with me I’m only trying to help.”

“Sorry,” Jim said contritely.

“Hmm, let’s look again. He can’t have gotten that far he’s only three.”

Just then William walked in carrying Blair in his arms.

“Blair! Baby, where have you been?” Jim said, relieved beyond belief.

“He was outside, sitting on the steps,” William answered, handing the little Guide over to his son. Who was reaching for him anxiously.

“I’ve been looking everywhere for you. I was so worried,” Jim told Blair, kissing his little face over and over.

“Play hide and seek?” Blair questioned, puzzled.
“Yes, but you blocked me.”

Blair furrowed his brows. “Jim cheat?”

“No, no, I wasn’t going to cheat. Well not too much.” Jim amended, with a guilty smile at the very, annoyed look Blair gave him.

“Blair, how did you block Jim?” Simon asked, moving closer to the Sentinel/Guide pair.

Blair shrugged his shoulder. “Don’t knows. No want Jim cheat ‘cause he Sentinell.”

“Okay, but how did you do it?” The little Guide gave him a silent, wide-eyed look. “I’m not going to get a straight answer out of you. I wish you were fifteen or even twelve, maybe then you’d be able to talk to me,” Simon said, with heartfelt sigh.

William smiled. “Must be killing you, huh?”

“And how,” Simon replied returning the smile. “Knowing he can do something no other Guide can do and not knowing exactly how is nerve-wracking. It’s going to drive me crazy by the time he’s ten.”

“Baby, how did you keep me from sensing you?” Jim asked, trying to help Simon at least a little.

“Tell you. No want you cheat,” Blair told him, impatiently.

Jim looked over at Simon. “He didn’t want me cheating,” he said, shrugging his shoulders apologetically.

“Oh, well. Remind me to ask him how he did that when he’s older,” Simon requested.

“You got it,” Jim promised solemnly. Noticing the way Steven was staring at Blair “Why are you looking at Blair that way?”

“Hmm, I think it’s time to get Blair a hair cut.”

Jim looked at his little Guide. He didn’t see anything wrong with him. Soft, curly hair framed a really cute, pale little face. “Why?”

“He’s starting to look like a girl,” Steven replied, with a hint of disgust.

Jim smiled at him. “What’s the matter, Steven-have a thing against looking like a girl?”

Steven rolled his eyes. “Well, *yeah*, if you’re a BOY. Geez, now that was a really stupid question.”

“Wanna get a hair cut, Blair?” Jim asked his little Guide, who shrugged his little shoulders.

“Don’t care.”

“Blair doesn’t care. Do you think he needs a hair cut, Dad?”

“Hmm, might not be a bad idea. It’ll be easier to keep clean if it wasn’t so long.”

“That’s true. It might not have taken a week to get all that cotton candy out of it if it’d been shorter.” Jim gave Steven a huge smile when his brother moaned. He still smiled when he remembered his brother and friends cleaning out Wofie and Blackie’s litter box in Penance for not taking care of Blair
at the zoo while he’d been in the bathroom. “Okay, I’ll take him on Saturday. Blair wanna get something to eat?”

“No play hide and seek?”

“Hmm, no,” Jim told him hurriedly. “I...I hmm, need some Blair cuddling. I really got scare when I couldn’t find you.” He’d been scared witless actually at the thought of having lost his little Guide. He couldn’t deal with another round of Hide and Seek. Not right now.

Blair made a sympathetic sound. “Poor Jim.” Stroking his cheek with a tiny finger.

“Yeah, poor me,” Jim said softly moving his face into the gentle caress. “I need you so much. More and more, since the day you bonded me and I miss you a lot when you’re not with me.”

“That reminds me, Jim. How long have you and Blair been bonded?” Steven asked, frowning slightly as he remembered he’d wanted to double check something.

“I think it’s been about eight months,” Jim replied, nuzzling Blair’s soft curls.

“Are you sure?” Steven’s frown deepened.

“Pretty sure. Why?”

“Simon and me were thinking it’d been going on two years. Right, Simon?”

The Doctor nodded. “I could have sworn it had been that long.”

William rubbed his ear thoughtfully. “I think, Jim’s right. I’ll have to check the paperwork, but I’m almost positive that it’s eight months as well.”

“How could we have gotten the timeline so wrong?” Simon asked, an extremely puzzled look on his face.

“It’s easy to do, Simon. There was a lot going on. It may have just seemed like two years,” William said smiling ruefully. “Plus you may have had a lot on your mind as well. I know for me it feels longer than eight months too.”

“There was a lot going on. That’s true. But to have gotten it so wrong. Confusion thy name is Simon Banks.”

Jim smiled at Steven, face half buried in Blair’s hair. “And Steven’s excuse is that he’s just a really, really big dweeb.”

Steven made a face at Jim. “Yeah, yeah and I love you too.”

Jim blew him a bunch of kisses. “Love you too, little bro.”

Steven decided the best thing to do was to completely ignore his brother after sticking his tongue out at him. Steven turned to his Father. “Dad?”

“Yes, Son?”

“Saturday’s my birthday.”

William smiled at his young son. “I know. Do you still want to go to the Fisherman’s Warf?”
“Yeah. Maybe we could go after Blair gets his hair cut? Simon you’re going with us right?”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

Steven smiled happily. “Cool.”

“Are you sure you wouldn’t rather have a birthday party? Invite all your friends?” William asked, pulling his soon to be ten year old son into a hug.

“Na. Rather hang out with my family.”

“Okay,” William said, him kissing the top of his son’s head. “One birthday celebration at Fisherman’s Warf coming up. Don’t forget to tell me what you’d like for your present.”

Steven smiled up at his father. “I’m kinda leaning toward a computer. Is that okay?”

William returned the smile. “Whatever you want. You’re only ten once.”

“Cool. You’re the best father in the whole world.”

William chuckled. “I know.” He replied, rubbing his son’s back affectionately.

***

Saturday afternoon found Blair sitting in Jim’s lap getting his first hair cut. He wasn’t scared, instead looking around curiously as the rest of the Ellison household got a hair cut as well. Well except for Sally who sat in a chair over by door reading a magazine.

“Okay, so how do you want it cut?” Mr. Beans asked Jim. Their barber for what seemed like forever.

“Hmm, not to short. But short enough so that it doesn’t get in his face to much.”

Mr. Beans smiled. “You got it. So what’s it like being a Sentinel?”

“Hmm, well it’s not too bad once you learn how to filter out everything that could make you gag, go blind or deaf you. Blair’s been a great help. Wait, wait, could I have that?” Jim asked the barber as he was about to drop a tuff of cut Blair hair to the floor.

“Sure thing.” Mr. Beans said amicably.

Steven had just finished his hair cut came up to them brushing his neck for stray hair asked. “What do you want it for?”


Steven shrugged. “No problem. Don’t get you nose all bent out of shape. Geez.”

“Well fine then. Go away,” Jim told him, accepting another tuff of cut hair from the Mr. Beans.

Steven gave his brother a hurt look. “Is that any way to treat me on my birthday?”

Jim gave him a tiny smile. “Sure is and if you don’t go away I’m going to give you a birthday licking to go with it.”

Steven gasped in horror. “You’d beat me up on my birthday.”
Jim nodded. “Yup. Just to show you how much I love you.”

“I’d rather have a new game for the X-Box. Thank you very much.”

“All done.” Mr. Beans, broke in use to this kind of squabbles between the two younger Ellisons. Nothing had changed since they’d starting coming to him at the age of three and four respectively. Both Jim and Steven looked at Blair. Jim’s blue eyes widened in wonder. “Oh, Blair you look so cute.”

Mr. Beans had cut Blair’s hair in such a way that it seemed to have made Blair’s hair even curlier. The tight curls framing his cute little face and making his eyes seem even bluer. And it wasn’t even that much shorter.

Blair smiled at his enchanted Sentinel. “Jim silly,” He giggled, shyly.

“No, you do. You look so cute. Doesn’t he, Steven?”

“Yeah well at least he doesn’t look like a girl any more. Can we go now? I’m hungry.”

“Geez, you and your stomach,” Jim said as he pulled Blair into his arms, kissing his little Guide on the forehead.

“Shut up. It’s my birthday and I can be hungry if I want. Hey, Simon-hmm, nice hair cut.” Steven told Simon as he came up to them.

“It’s not to short. It’s to short, isn’t it?”

Steven looked at Simon critically. “Well to tell you the truth I don’t really see any difference.”

Simon sighed in relief. “Good. Then they did a good job.”

Steven rolled his eyes. “You’re just as weird as my goofy brother,” he said watching Mr. Beans place tuffs of cut Blair hair in a small box as Jim watched anxiously. “Is that a Sentinel thing?”

Simon looked over at the Sentinel/Guide pair. “Hmm, yeah it is. It’s an instinctual thing. If for some reason Blair and Jim are separated Jim will use those little tuffs of hair to ground him and keep him from zoning until Blair can get to him.”

“He’s not going to save all the hair from every hair cut from now on is he? If he does he’ll have enough hair to have Sally knit him a sweater by the time Blair’s fifteen.”

Simon smiled at Steven. “No, it won’t get that bad. This is the first hair cut since they’ve been together and so it’ll be more than enough. Jim and Blair will be having a lot of firsts together.”

Steven narrowed his blue eyes. “Is this one of those things I may not want to know about? Dad hasn’t had THE TALK with me yet. You do know that, right?

Simon chuckled. Steven was a character and one of the reasons he loved living at the Ellison household. Steven was always ready with a wisecracking comment and always one step ahead of everyone else. The youngest Ellison had gone out of his way to make him feel welcome. That in itself meant a lot to Simon and had earned Steven a special place in his heart.

“Yeah, I know. It’s not too bad and I know that you want to know how best to help your brother and Blair. So there’s nothing wrong in being educated in Sentinel ways,” Simon said, knowing how deeply Steven loved his brother and Jim’s little Guide. And would do anything for them.
“I guess. Hey, look Dad’s ready. Let’s go eat.”

***

DINNER AND A ZONE

They had to wait for the restaurant staff to ready their table. While they waited Jim showed Blair the tank where all the lobsters were held. Laughing softly as Blair proceeded to name each and every one of them.

“How can you tell the difference?” He asked his little Guide, holding Blair close in his arms as they looked into the tank.

Blair pointed. “See der- that Mickey. He gots a white dot on hand.”

“Claw. That’s a claw.”

“Claw. And Benny gots a dark red spot on forehead. Ands Ralphie he gots cross-eyes.”

Just then they were called to their table. Dinner was a lively, happy affair. As they all joke and conversed as any family would on a special occasion.

Blair was happily feeding his Sentinel croutons when their waiter brought William and Simon’s food.

Steven was the first to notice something was wrong. He was sitting across from Blair and Jim. He noticed Blair’s blue eyes getting bigger and bigger, beginning to fill with tears as the little Guide stared over at the lobster tank and then at the two plates in front of his Dad and Simon.

He cussed inwardly. “Jim, look there’s a Koi pond over there, why don’t you take Blair to go see it?” He said, hurried before Blair could freak any more than he was about to.

“But our food will be here any minute,” Jim protested.

“Go. Go now. Hurry,” Steven urged. Trying his best to show Jim with his eyes where the problem was without making things worse. And his dense brother wasn’t getting it. Until finally…

“Oh, shit,” Jim hurriedly got off the chair and practically ran with Blair to the Koi pond. While Steven told his Dad and Simon to get rid of the lobsters quick before Blair came back.

“Look Blair aren’t they pretty?” Jim asked, trying his best to distract his little Guide.

“Will and Simon eat Ralphie and Mickey?” Blair asked, bottom lip trembling.

“No, no it couldn’t have been them,” Jim denied. Damn. He should never have showed Blair the lobsters.

“Dey eat. Dey on plates. Ralphie and Mickey no tank,” Blair said, the trembling of his bottom lip increasing. Tears beginning to fall from those big, blue eyes.

Jim didn’t know what to do. Lie or tell the truth. He could lie and tell him that his Dad and Simon weren’t about to eat two of the lobsters he’d gotten to know and name. But that wasn’t the truth and he couldn’t do that to his little Guide.

Jim sighed heavily pulling Blair into his arms. “I’m sorry, Baby. They didn’t know. Really they didn’t. They aren’t going to any more. They’re going to get popcorn shrimp like Steven, you and me.
They’re sorry. They’re really sorry.”

Blair buried his head against Jim’s neck snuffling wetly. “No like,” he said, sadly.

“I know, Baby. I know. I’m sorry,” Jim replied, running his hand up and down his little Guide’s back. As Blair wrapped his arms around as much of Jim as he could, seeking the comfort his Sentinel readily gave.

Finally calmer Blair pulled slightly away from Jim. “Are you feeling better, Baby?” Jim asked softly. Hating seeing those big, blue eyes all swollen and red.

Blair nodded. “I is better.”

Jim kissed Blair’s forehead gently. “Wanna look at the Koi for a little bit?”

Blair nodded again. He smiled slightly watching the large colorful fish swimming back and forth in the pond. Suddenly he stiffened. “Will and Simon no eat?” he asked, bottom lip beginning to tremble, eyes filling with tears all over again.


“Can name?”

Jim pulled his little Guide to him. “You can name them, Baby.”

They knelt in front of the pond, arms around each other as Blair proceeded to name all the fish.

Suddenly the lights in the restaurant flickered, sending a bright, colorful flash of light into the pond. Jim caught in its rays as it bounced off the water, stiffened.

From the table William, Simon, Steven and Sally watched as Jim comforted his little Guide. Having gotten rid of the lobsters. That was the last time they’d ever order lobster around Blair. Sally hadn’t had to worry she’d order a fish sandwich. Which she mentioned to them several times.

William noticed first. “Oh, my God…Jim…he’s zoned.”

They approached the Sentinel/Guide pair quietly. “Don’t do anything?” Simon instructed softly. “Let Blair do what he has to. What he was born to do.”

They watched. As did everyone in the restaurant. No one talked. No one dared make a sound as they watched. Sentinels and Guides were rare. To have the privilege of seeing a pair up close was true honor. Especially a pairing as young and rare as Jim and Blair.

Blair had felt Jim stiffen. He turned to look at him tilting his curly head to one side as he contemplated his Sentinel. Reaching out a tiny hand, he ran a forefinger over the bridge of Jim’s nose. And with the simplicity of that touch brought his Sentinel back from a potentially fatal zone.


“You zoned, Son.” William told him as he knelt in front of them.

“I…I zoned?” Jim asked dazedly, pulling Blair to him with a weary sigh. His little Guide began releasing scent. Jim moaned softly as it ease his frayed nerves. Weakly he buried his face against the side of Blair’s neck.
No one answered as they waited for Blair to do his magic. It took a few minutes before Jim felt strong enough to pull away slightly.


“A…a little bit.”

“Do you know what you zoned on?” Simon questioned.

“T…there was a light. A real bright light and then a flash off the water. That’s all I remember.” Jim pulled Blair to him even tighter. Sighing as he felt his little Guide’s hands gently rub his back.

“Thank you, Baby.” He said, kissing Blair’s forehead.

“Better?”

Jim gave his worried little Guide a smile. “Much better, Baby. Thanks to you.”

“I glad,” Blair replied, kissing Jim’s nose.

Simon looked at the little Guide. “Blair, what did you do?” he asked not really expecting to get an answer he could use.

“I help my Sentinel.”


William laughed. “Yes, you do. And weren’t you going to wait until Blair was at least twelve to ask him questions?”

“Yes. I was, but nine years is along time to wait,” Simon said, sighing sadly, wistfully.

“Are you alright?” The manager of the restaurant, a tall, blond man asked Jim worriedly.

Jim looked up at him, blue eyes still slightly glazed. “I…I’m better. Thank-you.”

“I don’t know what happened. The restaurant lighting must have flickered. I’m so sorry. We appreciate your business and to keep it, your meals are on the house. And the next time you come in, I assure you, we will be Sentinel safe.”

William helped his shaky son to his feet. “Thank-you. That’s very nice of you, but not necessary. What happened was an accident and no ones fault.”

“We want to make sure of it. An electrician will be called in to check it out.” The manager said with a smile. “It is quite an honor to have the world’s youngest Sentinel and his little Guide here at Fisherman’s Wharf.”

“You know about Jim and Blair?” William asked in surprise.

The manager nodded. “Oh, yes. Their names and pictures were in the papers awhile back. They’re celebrities here in Cascade.”

“Simon? Do you know anything about this?” William asked the Doctor, frowning heavily.

Simon had the good grace to look slightly guilty. “Hmm, yes. When a Sentinel/Guide bond it’s printed in the local paper. They’re extremely rare, William. Nothing to hide or be ashamed of.”
“We agreed that they were to grow up as normal as possible, Simon.”

“Yes, we did. And they will, but in case something happens there’ll be a city looking out for them.”

“How can you be so sure that everyone will have their best interests at heart?”

“Law of averages. If there is someone looking to do them harm there is no way they’ll be able to get through a city of two million who want only the best for them.”

“That’s the most convoluted logic I’ve ever heard. But we will talk about this at home. Let’s celebrate Steven’s birthday shall we?”

“God, finally. Someone remembers me,” Steven said sadly.

William pulled his youngest son into a bear hug. “No one has forgotten you, Steven. Least of all on your birthday. Come on let’s go back to the table.” William glared at Simon. “And you and I will have words back at the house.” He promised the Doctor.

Simon nodded. Not looking forward to having a discussion with the over-protective father. “Alright.” He replied, quietly following the family back to the table.

The celebration had lost a little of it joviality, but it quickly came back as everyone at the table and all over the restaurant watched as the little Guide became extremely protective with his shaky Sentinel.

The restaurant gave them new meals to replace those that had gotten cold. Plates of popcorn shrimp all around except for Sally who still wanted a fish sandwich. Which she reminded William and Simon about again when Blair looked at their plates suspiciously and then over at the lobster tank. Making sure all the lobsters were still there.

Blair sat on Jim’s lap carefully feeding his trembling Sentinel. “Poor Jim,” he said as he gently stroked Jim’s face with his tiny hands. “I make better,” he promised.

“I know you will, Baby,” Jim told him, sighing as he gave himself into his little Guide’s healing touch.

William looked around the restaurant when he heard someone near them utter an audible ‘Aw.’ He chewed on a cheese biscuit angrily. “This is not good. Not good at all. I really wish you’d told me about the newspapers, Simon. So that I could have put a stop to it.”

Simon looked over at the young Sentinel/Guide pair. Jim’s face buried in Blair’s neck keening very, very softly. Oblivious to the fact they were being watched by everyone in the restaurant. “I didn’t think it would be a problem.”

“Obviously there is,” William told him harshly. “I will not allow Jim and Blair to become objects of interest to the general public. What next? Do we sell tickets so people can come into our home to view them? I won’t have it.”

“That won’t happen. I assure you, that won’t happen, William.”

“Can you guarantee that, Simon? Unequivocally?”

Simon took a drink of his coffee. It would seem this conversation would not make it to the house. He gave Steven an apologetic look. The younger Ellison shrugged his shoulders.

“Yes,” he answered softly.
“How?”

“Cascade is the only city to have a Sentinel/Guide pairing as young as Jim and Blair. Do you know how rare that is?”

William brushed that off. “You have mentioned that before and it does not answer my question.”

“The world knows about Jim and Blair, William. There was no hiding the fact when they bonded. And Cascade has them.”

“What is that suppose to mean?”

“When Jim came online and he was the youngest Sentinel in recorded history to do so. Alex can be included in there somewhere, but let’s not talk about her. Word spread like wildfire. Potential Guides came from all over wanting to bond with him. But then a little munchkin the size of an ant waltzed right in and took him for himself, right under their noses.”

“Yes, and…”

“William, I’m not sure you know exactly how much is riding on this Sentinel/Guide pairing,” Simon told him softly.

“What the hell are you talking about?” William asked impatiently.

“William, Jim is already showing signs that he will be one of the best Watchman the world has ever know.”

“Simon…” William sighed heavily. “Just spit it out. In an English I can understand.”

“Allright. Jim has been tested constantly, much to his very vocal distaste. He can already sense volcanoes getting ready to erupt, earthquakes about to take place continents away and he hasn’t reached his full potential yet. He will be Watchman not only for Cascade, but for the planet. But because he was born and will be raised in Cascade, the city has first dibs on where he will be stationed when he is of age.”

“Simon, Jim wants to be a policeman. It’s a dream he’s has had since he was very small.”

“Yes,” Simon nodded slowly. “I know.”

“I won’t have his dreams squashed as if they never existed.”

“They won’t be.”

William glared at Simon. “You better believe they won’t be. I’ll pack up my family and disappear off the face off the earth before I allow that to happen. Do you hear me, Simon?”

The Doctor gave William a tiny smile. “Loud and clear, William.”

William nodded. “Fine. Tell me the rest of it.”

Simon looked over at the Sentinel/Guide pair still cuddling close. Blair feeding his Sentinel food in between kisses. “Offers are coming in from all over the world, William. I’ve never seen anything like it in my life. Offers of full scholarships to the best schools. Offers of money, cars, homes. You name it, it’s being offered to woe Jim into going to their city and be their Watchman.”

“Jim is eleven years old, Simon. There is no way he can make a choice like that right now. Look at
him. He’d rather be with Blair and his friends. He has plans on playing football next year. Which I will fully encourage.”

“I know. That’s why I haven’t mentioned it before. And many of the offers are not only for Jim but for Blair as well. They think if they can get to the Guide the Sentinel will follow.”

“Simon, Blair is three. Three years old, God damn it. Sorry, Blair,” He automatically apologized when the little Guide looked over at him and growled softly. “I go into the lawyer’s office on Monday to sigh the adoption papers. Blair will be one of my sons and I will not have him be a pawn in some sort of game.”

Simon sighed heavily. “I know that as well, William. That’s why I haven’t said anything sooner. I knew you’d get upset.”

“Upset doesn’t even begin to cover the way I’m feeling right now, Simon.”

“I know, I know.”

William turned to his youngest son whose birthday dinner was now ruined. “I’m sorry, Son.”

Steven smiled at his father. “That’s okay, Dad. Its better that this all get fixed and besides, I’ve got a great new computer at home. So I’m happy. Can I ask something though?”

“Sure, Son, what is it?”

“If all these really cool offers are coming in for Jim and Blair what happens to them until Jim and Blair are old enough to decide what they want to do?”

Two pairs of blue eyes looked at Simon curiously. “They don’t have an expiration date if that’s what you mean,” he answered softly.

“Can you keep a record of everything that their being offered? Well, actually can we look at the offers?” Steven asked.

“Yes, why?”

“Well, because I think that Jim might like to look at them eventually. Well when he quits being so mushy with Blair,” Steven answered, looking over at his brother who had his face buried in Blair’s newly cut hair. “Maybe we could put all the best ones in a folder or something. Ones that fit into what Jim and Blair might want to do when they get older.”

“That’s a great idea,” William said, smiling at his smart son.

“That’d be kinda hard right now though considering Blair’s still a baby,” Steven said, biting his lip thoughtfully.

Blair turned to glare at him almost dislodging Jim who still had his face buried in his hair, purring away happily.

“I no baby. I tree.”

Jim looked up, no longer purring. “Yeah, he’s tree, you fool,” He added, voicing his displeasure as well.

Steven rolled his eyes.” I know you’re three, Blair,” He said ignoring his stupid brother. “This is for when you’re a lot older. Right now you’re still too little. This is for college and stuff like that.”
“College what?” Jim asked, still slightly disoriented.

“Haven’t you been listening to anything we’ve been talking about?” Steven asked in exasperation.

Jim gave him a goofy grin. “Nope.” He said before burying his nose on Blair’s hair once again.

Steven rolled his eyes again. “Geez. It’s a good thing you’ve got me looking out for you.”

“Yeah it is,” Jim readily agreed.

Steven’s blue eyes widened in astonishment. “You’re admitting it?”

Jim shrugged. “Why not. It’s your birthday after all.”

Steven narrowed his eyes suspiciously. “What are you after?”

“Nothing,” Jim replied, sitting straighter in his chair now that he was feeling better. “Can’t I show my appreciation for my brother on his birthday?”

“And?” Steven prompted, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

“And nothing. You’re my brother and I love you.”

Steven felt his eyes fill with tears. “Y…you do?”

Jim smiled at him. “Yeah. Just don’t let it go to your head.”

Steven returned the smile, blinking away tears. “Okay,” he said happily. “That’s way better than the X-Box game you gave me. Thanks Jim.” He turned to his father. “Can we have ice cream now? Ice cream would make this the best birthday yet.”

William blinked away his own tears. He’d known that his sons were close, not until tonight had he realized exactly how close. He reached over and gently tucked his son’s hair behind his ear. He had the best sons in the world, Blair included. “You can have whatever you want, Son.”

***

CUDDLES

Once they’d gotten back from the restaurant Jim had carried Blair up to the bedroom and was now cuddling with him on the bed. Happily listening to the gentle beating of his little Guide’s heart, allowing it to soothe his frayed nerves. Zoning hurt, it really hurt in a way that was hard to explain to someone who wasn’t a Sentinel. It was as if every sense he had, be it hearing, sight, scent, touch, sparked, sending a flash fire of pain through his nerves overloading them, then there was nothing. Nothing until a tiny touch across the bridge of his nose brought him back to look shakily into the worried blue eyes of his little Guide.

Jim purred contently as he listened to Blair’s heartbeat, rubbing his head against the soft flannel cloth of Blair’s shirt. Feeling tiny, gentle hands stroking his hair. His little Guide was releasing scent, slowly and steadily. Healing the part of him that had been hurt by the zone.

He knew that zones were dangerous. Could in fact be deadly if a Sentinel stayed in one to long. Simon had told him as much, but all he knew was that he didn’t like it. Not one little bit. But he sure did like the cuddling he did with Blair afterwards.

He looked up at Blair, careful not to dislodge the gentle hands still stroking his hair. “I love you,
Blair.


Jim sighed. “Will you always love me, Blair?” He asked, laying his head back down on Blair’s chest, right over his heart.

“For always.” Blair answered softly. It was all Jim heard, lured into sleep by the gentle beating of his little Guide’s heart and the scent that was visible prove of Blair’s love for him

***

WHO HIDES, WHO SEEKS

Steven walked into the living room carrying a plate with a huge sandwich Sally was nice enough to make for him. It was Sunday the day after his birthday and all was right with his world. He plopped down on the couch next to Jim. Who was sitting on the couch arms crossed staring at the TV.

“What’cha watchin’?”

“Don’t know.” Came the short answer.

“Oh. Where’s Blair?”

“Playing hide and seek with Rafe.”

“Oh.” Steven looked at the TV screen. “Cartoons?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

Before he could take a bite of his sandwich, he turned startled eyes toward Jim. “Are you growling?”

Jim turned to glare at him. “And what if I am? Wanna make something out of it?”

“No,” he replied, handing Jim half of his sandwich. Taking a bite of his own. “You could try tracking him you know?” he said.

“And if I don’t want to?” Jim asked taking a vicious bite of the sandwich, making Steven wince.

“He’s your Guide,” He told him softly.

Jim sighed unhappily. “I know.”

“Then what’cha worried about?”

“I don’t know.”

“Are you jealous of Rafe?”

Jim nibbled on his sandwich thoughtfully. “Maybe. Would that be wrong?” he asked looking at his brother, blue eyes dark with worry.

“Not really. At least that’s my uneducated thought.”

“I don’t know what I feel. Blair’s mine, right?”

“Yup.”
“No one else can take him from me?”

“That’s what I’ve heard and read,” Steven reassured him.

“Then why do I feel so funny every time Rafe gets near Blair?”

“Don’t know. Don’t worry about it so much.”

Jim sighed. “I can’t help it. It’s getting to where I don’t like Rafe much anymore. Especially when he’s near Blair, but I can’t keep him from him. They’re friends.”

“Yeah, that would be bad. Whatcha going to do?”

“I don’t know. Got any suggestions?” Jim asked hopefully.

“Well, keep letting them be friends, but for now, how about trying to track Blair?”

“I couldn’t do it last time. He blocked me, remember?”

“Yeah, but now you have a secret weapon,” Steven said smiling.

Jim perked up at that. “Yeah, what?”

“What did you do with Blair’s hair from his haircut?”

“It’s in the nightstand between our beds.”

Steven’s smile grew. “Go get it. Let’s see if we can get you to track Blair with it.”

Jim returned the smile as he hurriedly got up from the couch, he ran upstairs coming back a few minutes later with a tiny box held carefully in his hands. He handed it to Steven. “Now what?”

“Okay, first can you sense Blair?”

Jim frowned as he concentrated. “Nope,” He said, shaking his head.

“Nope. Just Rafe trying to find him in the back yard. Dad in his office, typing away at his laptop. Sally making cookies-hmm smells really good-chocolate chip cookies. And Simon in his office going through a pile of papers six inches high mumbling about over-protective fathers and their ideas of normal life. What’s that suppose to mean and does he mean our Dad?”

“Yeah he means our Dad, but don’t worry about that now,” Steven told him, opening the box carefully. “Okay, I want you to focus your senses on the hair. Concentrate on it. Sort of like it was a string leading you to Blair. Follow it.”

“What if I can’t?”

“Try, dumbass. How are you going to know you can’t, if you don’t even try.”

Jim frowned at Steven, but did as he was told. Concentrating with everything in him to find something, anything that would lead him to his little Guide. Suddenly there was something. There. Just out of reach. He grasped at it time and time again only to have it slip out of his hands and move away from him.
“I can’t. There’s something there, but I can’t reach it,” Jim said in frustration.

“Try again. Concentrate. You can do it.”

“Okay.”

Jim watched the string or whatever it was and just as it started to moved away he jumped on it, grabbing hard he pulled it towards him. Suddenly he found he could sense Blair. He knew where he was. He could feel his little Guide. He could feel him. Jim opened his eyes to look at an expectant Steven.

“I can sense him. I know where he is,” Jim said happily. “Oh, God, Steven I know where he is. Where he’s hiding.”


Jim furrowed his brow as he thought about it. “Naw. I know where he is and that I can find him no matter where he hides so I feel better. And besides where he’s hidden himself Rafe will never find him. It’s a great hiding place,” Jim said admiringly.

“Where is he hiding?”

“The cubby under the stairs.”

“Cool. I never would have thought to look for him there,” Steven replied, smiling at Jim.

“Yeah, me neither. He’s coloring in his coloring book right now as he waits for Rafe.” Jim took the box filled with tuffs of Blair’s hair and carefully placed the cover back on it. “Thanks, Steven. I feel lots better now.”

“Yeah, well don’t sweat the small stuff and for the bigger stuff I’m here and I’ll help you with whatever you need.”

“I know and I am grateful,” Jim told him smiling. A smile that lit up Jim’s whole face now that he knew he’d be able to find Blair no matter what and he had Steven to thank for that.

“Yeah, well don’t let it go to you head.” Steven told him, punching him hard in the arm.

“Okay.” Jim said, rubbing his arm. “Wanna watch Rafe try and find Blair?” He asked, his smile turning mischievous.

“Yeah, but you make the popcorn.”

Jim stood up. “Alright. Do you want a soda?”

“Yeah. Dr. Pepper, please.”

“Okay.”

While Jim was gone Simon walked into the living room caring a big stack of paper. “Is that the stuff people have been sending in to bribe Jim and Blair?” Steven asked curiously.

“Yes. Want to have a look?”

“Yeah. Has Dad had a look at it yet?”
Simon handed the bulging folder to Steven. “Yes, but he’s not interested in any of it.”

“Hmm. Jim will be right back and we’ll go through it see if any thing perks his interest.”

“Okay.” Simon looked around the room. “Hey, where’s Blair?”

“Playing hide and seek with Rafe.”

“And Jim’s not having a major cow over it?”

“Well he was, but we figure away around that,” Steven told him smiling.

Simon sat down. “How’s that?”

“Jim brought down his little box with Blair’s hair in it and I had him use it to track his little Guide with it.”

“And it worked?”

“Hell, yeah. Make Jim real happy too,” Steven told him, chuckling. “Now Jim’s making popcorn so we can watch Rafe try and find Blair. Wanna watch. Should be good for a laugh or two ‘cause Rafe’s never going to find him.”

Simon laughed. “Yeah. Sounds like fun. And how do you know Rafe’s never going to find Blair?”

Steven looked at Simon blue eyes twinkling. “Cause we never would have thought of looking for him there.”

“Oh. Guess that makes sense.”

“Yeah. Hey, wanna soda to go with the popcorn?”

“Sure. A Dr. Pepper.”

“Hey, Jim,” Steven yelled, deafening Simon. “Simon’s gonna watch with us. Bring him a Dr Pepper, too.”

“Okay.” Came the muffled shout back.

Simon looked at the youngest Ellison, rubbing his ringing ears. “He’s a Sentinel. You could have whispered and he would have heard you. I’m deaf now,” He said chidingly.

Steven gave him a sheepish grin. “Oops, forgot about that. Sorry.”

All three watched as Rafe tried furtively to find the hiding little Guide. Sharing popcorn and soda as they looked through the folder Simon had provided at the same time.

“No luck, Rafe?” Steven asked the fifth time Rafe came into the living room.

“No. The little turd sure hides good,” Rafe replied, taking a drink of soda from Steven’s glass.

Dark eyes stared at the unconcerned young Sentinel as Jim munched on popcorn. “You know where he is don’t you?” Rafe accused.

Jim nodded, tossing more popcorn into his mouth. “Yup.”

“Care to share the location?”
“Nope.”

“Why?”

Jim gave Rafe a tight smile. “Because Blair’s not playing hide and seek with me.”

“Oh.”

“Yup.”

Rafe sat down on the loveseat. “Is he alright?”

“Yup. He fell asleep about twenty minutes ago. Want some popcorn?”

“Thank,” Rafe replied reaching into the bowl. “I hate you. You do know that right?”

“Hmm.” Came the unconcerned reply.

“Okay then. Just so you know. What are you guys looking at?”

“Bribes Jim’s getting ‘cause he’s a Sentinel,” Steven replied.

“Cool. Are there any good ones?”

“Yup. Hey Jim do you want a laser red Mustang?” Steven asked, looking at a pamphlet.

“Hmm, I guess I would, if I could drive.”

“Yeah, that could be a bit of a problem,” Steven chuckled.

“Yeah.”

“Wow. There’s offers of full college scholarships with room and board for both you and Blair in here,” Rafe said in awe as he looked over some of the pamphlets.

“Yeah, there is,” Jim replied. “But it’s in places I really don’t want to live. Like Alaska. Not that there’s anything wrong with Alaska, but have you ever tried to surf in Alaska?” Everyone in the room shivered. “See.”

Steven looked at Jim. “Hey, what do you care about surfing anyway? You don’t surf.”

Jim returned the look hauntingly. “Dad, promised me surfing lessons for my next birthday so there,” He replied, sticking his tongue out at his brother.

Steven laughed. “Oh and how old are you going to be, two?”

Jim tilted his head sideways as if listening for something. “Good he’s still asleep. Screw you, Steven,” He said succulently.

Steven gasped. “Oh, I am so going to tell on you.”

“Oh, and who’s Blair going to believe, you or me?” Jim told him. “I am after all his Sentinel.”

“He might not believe me, but I’ve got witnesses. Huh, Simon? Huh, Rafe?”

“Don’t involve me. This isn’t my fight,” The Doctor told Steven, smiling.
“Oh. Hmm, you’ll back me up won’t you Rafe?”

“Sure.”

“Snitch,” Jim hissed at Rafe, earning a big grin from his friend.

“You better believe it. Think of it as payback for not telling me where Blair is.”

“Hey look at this,” Steven said breaking into Jim and Rafe’s conversation before it could get ugly and it could considering the way Jim was starting to feel about Rafe. “The state of Nevada is offering you a free trip to Las Vegas. No strings attached. Just so you can see their beautiful state and might choose to live there. Their words, not mine.”

“Yeah?” Jim asked, slightly interested despite himself, still glaring at Rafe, who glared back.

“Yeah, you can take as many people as you want. Stay wherever you want for one week. Even the cost of food is thrown in.” Steven gave Jim an awed looked. “Wow! They really want you.”

Jim shrugged. “I guess. But what if I don’t want to move to Neveda when I’m older and besides none of us can gamble. Well, except for Dad, Sally and Simon.”

“You deweeb, didn’t you read the pamphlet? There’s a lot of other things to do in Las Vegas besides gamble.”

“Don’t call me names. Like what?”

Well, let’s see here,” Steven said looking over the pamphlet. “Caesar’s has The Fall of Atlantis. The Luxor has a display of the kid king, hmm Tutankhamen and lots of other old dusty history stuff. The Hilton’s got the Star Trek Experience. There’s all kinds of things to see and do,” Steven added looking at his brother hopefully.

Jim smiled at him. “You really want to go?”

“Yeah. We got spring break coming up soon and this sure beats staying home not doing anything.”

“I don’t know. Wouldn’t that be kind of like taking advantage? Blair and I may not even decide to go to Nevada. What if I want to stay here in Cascade and be a cop like I’ve always wanted to?” Jim asked, looking over at Simon who was quietly listening.

“It doesn’t hurt to leave all your choices open, Jim. You’re still very young. You’ve got many years ahead to decide what it is you want to do with your life. Look through the offers you’re receiving and see if anything interests you. You’re not committing yourself, you’re just keeping your options open.”

Jim sighed biting his lip thoughtfully. “That’s true.” He turned to Steven. “Do you think we can talk Dad into it?”

Steven gave him a huge grin. “Piece of cake. We’ll just use our secret weapon.”

“Blair?”

Steven nodded. “Blair. All he’s got to do is give Dad ‘the look’ and it’s a done deal. Is he still asleep, by the way?”

Jim tilted his head to the side, listening. “Yeah.”
“You know you’re not freaking cause he’s not within eye shot?”

“Yeah, I think you helping me figure out how to track him helped,” Jim told him thoughtfully.

“How did you come up with the idea?” Simon asked curiously.

Steven smiled at him. “Something you told me about the tufts of hair and what a Sentinel does with it. If Jim’s going to use it to keep from zoning when Blair’s not around there’s no reason he can’t use it track him down. It’s kinda like following the trail.”

“Ah. Guess that make’s sense.”

“Are you going to put that in your book?” Steven asked, grabbing a handful of popcorn.

“Hell, yeah,” Simon told him gleefully.

“Cool. I get to be in a Sentinel book and I’m not even a Sentinel.” He offered Jim the bowl of popcorn. “So who you gonna take to Las Vegas?”

Jim nibbled on a kernel. “Hmm, Blair, you, Dad, Sally. Can you get time off Simon and go with us?” Smiling at the nod the Doctor gave him.

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

“Cool. Hmm, wanna go to Las Vegas, Rafe?” Jim asked, forgetting he was annoyed with Rafe. Rafe forgetting he was annoyed with Jim as well. “Sure, sounds like fun.”

Jim nodded. “Cool. We can ask H and Carl if they wanna come, too. I think that should be about everyone.”

Simon chuckled. “This is going to cost the state of Nevada a pretty penny.”

Jim’s blue eyes widened . “Too much? Do you think it’s to much?”

Simon shook his head. “No Jim it’s not too much. Nevada won’t mind. They’re trying to woe the youngest and potentially most powerful Sentinel the planet has ever known. They’ll pay for your trip without even blinking their collective eyes.”

Jim smiled slightly at Simon. “Dad’s not going to like you talking that way. ‘Cause it might go to my head.”

“I doubt that,” Simon scoffed. “He’ll make sure of that.”

Jim, Steven and Rafe chuckled at that, knowing it to be true. Jim suddenly tilted his head. “Blair’s waking up. I better go get him before he starts to get scared. Steven, you get to tell Dad about this trip you want to take.”

“Chicken shit.”

“You betcha,” Jim told him as he rose up from the couch. “Blair’s waiting for me. See ya.”

***

CUDDLES TWO
Jim reached into the cubby to pick up his sleepy little Guide. “How you doin’, Baby?”

Blair rubbed his face sleepily against Jim’s chest. “I is good.”

Jim kissed the top of Blair’s curly head. “Good. Wanna go to our room and cuddle?”

“Yups, cuddles.”

Jim carried his little Guide up to their room carefully laying him on the bed before toeing off his shoes and climbing on top. He gathered Blair to him with a happy sigh.

“I love cuddling with you, Baby.”

“I like lots, too.”

The room was silent for a long moment before Blair moved out of Jim’s arms to climb on top of his Sentinel, straddling his chest. He peered down into Jim’s face.

“How you find?”

“How you find?” Jim asked dopily, already lost in Blair’s warmth and clean scent.

“How you find?” Blair asked again, getting right in Jim’s face.

“How you find?” Jim said with a weak smile.

Blair’s beautiful blue eyes narrowed. “Steven help Jim cheat?”

“How you find?” Blair asked sheepishly. “I love you, Blair,” He offered, hoping Blair wouldn’t get angry.

Blair tilted his head to the side looking at him cutely. “I luvs you, too, but not nice cheat.”

Jim smiled up at him. “I know, but you know what?”

“What?”

“I can play hide and seek with you now and not be afraid.”

Blair gave him a brilliant smile. “Really?” Showing Jim that Blair truly missed not being able to play his favorite game with his Sentinel.

“How you find?” Jim told him. “I didn’t want to play because I was afraid I’d lose you and wouldn’t be able to find you. Steven helped me find a way to track you when you block me. I don’t have to be afraid.”


“I know,” Jim sighed softly. “But I was still afraid.” He pulled Blair to him wrapping his arms around his little Guide. “But I’m not any more so I’ll play hide and seek with you whenever you want and I’ll only cheat when I have to. Deal?”

Blair smiled at him, kissing his nose. “Deal. Play now?”

“Later. Cuddle now?”

Blair nodded his curly head. “Cuddle now,” he replied settling himself contently on top of his Sentinel. Murmuring happily when Jim began purring, telling him in a way words could not that
everything in their world was good.
The Las Vegas Experience

“Wow! Look at that,” Steven said as he looked out the airplane window. “I think that’s the Luxor. That’s where we’ll be staying.”

“Pretty,” Blair replied, looking over from his seat between Jim and Steven.

“Sure is.”

They’d gotten their trip, but not in the way they had thought. William had smiled taking Blair into his arms after receiving ‘the look’ from his now youngest son. The adoption going through with no problem whatsoever.

“Is that what you really want to do for spring break?” He’d asked, both Jim and Steven had nodded eagerly. “And you Blair? Without coaxing from your brothers, do you want to go to Las Vegas?”

Blair smiled up at him winsomely. “Yups.”

William frowned as he thought about it, making his sons uncomfortable. “Dad?” Steven finally asked worriedly.

“I’m thinking about it.”

“It’s a free trip, Dad. The state of Nevada will pay for everything,” Jim said softly.

“That’s not the problem, Jim. If you want to go to Las Vegas I can take you and your friends without a problem. I rejected everything in the folder Simon gave you for a reason. There wasn’t anything in there that I can’t provide for any of you with no ulterior motive. Your college education has all ready been paid, for all three of you.” William looked at Jim. “I don’t want you getting caught in any of this, Son. I want you to make your life choices as normally as possible even if you are a Sentinel. Everything in that folder may seem the easy way to get ahead in life, but that’s not the case. They all want something from you and Blair. If not now, in the future. I won’t have it.”

Jim cleared his throat. “I hadn’t thought of that.”

“I know you didn’t, Son. You’re still very, very young.” He smiled at his two sons. “That's one of the things I'm here for. If there’s something that you need come to me. We will discuss it and see if it’s in your best interest. If it is, we will more forward on it.”

Two heads bend down. Steven was the first to look back up. “We’re sorry, Dad.”

William smiled at him. “Don’t be sorry, Son. I would appreciate it if you would come to me first when you get these ideas in your heads. That’s not to say that I don’t appreciate getting ‘The Look’ from Blair. No one could resist it, I must say,” He said, chuckling as he kissed Blair’s forehead.
Jim cleared his throat. “Do you want the folder?”

“Yes, I think it’s best. I plan on shredding it and everything it contains. Then have another talk with Simon. Now as to the trip you’d like to take. I haven’t had a vacation in some time, none of us have. Ask your friends and we will plan on it for spring break.”

Suddenly William was being hugged by his whooping sons. Blair squished happily in the middle.

***

Two week’s later they were touching down in what was suppose to be one of the world’s most exciting places. They waited until everyone had gotten off the plane to make their way into the airport.

Blair insisting on pulling his own little luggage on wheelie thing. Saying he was a ‘big boy’ and he could do it, while at the same time holding Jim’s hand tightly as he looked around him curiously.

Simon trailed in back, making sure they didn’t forget anyone or anything. It’d been an interesting experience sitting with Rafe and H. They hadn’t stopped talking since they’d left Cascade. He smiled at them as they followed the others, just slightly behind Sally. This was certainly going to be a hell of a vacation and Simon was looking forward to it as much as the boys.

Jim cringed when he heard the sounds of the slot machines. “Are you alright?” Steven asked him as they made their way out of the huge airport to where their father had a van waiting to take them to the hotel.

“I…it’s the sounds of the slot machines. I think it’ll be okay once I get use to it.”

“Do you need Blair?”

Jim looked down at his little Guide. “Yeah, I do.” Cringing again in pain as the sounds of the slot machines seemed to increase in volume.

Steven took Blair’s luggage. Thinking he looked stupid pulling a wheelie thing with Batman on it, but then who was he to complain, his had Spiderman plastered all over it.

Jim reached down to lift Blair into his arms feeling instantly better when his little Guide began releasing scent. Tiny, gentle hands gently caressed his face.

“How?” Blair asked softly.

Jim sighed. “Not anymore. Thank you, Blair.”

His little Guide gave him a huge smile. “You welcome.”

Jim chuckled softly. “My polite little Guide. I love you, Blair,” He said, kissing him on the nose.

“I luvs you, too. Berry much.”

Jim hugged Blair’s slight, little body. “Hmm, I’m glad.”

“Better?” H asked, not really liking the way Jim had paled when they’d gotten off the airplane.

“Yeah, Blair helped me.”

“Good. This place is huge. I’m so glad my parents let me come.” H smiled at Jim happily. “They
gave me money to pay for my food and spending money in case I saw something I wanted to buy.”

“Dad won’t let you pay for food. Just save it for spending money.”

“You have got to have the coolest Dad on the planet.”

“Yeah, I do,” Jim replied, sending his Dad a huge grin. William turned from loading the van with their luggage, caught it. He smiled back. “What’s the smile for?” he asked softly.

“H just said that I have the coolest Dad on the planet and I happen to agree.”

“Why, thank you, very much kind, sir. I just happen to think I’ve got the coolest sons on the planet as well.”

Steven handed his Dad-Blair’s suitcase. “Well, at least one of us is.”

Both Steven and Jim looked at each other. “Blair,” They said at the same time, breaking out in laughter.

Blair looked from one to the other. “Yups, I is the coolest.” He replied sagely, nodding his curly head in agreement. Making everyone with in earshot laugh.

“You sure are, Baby,” Jim told him as they got into the van.

Unloading at the hotel took no time at all with the help of the hotel personnel. Everyone in their group looked around the hotel in awe. They’d never seen anything like it in their life. If Blair’s eyes could have gotten any bigger they would have.

The boys were itching to go exploring, but William had told them they needed to talk over a few things first. So they met in the room William and Simon would be sharing.

They’d been paired up to a buddy for room sharing, Carl much to his disappointment couldn’t go on the trip, being made to visit his grandmother in Los Angeles over the break. Rafe and H got to share one room, Steven and Jim and Blair another since the young Sentinel/Guide pair hadn’t slept separately since they’d bonded. Sally got a room all to herself being the only girl in the group and William and Simon taking up the last room.

William sat on the couch eyeing the boys watching him expectantly. “Okay, men here are the rules for this trip to Las Vegas. You do not wander off by yourself. Always, but always have a buddy with you. No exceptions to the rule, if I find out that you have broken this rule, I will chase you down and kick your buns all the way back to Cascade. If you want to leave the hotel to explore the strip, an adult must accompany you. Also no exceptions.” William reached into his briefcase and pulled out five cell phones. “These have been programmed to reach Sally, Simon or me. Just press one, two or three and you will reach one of us if you need to,” He said, passing them out to the boys, even Blair got one, even though chances were he’d never be out of Jim’s sight, but still you could never be too careful. “We'll be using the phones to call you in to lunch or dinner If you are in the hotel exploring call in every hour, also no exceptions.” William reached into the briefcase once again, this time pulling out watches. He handed them out as well. “This may seem excessive, but I want you all to be safe. Here are the keys to your rooms. I’m trusting you to behave like gentlemen and not tear the rooms apart. This is suppose to be a fun time for all and it would not be fun for me if I have to pay to have the rooms repaired because you decided to become rambunctious.” He smiled at the quietly listening youngsters. “Are there any questions, men?”

“No, Sir,” They all replied at the same time.
William smiled at them. “Okay, check out your rooms to see if they meet your expectations. Then go forth and have a good time. If you need anything let us know.”

“They sure are a bunch of happy campers aren’t they?” Simon asked, watching Steven shove Rafe out of the way as they tried to get out of the door at the same time. Jim and Blair standing to one side as the young Sentinel helped his little Guide with his watch.

“Yeah, William replied. “They sure are.” He looked up at the Doctor. “I hope you don’t mind sharing a room with me?”

“ It’s fine. This is one fine room, Will,” Simon replied, eyeing the elegantly appointed living room and then over into the bedroom containing two huge beds.

William smiled. “Yes, well, we don’t get a chance to get away to often, so I thought I do it up right.” Simon whistled. “You sure did.”

William turned to Sally handing over her room key. “What are you going to do first, Sally?”

“I thought I’d look around the hotel, see all it has to offer. It’s huge. We may not need to leave the Luxor the whole time we’re here.”

“That’s true. But Jim will be asking for someone to go with them to the sites he’s scoped out.” Simon chuckled. “He sure did his research, didn’t he?”

“Yes. That paper he’s got his itinerary on must have about fifteen things written on it. He’s going to run us ragged.”

“Did you hear Steven? He called Jim anal retentive because he made a list of things he wanted to see while we’re here,” Simon said, remembering the comment had earned Steven a hard punch to the arm.

William smiled. “Yeah.” He frowned. “Do you think Jim will be alright? There’s a lot of people here. I hope he doesn’t have too much trouble with his senses.”

“I hope not, too. But Blair will take care of it, if there’s a problem,” Simon answered. “But this is going to definitely be another learning experience for all of us.”

“That’s for sure,” William said thoughtfully as he looked at the door the boys had gone through.

***

“Come on, Blair the others are waiting for us,” Jim coaxed his unwilling little Guide.

“No. Scent first,” Blair replied, crossing his little arms stubbornly.

After Steven and Jim had ooh’d and awed over the room their Dad had gotten for them. As well as giving Rafe and H a chance to look at their own room. They’d gotten together in Steven, Jim and Blair’s room, now they all waited near the door to go exploring. Except for Jim and Blair.

“But Blair you did that at the airport. I don’t need it right now. Come on, let’s go explore.”

“No Scent. NOW,” Blair said, uncompromisingly.

Go on. We’ll catch up to you later.”

“Okay. Don’t take to long,” Steven told him as he reached for the door handle.

Jim turned to Blair once the door closed. “Okay, Baby. I’m all yours.”

Blair offered his arms to Jim. “I knows,” He told him, with a shy, little smile.

Jim picked him up. “I know you do and you’ve got me wrapped so tight around your little fingers I don’t know which way is up sometimes.”

Blair caressed the side of Jim’s face earning a soft moan from Jim. “I knows dat too,” He said, tilting his head to one side in offer, releasing scent.

Jim keened softly, burying his head against the side of Blair’s neck. “I love when you do that,” He told him softly.

Blair began releasing the bonding scent as well making Jim keen louder, arms wrapping tightly around his little Guide, pulling him as close as he could.

He’d never get use to this, never. He’d always wanted this from his little Guide, even if he was a little reluctant at first.

After a long moment he pulled away. “That was really good, Baby. Thank-you,” he said, shakily.

Tiny, hands caressed his face. Jim moved into it with a contented sigh. “I glad. Know you no want, but I take care my Sentinell, always.”

“For my own good?” Jim asked chuckling softly, kissing Blair’s nose.

“Yups,” Blair replied, kissing Jim back. “Own good. No want get sick.”

“I love you, Baby.”

“I knows. I luv, too. Berry, berry much.”

“Hmm, wanna catch up with the guys now?”

“Yups.”

***

Jim had no trouble finding the others, even with all the people in the hotel. Using his heightened sense of smell he quickly tracked them down near a museum entrance.

“It costs five buck,” H was telling them. “don’t you think that’s too much for a dusty, old museum?”

“Might be, but let’s have a look anyway,” Rafe told them. “You heathens could use a little culture, God knows.”

Steven shoved him. “Oh, shut up, twit.”

“Ow! Hey, Jim, Blair. Wanna go into a museum for that kid King? We were just trying decide if we wanted to go in.”

Jim shrugged. “Sure why not.”
It turned out to be a good choice as they watched Blair becoming more and more captivated by the whole Egyptian thing. Listening enthralled to the movie explaining the excavation of Tutankhamen’s burial site. Jim was growing bored, forced to listen since Blair was once again sitting in his lap. But he held still, it was the least he could do for his little Guide.

He helped the attendant carefully place the head phone over Blair’s ears as they walked through the museum. He was bored stiff by the time they made it to the first window that had depictions of how things were way, way back for the kid King. He was having more fun watching his little Guide.

Blair’s eyes had a look in them Jim had never seen before as they walked through the museum. Still in Jim’s arms as they walked around, he’d place his tiny hands on the windows and stared at everything in the room in fascination. Now and then looking up at Jim to make sure his Sentinel was sharing his enjoyment.

Jim would smile at him, earning a returning grin before Blair went back to his inspection of the old stuff.

“Blair sure likes it in here?” Steven told him as he came back to stand next to them.

“Yeah. He doesn’t even look at his reading books the way he’s looking at all this old, dusty stuff.”

Steven chuckled. “Yeah, you’d think that for a hotel this size and this fancy, they’d find someone to come and dust.”

“Shush, no can here,” Blair chided them, blue eyes dark with annoyance. Before turning back to his inspection of what the earphones told them was a depiction of the kid King’s bed.”

“Sorry.” Steven apologized, even though Blair was already listening intently to the narrator. “Hey, Jim I think we may have come across what Blair might be doing when he’s older,” He whispered softly, not wanting to raise Blair ire once again.


“He’s going to want to study really, old dusty things.”

Jim chuckled. “You may be right.”

Blair was reluctant to leave the museum, the only way they got him to go was to promise him that they would bring him back again later.

Once they were done with the tour, the museum dumped them into a store filled with Egyptian things for sale. They spent a good hour looking through everything. Blair coming away with a coloring book, a bear dressed in an Egyptian outfit called Tiny Tut and a book on Egypt. All bought and paid for with his very own allowance he’d earned for changing the kitty box.

He took his job as kitty litter changer very seriously as well as making sure the kittens had water and lots of kibbles to eat. When they’d taken the kittens to Mrs. Deans who’d agreed to look after them while they were away, Blair had handed her the care instructions written in his very, own hand writing.

Mrs. Deans not in the least bit surprised that Blair was writing clear, concise sentences at three. No one that came into Blair’s orbit was surprised by anything the little Guide did any more. Simply enjoying it for the gift it truly was. She’d taken the list with all the seriousness it was do, telling Blair she would take good care of his kittens.
Back in William and Simon’s hotel room the eldest Ellison offered the Doctor a drink from the wet bar. “Can we talk about something that has been bothering me?” he asked the Doctor.

“Sure,” Simon replied, taking a sip of his soda. It really wasn’t a good idea to drink liquor when you were helping take care of five youngsters all under the age of eleven. He wanted to have his faculties fully functioning, especially if two of said youngsters were a Sentinel/Guide pairing. Sally had already left to explore the hotel and to check on the boys so for now it was just William and Simon. “What do you need to talk about? You’re not still mad about the folder? I did help you shred the offers.”

William waved his hand dismissively as he sat down. Placing his own glass of soda on the coffee table.

“No that’s been long forgotten. Jim is eleven now.”

“Yup.”

“Hormones will be kicking in anytime now.”

“Yup.”

“The age difference is quite extensive.”

“Yup.”

William sighed. “You’re not making this easy.”

Simon smiled. “Nope.”

“Is it because I got mad about the folder incident?”

“Maybe.”

“Oh,” William replied, clearing his throat uncomfortably.

“Okay, what’s the question?” Simon said, deciding to take pity on him.

“Because of the age difference. What happens to Jim when he’s starts going through changes and needing physical intimacy? Blair is way too young to even consider it.”

Simon took a drink of his soda. “Yes he is. And Jim is already going through changes. He’s starting to get peach fuzz on his face. Coming online so young may have set it off early.”

“I’ve already talked to him about sex. He knows what's going to happen, but I don’t think he’s ready for the fact that he’s a Sentinel about to go hormonal. What can we expect? Will he seek someone to help him with his urges when they get to be too much for him? He is after all a healthy male. What’s going to happen?” William looked at Simon worry deep in his blue eyes.

“I can’t say for sure what’s going to happen. Both Jim and Blair have rewritten the book, like I’ve said before. I can honestly say though that Jim will NOT look for physical relief with someone else. The bond that is growing and strengthening between Blair and Jim won’t allow for it,” Simon smiled taking a sip of his soda. “not to mention his little Guide will kick his ass if he tries,” He added.

“He’ll go completely crazy by the time Blair is ready to become physically intimate.”
“I don’t think Blair will allow that to happen.” Simon replied, smiling slightly.

“What do you mean?”

“Blair will take care of his Sentinell.”

“I won’t allow my youngest son to be hurt.” William said, softly. Blue eyes darkening in worry.

“He won’t be. Blair has defenses. Remember what he did to Alex?”

“Yes, but that’s hardly the same.”

“No, it’s not. Blair is one of the most talented Guides I’ve ever come across even at three. You will have to trust in that talent and in the fact that your son will cut off his own arm before he hurts or lets his little Guide be hurt.”

“I know, but I still worry.”

“Don’t worry so much. Blair has it all under control.”

“How can you be so sure? Blair is still a baby.”

Simon gave William a brilliant smile. “I can, because it's Blair. He may only be three but he’s a very, very old three. With the biggest, most giving heart I’ve ever seen and he knows instinctively what is in the best interest of his Sentinel. Not to mention that Blair and Jim already share a deep intimacy that very few of us will ever know. It may be enough.”

William sighed softly. “I hope your right.”

***

Blair now sat in his Sentinel’s lap sharing, a soda and French fries. Bags from the museum store scattered all around their feet.

“Who would have thought a hotel as fancy as this would have a McDonald’s in it?” Steven said, munching on a fry.

“Yeah, huh,” H replied, stealing a fry from Rafe’s box.

“Hey,” Rafe complained half-heartedly. “Should we be snacking right now? Your Dad is going to be calling us in for dinner soon,” He asked Steven.

Steven smiled at him. “This is only an appetizer. We’ll have plenty of room for dinner.”

Jim held the cup for Blair to drink, holding the straw steady. “Especially if you’re Steven.”

Steven stuck his nose up in the air. “I happen to have a good appetite and I’m a growing boy, I’ll have you know.”

“Yeah, but in which direction?” Jim asked wirily, offering Blair another fry. Watching as his little Guide drew little circles in the ketchup before placing it in his mouth.

Steven was saved from responding by the beeping of a phone. All of them scrambling for their cells before they realized it was Jim’s.

“Hello. Hi, Dad. Everything’s going great. Blair loved the museum on that kid king.”
“Pharaoh,” Blair told him quietly.

“Hold on Dad. What Blair?”

“He Pharaoh. Not King,” Blair said, nibbling delicately on a fry.

“Oh.” Jim smiled at him. “Blair said he was Pharaoh. Yeah, he really liked it. I’m going to take him through it again later. Okay, we’ll be right up.” Jim closed his phone. “Dad wants us to go up for dinner. We’re going to order room service.”

They came across Sally as they made their way to the elevators. She’d decided to play the slot machines. Being to young to be allowed into the actual casino and they didn’t want Sally getting in trouble they watched at a safe distance.

“Hey, look Sally won,” Steven said happily. “Hey, Sally how much did you win?”

“Two hundred and fifty,” She told them smiling.

“Cool,” Steven replied.

Sally gathered all her coins into one of the buckets provide. “Yes, it is. I wasn’t having much luck until my boys came by. That was the last quarter I was going to use before going up for dinner. Did your Dad call you?” She asked Jim.

“Yup. We were just heading up.”

“I’ll go up with you.”

Sally almost fainted at the prices of the food. William had to reassure her that it was alright before she would order anything.

“So Blair are you having fun?” William asked his youngest son.


“That’s good. Did you learn anything?”

Blair nodded again. “Yups. Learn lots,” He replied, as he took a bite of the hamburger he was sharing with Jim. He smiled up at his Sentinel from his usual perch. “Take back ‘gain, huh, Jim?”

Jim handed Blair a carrot stick. “You betcha,” He said, returning the smile.

Steven took a bite of his sandwich. “What are we going to do after dinner?” he asked his mouth full.

Jim cringed. “That is just so gross.”

Steven smiled at him as he swallowed. “Yeah, huh? So bring out your list.”

Jim reached into the pocket of his shirt, pulling out a very worn piece of paper. “Well let’s see. There’s the M & M store, Blair’ll like that. There’s The Fall of Atlantis—that’s suppose to be really cool. There’s the pirate fight at Treasure Island. Or the fountains at the Bellagio. There’s the Star Trek Experience at the Hilton. There’s lots to do.”

Simon chuckled. “Are we going to be able to fit all that in-in a week?”

“Sure we just have to be organized about it,” Jim answered, offering Blair a drink of milk.
“You are just so anal,” Steven said, rolling his eyes at his brother.

“There’s nothing wrong with being organized,” Jim replied defensively.

“Yeah, there’s a thing about being organized and then there’s the thing about being anal about it.”

“I’m not anal. Blair, tell Steven to quit telling me I’m anal.”

Blair looked at Steven, big, blue eyes narrowing, menacingly. “No pick on Jim. No call anal.”


Blair looked up at his Sentinel. “Jim?”

“Yeah, Baby?”

“What mean anal?”

***

They decide to watch the fountains at the Bellagio. Jim enjoyed the fountain’s waterworks immensely, but enjoying watching his little Guide more. Blair’s mouth was in formed into a little ‘o’ as he watched the fountains shooting water high into the air, moving his body to the beat of the music playing at the same time.

Jim held his little Guide tight against his chest, Blair’s feet braced against the wall that went all around the fountains. Every now and then Blair would look up at him to make sure his Sentinel was enjoying the water show.

Jim wasn’t about to zone on the water as lights flickered through it. Blair was to good a Guide for that. He was releasing scent minutely to make sure of it. It was enough to keep Jim steady, but not enough to cause him to lose himself in the scent he so loved.

Jim gently kissed the top of Blair’s head earning a happy smile from his little Guide. Suddenly Blair turned away from the fountains to give Jim a hug.

“Hmm, that’s nice,” Jim said, rubbing Blair's back. “but what it's for?”

“Just cause I luvs you,” Blair told him, kissing Jim’s nose happily. Suddenly Blair yawned hugely.

“Wow! I saw your toes there, Baby. Are you tired?”

Blair rubbed his face against Jim’s chest. “Yups.”

“Wanna go back to the hotel?” Blair looked back at the fountains. “We can come back here tomorrow if you want,” Jim promised him.

“Promise?”

“I promise,” Jim replied, pulling Blair up into his arms. “Let’s go. Dad, I’m taking Blair back to the hotel. He’s tired.”

William looked at his youngest son who started back at him sleepily. “Okay. Does anyone else want to go back with Jim and Blair?” he asked the others.

“I will,” Sally said. “I’m kind of tired, too.”
They made their way carefully through the huge crowds of people walking up and down the strip. Finally taking the monorail from the Excalibur back to the Luxor. By the time they made it back to the hotel Jim felt as exhausted as Blair looked.

“Wow. It felt like we must have walked ten miles,” Jim said as they walked Sally to her door.

Sally smiled tiredly at him. “Sure does. I need to pick my feet up. They really hurt right now,” She replied as she inserted the card key into the lock. Watching it go from red to green she pushed it open. “I'll see you boys in the morning,” She added, giving them both a kiss. “Sleep well.”

“We will.”

Jim turned toward their door as soon as Sally’s closed and he heard the lock turn.

“Oh, God, Baby, my feet hurt,” Jim told Blair as he inserted their key. Fortunately for them their room was next to Sally’s.

Once in the room he plopped down on the bed he’d chosen for the two of them. Holding tightly to Blair as his little Guide landed on top of him.

Blair murmured softly as he buried his face against Jim’s neck. “I’ll give you a bath later, rest for a little bit first,” Jim said, tightening his arms around his little Guide he closed his eyes.

Next thing Jim heard was Steven quietly entering the room. “What time is it?”

“Hmm, “Steven looked over at the clock between the two beds. “Eleven thirty.”

“Wow. I was more tired than I thought.”

Steven sat on the edge of Jim and Blair’s bed. “How are you holding up? Any problems with the Sentinel stuff?”

“I’m doing good. Every time Blair notices that the crowds getting to me he releases extra scent. It’s making a big difference,” Jim said, looking down affectionately at the little boy cuddled against his chest.

“Good. What do you want to do tomorrow?”

“Go to the Hilton-see the Star Trek Experience? I’ve really been looking forward to seeing it since I read about it on the internet. Especially since we’ve been watching Star Trek Deep Space Nine after school.”

“Sounds good to me. I heard someone say you can catch the monorail from the MGM and it’ll take you all the way to the Hilton so we don’t have to do that much walking.”

“Cool. I don’t think I’ve ever done so much walking in my life.”

Steven took off his shoes flinging them across the room. “I know what you mean. Hey, are you planning on sleeping in your jeans?”

“No. I was just so tired that I plopped down on the bed and fell asleep. Didn’t even give Blair a bath,” Jim replied, carefully maneuvering himself from under his little Guide so as not to wake him.

“Well, the bath can wait till morning. You could just change him out of his little jeans into his pajamas so he’s comfortable.”
“Yeah, I could. You don’t think that—that might wake him?”

Steven looked at his baby brother. “Heck no. He so tired I don’t think anything would wake him right now.”

Jim smiled. “Yeah, he is.”

“Need any help?”

Jim opened Blair’s suitcase. “Naw, I got it. So how do you think Blair’s going to react to seeing a Klingon?”

“Don’t know. But knowing Blair it isn’t going to be a normal reaction.”

Jim chuckled softly as he very carefully removed Blair’s shoes so he could replace the tiny jeans with Blair’s favorite wolf pajamas. “You’re probably right.” Blair didn’t move at all not even when Jim sat him up slightly exchanging his little Guide’s t-shirt for a pajama top.

Jim very carefully picked up Blair so he could move the bedcover. Ginning affectionately at his limp as a cooked noodle little Guide. Laying him down Jim covered Blair with the blankets.

“He’s out.”

Steven smiled. “He sure is. He sure had fun today. He loved the museum.”

Jim opened his suitcase. “Yeah, he did. He’s got a real fascination for old, dusty stuff.”

“Do you think he’s going to be someone like Indiana Jones when he grows up? Looking for buried treasure?”

Jim pulled out his pajamas. “Possibly. He’s smart enough. I’m going to go take a quick shower—watch Blair for me?”

“Sure thing,” Steven answered picking up the remote to the TV.

***

Morning found happy giggles and splashing coming from the bathroom. Jim carefully working Sentinel safe shampoo into Blair’s curly hair as his little Guide played with the soap.

“So, Baby, are you having fun in Las Vegas?” Jim asked, very carefully moving bubbles away from his little Guide forehead, not wanting any to fall in his eyes.

“Yups. Fun,” Blair replied.

“We’re going to the Star Trek Experience today. Maybe meet a Klingon, you know like on that show we watch in the afternoons.”

Clear, happy blue eyes looked up at Jim. “Cool.”

Jim smiled. “Yup. Cool.”

Blair suddenly frowned as he looked at the bar of soap and then at his Sentinel. “Jim?”

Jim carefully rinsed Blair’s hair. “Yeah, Baby?”
“Jim give Blair baff lots?”

“Yup. And?”

“Why Blair no give Jim baff?” Blair asked curiously.

Jim stopped shampooing his little Guide’s hair. “You want to give me a bath?”

Blair nodded. “Yup.”

“B…but I’m too old to need help with a bath,” Jim stuttered, turning a bright pink.

“I tree. I big boy. I get help wiff baffs.”

“Hmm, yeah, but you still need help even though your three. I don’t want you to get hurt in here. Everything is very slippery.” Suddenly inspiration hit Jim or so he thought. “It’s a Sentinel thing,” he said smartly.


*Oh Shit.* Blair got him good. Jim thought to himself. How the hell was he going to get out of this one? “Hmm, it is?”

“Yups.”

“Can I think about it?”

“Nope,” Blair told him, giving him a brilliant smile. “Blair give Jim baff.”

*Oh Shit.* Jim thought to himself again. There was no way he was getting out of it. If he didn’t do what Blair wanted his little Guide would make his life miserable. And Jim hated when Blair got mad at him, just hated it. It could possibly ruin the whole trip if he didn’t agree. It was after all only a bath. It didn’t matter that he was eleven and could give himself a bath. God, this was going to be embarrassing, especially since his body was going through changes and he was really self-conscious about it. He hoped none of the guys found out about this.

“O…okay, but can it wait until tonight? Dad’s waiting to take us to breakfast and we have a lot to do today,” Jim stalled.

Blair smiled at his Sentinel. Never for a minute doubting he wouldn’t get his way. He handed Jim the bar of soap. “Cool.”

"Cool," Jim replied, with a weak smile.

***

Simon got drafted into going to with them to the Las Vegas Hilton. Not that he minded one little bit. He loved watching the interplay between the boys. They had him chuckling the whole way over on the monorail.
Now they were all exploring the stores in the Promenade, part of the Star Trek Experience. Jim explained to his Dad they’d probably be at the Hilton most of the day. So they’d agreed to meet for lunch at Quark’s, the restaurant inside the Experience at 1:00, before the guys took to the Borg and Klingon Rides.

Jim watched his little Guide as he went to a bin picking up one of the many fuzzy balls in it. Chuckling when it started chirping, making Blair jump.

“It’s a tribble, Baby.”

“Tribble?” Blair asked, looking at it curiously.

“Yup.”

Blair gave him a huge smile. “I like,” He said, listening intently to the chirping.

“Are you going to buy it?” Jim asked, kneeling in front of his little Guide.


“You want me to carry it?”

“Yup.”

“But it’s your tribble. Why should I carry it?”

Blair gave Jim a sly look from those big, expressive eyes of his. “Because Jim luvs Blair,” He replied, running a loving finger over the bridge of his Sentinel’s nose.

Blair gave him a brilliant smile as he bounced off to go explore with Steven, leaving Jim chuckling softly.

“He’s really something else isn’t he?” Simon told him, laughing as he came up to Jim.

The young Sentinel looked at him, blue eyes twinkling happily. “Yeah, he is and I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

They’d been in the Promenade about an hour before one of the Klingons that roamed around the Experience made an appearance. Steven elbowed Jim to alert him to the fact.

Jim put down the Star Trek watch he’d been looking at. “Here we go. Be ready to go to him if it looks like he’s going to panic,” Jim told his brother.

They watched intently as Blair finally noticed the tall imposing figure. The little Guide put down the Star Fleet bears he’d been looking at. His big, blue eyes getting even bigger. Making Jim think he was going to have to save his little Guide. He need not have worried when Blair tilted his head to one side. “Hi,” he said shyly.

The Klingon looked down at the curly-headed boy looking up at him before going to his knees in front of him. “Hello, little man. What’s your name?”

“Blair.”

“Well, Blair, are you having fun?”

Blair nodded his head so fast it sent curls all over his face. “Yups. Lots.”

“That’s good.”

Blair reached out a tiny hand running it over the Klingon’s forehead. “Yups.” He said, softly. “Cool.”
The Klingon gave Blair a smile. “You think I’m cool?”

“Yups.”

“That’s good. Usually when little kids see me they run the other way unless they’re into Star Trek. Is he with you?” Jim got asked as he moved closer.

“Yes,” Jim told him, smiling.

Blair was still running his hands over the bumpy forehead of the Klingon. Later Jim would tell him it was a man in a costume. But not right now. No, not right now.

The Klingon smiled at him. “Would you like to take a picture with me?”

“Yes, sir.”

All of them got their picture taken with the abnormally, patient Klingon. Together and separately. When it came time for the Borg to make the rounds through the Promenade it was the only time Blair seemed to panic. Not quite sure what to make of it.

The Klingon had stayed with them, reaching down he picked up the pale, little boy. “Don’t worry. It’s not real.”

Blair hid his face against his neck. “No like. No like.”

“Don’t worry. You’re not alone. No one likes the Borg. So tell me Blair how old are you?”

“I tree,” Blair replied, softly, little arms tightening around the Klingon’s neck.

“You’re tree. Ooh, that’s old.”
Blair’s head popped up. “See,” He told his watching Sentinel smugly.

Jim smiled. “Yup, I see. You’re really, really old.”

The Klingon sighed regretfully. “Sorry little man, I’ve got to get back to work,” He told Blair handing him to Jim.

“Go work?”

A dark hand came up to gently pat Blair’s soft curls. “Yes, little man. Go work.”

“Oh,” Blair said sadly.

The Klingon smiled. “I’ll be around. Maybe I’ll see you again before you leave.”

Blair looked at Jim expectantly. “Maybe. We’re having lunch with Dad and Sally at Quarks, remember,” The Sentinel told his little Guide.

Blair smiled at the Klingon. “Maybes.”

“Okay. See you later, little man.”

They looked around the Promenade for a while before William and Sally showed up and they sat down for lunch. Blair sitting in Jim’s lap looking around every now and then for his new friend.

William noticed. “What’s Blair looking for?”

Jim smiled handing his little Guide an onion ring. “He made a new friend.”
H nodded. “The biggest, scariest dude you ever did see.”

“Really?” William asked looking at Simon, who agreed with H.

“Oh, yeah. He’s taller that me and looks to be ten times as mean.” William looked worried. Simon smiled at him. “We were watching the whole time. Your youngest son was perfectly safe.”

William sighed. “Good.” He gave the Doctor a sheepish look. “I’m a Dad and I worry.”

“Yeah, I know how that goes.”

William took a drink of his coffee. “Any luck with the visitation rights?”

“Yes, actually there is. Thanks to your lawyers. My ex-wife has agreed rather reluctantly to allow me to see my son on holidays and during summer break.”

“That’s great.”

“I hope you don’t mind having another Banks underfoot.”

William smiled at Simon. “Never. Your son is welcome to stay as long and as often as he likes. It’s your home too, Simon. Don’t forget that. Oh, my word. Is that the fellow, Blair’s new friend?”

Simon turned to see the Klingon coming out of the kitchen. “One and the same.”

“He is scary,” William said softly.

“Yup, he is.”

The Klingon spotted Blair right away. “Hello, little man. Did you have a good lunch?”
Blair smiled brilliantly at him. “Yups.” He replied, handing him an onion ring.

The Klingon took it. “Why thank you. Don’t mind if I do. Just don’t tell anyone I had an onion ring. They frown on that around here.”

“Would you like to join us?” William asked.

The Klingon looked over at the hopeful Blair. “Hmm, can’t. I’m suppose to mingle. I do thank you, though. Hey, little man, don’t look that way, I’ll be around.”

“Really? Be ‘round?”

“Why surely. I’ll see you again.”

Right after lunch, the boys took in the rides while William, Sally and Simon watched over Blair. He was too little or rather to short to get into the rides. They came out talking excitedly about them to find Blair sitting in the Klingon’s lap, playing with a tiny keychain of a Klingon.

“Hey, Blair, whatcha’ got there?” Jim asked as they came up to them.

“Keychain, Mr. Klingon give,” Blair replied, showing it to him.

“Cool.”

“Yups,” Blair, smiled up at his new friend. “Cool.”

The smile was returned. “I’m glad you liked it. Well, it was really nice talking to you folks, but now it’s time for me to go. My ship is waiting to take me home.”

Blair turned to give Mr. Klingon a warm hug, it was enthusiastically returned. “It was nice meeting you all. Especially you, little man. You’ve got my address?”
“Yups.” Blair said, nodding.

“You’ll write me?” Blair nodded again. “I’ve never met a three year old on any of the many planets I’ve visited that could write before. Good bye little man. Take care of him.” Mr. Klingon told Jim, giving the little Guide another hug.

“I will.”

With a smart salute Mr. Klingon was gone. They’d all forgotten to ask him his name. But he didn’t seem to mind being called Mr. Klingon.

William turned to the waiting group. “What do you want to do now?”

The day finished in a whirlwind of activity and active spending. They covered the M&M store, Blair loving it just like Jim had said. Followed by The Fall of Atlantis which Blair REALLY liked. Fascinated by the fire and drama of it all. They ended their day with a trip to the midway faire inside the Excalibur.

“Did you cheat?” Steven asked Jim softly as they strolled through the midway.

Jim turned to glare at him. “Why would I cheat?”

“Because Blair really liked this dragon.”

“That doesn’t mean I would cheat to get it for him.”

Steven smiled at him smugly. “Yes it does.”

Jim returned the smile sheepishly. “Yes it does,” He agreed softly. Suddenly he burst out in laughter. Steven turned to see what his brother found so funny. Blair was coming toward them wearing a court jester hat, holding H’s hand. Jim reached down to pick up his little Guide. “You look so cute,” He replied, kissing his nose. “Who won it for you?”
“Rafe,” Blair answered, turning his head to make the little bells on the hat jingle. Jim fought to keep himself from stiffening at the mention of Rafe’s name. He did it, but it had been a real struggle. After a moment all he said was. “Cool.”

Steven noticed, but made no comment instead bringing up the huge purple dragon Jim had won. “Look what Jim won for you, Blair.”

Blair smiled at Jim brilliantly. “For me?”

Jim kissed Blair’s nose again. “For you.”

“Tank you.” Suddenly Blair frowned. “No cheat?”

Jim bit his lip. “Hmm…” he hedged.

A tiny hand punched him on the shoulder. “No cheat?” he was asked again.

“Ow! Hmm, only a little bit. I love you, Blair,” Jim said, trying to distract his little Guide. Blair continued to frown at him. Jim smiled at him. “A lot.” He offered lamely. H returned from on his trip to one of his quick trips to a nearby booth. “Nice hat, H.” Jim told him.

“Yeah, huh?” H replied. Touching the Viking hat on top of his head. “Well, Blair shouldn’t be the only one with a cool hat.”

Jim smiled at him. “That’s true. Has anyone seen Sally or Dad?”

“Dad was watching Sally play those slot machines she likes so much,” Steven replied, touching one of the horns on H’s hat.

“Hands off the hat,” H told him moving away slightly.
“Sorry,” Steven said, still looking at the hat in fascination. “Where’s Simon and Rafe?”

They were going to the Excalibur store to look for a gift for Simon’s son,” H answered. “They said they’d be right back. Look buddy, keep the hands off the hat or I’ll be forced to hurt you,” H told Steven, who was touching the hat again.

“Alright, alright. Geez, some people get so touchy about their hats. I got to get me one of them before we head back.”

As they made their way back to the Luxor- Steven was indeed wearing a Viking hat just like H’s. Walking in a happy group they were talking excitedly about everything they’d seen and done.

“How the heck are we going to get Blair’s dragon home?” Steven asked struggling to carry it.

William smiled. “Hmm, we may have to get an airplane seat just for it. What did you name it, Blair?”

“Puff,” Blair answered, readily.

“Like from Puff the Magic Dragon?” Jim asked smiling down at his little Guide. He decided once again that he was ‘a big boy’ and could walk by himself. He looked so cute with his jester hat jingling away, carrying what he could of his collected treasures for the day.

Jim chuckled inwardly. Blair had quite a haul, too. It seemed everywhere they went people took one look at Blair and wanted to give him things. Candies, stuffed animals, you name it, they gave it to Blair. Everyone seemed to be touched by the magic that was Blair. Blair glowed with a happy, bouncy sort of innocence that was hard to resist. But then who’d want to. He thought to himself, kissing a pert, little nose.

***

Steven sighed happily as he flung himself on his bed. “Oh, man what a day. I’m one pooped fella.”

Jim helped Blair place all his treasures on the table. “Yeah, me, too. Is this one exciting place or what?”
Steven rolled over onto his stomach, watching Blair inspect his stuffed animals. “Yeah, it is. Blair did good.”

Jim smiled as he took off his shoes. “He sure did. Everywhere we went people wanted to give him things. Blair? Baby, do you want to take a nap before we go have dinner or do you want a bath?”

Jim cringed realizing what he’d just done. He bit back a cuss word that would get his nose bit for sure. Instead he bit his lip hard and waited.

Blair’s head popped up from where he was inspection the red M&M stuffed critter William had bought him. “Bath?”

“Hmm, yeah. You gotta be feeling all hot and sticky from all the running around we’ve done today. Do YOU want a bath?” Jim emphasized, hoping Blair would let the whole let’s give the Sentinel a bath go for now.

“Yup, bath,” Blair replied readily enough, taking off his shoes.

Jim smiled thinking that was a close one. He knew Blair hadn’t forgotten, he was just bidding his time before he was knee deep in Sentinel safe bubbles, but for now all was right with his world he thought to himself as he trailed his little Guide into the bathroom.

***

Steven opened the door to the room he shared with Jim and Steven with a tired sigh. Whew, it’d been quite a day. Dinner at the Flamingo had been great. He didn’t even remember who had recommended it. The food had been GREAT. Even if everything in the Flamingo was PINK. They stuffed themselves on buffet food until they couldn’t move. Then going into the Habitat so Blair could look at the penguins and the Koi swimming in the ponds. Steven smiled as he remembered the look Blair had given their Dad and Simon as he watched the fish swim around. After that they’d gone to Treasure Island and then back up the strip to see the fountains at the Bellagio.

Jim and Blair had come back to the hotel way before them. Blair had insisted. Steven had noticed that Jim had been reluctant for some odd reason, but had finally given in. Steven had put it off as it being a Sentinel/Guide thing Jim wasn’t to keen on doing.
Closing the door to the hotel room he spotted Blair rummaging through Jim’s stuff. “Whatcha’ doing baby brother?” he asked, curiously.

Blair pulled out a pair of socks. “Giving Jim baff,” He was told as Blair bounced back into the bathroom.

Steven trailed after the little Guide finding a sullen Jim deep into a bathtub full of bubbles. He bit back a smile and got a blue-eyed glare for his trouble.

“Tell anyone about this and you shall die a horrible, painful death.”

Steven shivered dramatically. “Ooh, I’m scared. How much you willing to pay me for my silence?”

The blue eyes glared intensified. “How about I let you live?”

Steven chuckled. “That’s a good enough reason. So are you having fun?” he asked as he sat on the closed toilet seat.

Jim looked over at Blair who was listening as he carefully worked shampoo into Jim’s brown hair. “Hmm, yeah?” he said, giving his little guide a tentatively smile.

“Yeah, well you look like you’re having fun.”

Jim shot him a look that plainly said.” Screw you.” Making Steven chuckle even more.

“So Blair-little brother, are you having fun giving Jim a bath?” Steven asked, ignoring the groan of misery coming from the bathtub.

Blair nodded his curly head, tiny hand still working the shampoo into Jim’s hair. “Yups, it’s a Guide thing,” He was told sagely.
Steven smiled as he watched Jim sink even deeper into the bathtub. “It is?”

“Well?”

“Cool,” Steven replied, biting his lip hard to keep from laughing. Well then I’ll leave you to it. Have fun.”

He left the bathroom breaking out in laughter unable to hold it back any more. Laughing harder when Jim promised to get even if it was the last thing he did.

***

LAST MINUTE THOUGHTS

Jim stared at himself in the mirror as he dried his face with a towel. It’d been a fun trip, but it was time to go home. They were heading back later today.

Blair had-had a great time. Making Jim take him back to the Tutankhamen museum over and over again. Jim thinking if they asked him about the kid King in school. Oops, Pharaoh, he’d ace it for sure.

Plus Blair’s Las Vegas haul would fill the trunk of a car. Actually it would, Sally’s brand new red Mustang to be exact. She’d won while playing one of the slot machines here in Las Vegas.

Jim smiled. He’d never see Sally so happy as when she’d told them all about it. Sally had done really well. Winning way more than she’d lost playing the slots. Gambling was something Jim saw very little use for, but then he was only eleven so what did he know.

Dad was having the car shipped to Cascade. Along with everything they didn’t want to take on the plane. At least they’d found a way to get Puff home.

Jim sighed as he looked at himself in the mirror. Touching the three straggly bits of hair on his chin. Blair was asleep on their bed. His poor little Guide was worn out in a really happy sort of way. So Jim thought he might as well use this time for a quick shower-ALONE.
His little Guide had insisted on giving him a bath everyday since they’d been here. Much to Steven’s amusement. Something Jim was going to have to make him pay for again and again and again, when they got home. It wasn’t so much that Jim minded. He really enjoyed having Blair take care of him. It’s just…well it was just that he wasn’t comfortable with it. Not with the changes he was going through.

Suddenly Jim felt an unfamiliar feeling as he dried himself with the towel. He couldn’t quite place it. He frowned into the mirror as he tried to figure out what it was. It was kind of like an ache, but it didn’t really hurt. It felt alright-actually.

That’s when his eyebrows shot up. He looked down. “Oh, Shit,” He exclaimed softly. This was not good, not good at all.
The Gift of Time

Jim sighed heavily as he looked at himself in the mirror. He didn’t seem any different, but he knew for a fact that he was indeed different. His father had told him all about the changes his body was going to go through. He wasn’t all that sure he was ready for it, not much to be done about it though. It was going to happen if he wanted it or not.

He looked down at his traitorous body. He could already see hair coming in. At his groin and underarms. He didn’t mind that so much as he minded the feelings that were starting to take over. Feelings that made his body feel weird. His father had said that that was normal. All boys went through that. He wasn’t a teenager yet so he really shouldn’t be going through it, but Simon had said he wasn’t exactly normal. None of the other guys were going through changes. He’d checked using his enhanced senses. He really shouldn’t have done that-right to privacy and all. But he couldn’t exactly go up to them and ask them. “Hey do you have hair coming in around your privates?” They’d kill him for sure.

Yet slowly ever so slowly he was going crazy. His body was needing things he was no way in hell going to give it. Not yet. There was a girl in school. Fifteen and very pretty. Long red hair and green eyes. Her name was Daisy. She kept looking at him in class and had started going over to him at lunch when Blair was busy being tested by Simon. A week ago she’s started rubbing herself against him like some sort of cat. He was picking up a scent from her that wasn’t too bad and it offered an answer to his problem. He wasn’t that stupid not to notice THAT. Well that and the fact she’d asked him to go with her behind the bleachers. But he didn’t want Daisy, pretty as she was. He didn’t want her.

Jim had decided he was going to wait for Blair. He might only be eleven, but he already knew that his little Guide was his heart and soul and he wasn’t about to give that up for some kind of physical relief that only last a few minutes.
But he couldn’t keep hiding from Blair that he was in pain. His little Guide was starting to look at him funny. He hadn’t questioned him about it yet. And if Blair did how the hell was he going to explain that he was going hormonal. There’s no way a three year old would understand something like that.

Jim rubbed his groin. Moaning at how sensitive it was. Damn. He could stay in the bathroom and take care of himself like he had been doing since that day in Las Vegas when he’d discovered why his body was acting weird.

Jim stared at himself in the mirror. Resolved to the fact that he was going to wait for Blair and share that part of himself just as they’d shared everything else. He didn’t care how much he hurt, he was going to wait. In the mean time…

Reaching over to the bathroom door he locked it.

While Jim was in the bathroom Blair, H and Rafe were sitting outside in the backyard waiting for him so they could go to the park. Carl was to meet them there after he finished his chores.

H and Rafe started talking about their new favorite subject-girls. The little Guide hearing a soft mewling went it search of it. Rafe and H didn’t notice that he was no longer sitting next to them.

Blair searched out the sound until he found Blackie in the big tree in the middle of the yard. The tiny, black kitten looked down at him and meowed even louder.

“No worry Blackie, I help,” he told the kitten as he began to climb.

Jim opened the back door finally ready to go to the park. He saw Rafe and H, but no little Guide. “Where’s Blair?” he asked, frowning.

Both Rafe and H looked around. “He was here a minute ago,” H replied.

Suddenly there was a yell and the sound of a body hitting the ground.

“Blair. Oh, my God, Blair,” Jim said in horror. “He’s fallen from the tree.” He ran to where his little
Guide lay on the ground, holding his left arm. He carefully touched Blair’s arm biting his lip hard when the little Guide flinched. “Oh, God, Blair.”

“Is he okay?” Rafe asked, fright widening his dark brown eyes.

Jim’s brows drew together, a red haze of anger covering him. “It’s broken. I left him here with you. I trusted you to take care of him.”

Rafe took a step back from the fire in the flashing blue eyes. “I…I didn’t know he wasn’t sitting with us.”

“You’re supposed to know. Especially when I trust you to take care of him. I TRUSTED YOU!” With that Jim launched himself at his stunned friend with intent to do serious injury. “I TRUSTED YOU WITH HIM. You fucking asshole. I’m going to kill you.”

H threw himself between the two. “No, Jim. DON’T.”

The furious Sentinel kept reaching for Rafe. “I’m going to kill you.”

Suddenly a deep voice boomed. “Sentinel stand down. NOW!”

Jim turned to see Simon coming hurriedly into the backyard. Before reaching for Rafe again, who took a several steps back.

“I SAID stand down, Sentinel,” Simon boomed again. “See to your Guide. NOW.”

Jim shook his head enough to clear the heavy haze as he turned toward Blair who was quietly crying.


“Hurts, Jim, hurts.”
“I know, Baby. I know.” Jim looked up at Simon who’d was now kneeling beside them. “His arm is broken.”

Simon sighed heavily. “Okay. Let’s get him to the hospital and get it taken care of.”

***

At the hospital the Sentinel was separated from his Guide when they took him up to x-ray. Then nurses refused to allow Jim to go with Blair. So he waited.

Prowling the waiting room like a caged panther. Moving back and forth, beside himself with worry.

“He’s going to be alright,” Simon told him softly as he watched the young Sentinel.

“It should never have happened.”

“Jim, come here and sit down.” Jim went to the chair Simon indicated. “You can’t enclose Blair in a plastic bubble to keep him away from anything that’s going to hurt him. Or guard him every minute of every day. This kind of stuff is going to happen. Unsettling as it is. It’s going to happen.”

Jim wiped at the tears coursing down his face impatiently. “I left for a few minutes. I thought H and Rafe would look after him for me. They didn’t.”

Simon sighed again. “Listen to me, Jim. You can’t blame Rafe and H for this. It was an accident.”

Angry blue eyes met Simon’s. “An accident that should never have happened. Wouldn’t have happened if they were looking out for him like I asked.”

Simon was stunned by the look in those startling blue eyes. They held a wealth of emotion. Most of it not good.
“There’s something else going on here. Wanna talk about it?”

Jim hopped back to his feet to begin his prowling all over again. “No.”

“Come on, Jim. I might be able to help.”

“No.”

Simon watched the young Sentinel as he worked his way around the room. Seeing grief, fear, tension in those very young shoulders. He decided to try again.

“Talk to me, Jim. Please.”

“I said no,” Jim said, viciously.

Simon was taken back by the venom in Jim’s voice. “Don’t take that tone with me, young man.” He responded quietly, trying to defuse what could grow to be a very bad scene.

Jim turned to him, his brows drawing together angrily. Simon had never seen him look or act this way, not the whole time he’s been living in the Ellison household. This was not the Jim he knew and loved.

“Leave me the fuck alone,” Jim hissed at him angrily.

“JIM!” William said, shocked by his son’s tone of voice. Coming into the waiting room trailed by Steven and Sally. “You will not talk to Simon that way. Apologize this minute.”

“No.”

“Jim, do as I say.”
Jim turned to glare at his father and with a growl of pure, frustrated rage rammed his left hand through one of the many glass panes that lined the nearly empty waiting room. Sending a spray of broken glass all over the room.

“Jim, what have you done?” William hurried to his son’s side carefully cradling Jim’s hand in his.

Simon quickly took charge, bustling the trembling Sentinel into one of the emergency rooms. After a few minutes the cut had stopped bleeding. “Well, you young man, are going to need stitches.” He looked up trying to meet the Sentinel’s eyes, Jim sullenly refused to. Simon shook his head sadly. He turned to the nurse waiting near by. “Get me a stitch kit, please. And could you please check and see if Blair is out of x-ray. He’s been gone a long time.”

He turned to William, Steven and Sally who where anxiously waiting in the room with them. “It’s going to take at quite a few stitches, but it didn’t cut through any nerves. So that’s good. I am surprised though that the pain didn’t send him into a zone.”

“I think you spoke to soon, Simon,” Steven said softly, going to stand near his very silent, very still brother.

“Shit,” Simon hissed. “Nurse, get Blair down here, stat. Jim’s zoned.” He met the very worried eyes of Jim’s father. “What the hell is going on here?”

“I…I wish I knew,” William replied as he gently pushed sweat-soaked hair off his pale son’s face. “He hasn’t been acting like Jim since we got back from Las Vegas. Some thing is very, very wrong.”

“Yeah, there has been. Steven has Jim talked to you about it at all?” Simon asked Steven. Who shook his head.

“No. He’s been really, really quiet. I’ve been trying to get him to talk to me but he won’t.”

Simon turned to Sally. Who shook her head as well. “Nothing. I have noticed that he’s not eating again. Could there be another Sentinel in Cascade like Alex?”

“No. I would have heard about it before now. Where the hell is that nurse with word on Blair?” Simon asked anxiously.
Just then the nurse came in carrying Blair who now sported a blue cast on his left arm. “The orthopedic Doctor was in x-ray, so he decided that it would be best to go ahead and cast Blair.” She smiled at the cute little boy in her arms. “He was very brave.”

Blair tilted his head to the side as he silently contemplated his Sentinel. “Down,” he demanded softly.

Steven saw what needed to be done, had a chair ready for Blair as soon as the little Guide got close enough, carefully placing him on it.

Blair ran his forefinger of his right hand down the bridge of Jim’s nose, like he’d done at the restaurant many months back. Bringing his Sentinel back from the zone with deceptive ease.


Blair tilted his head to the side allowing his Sentinel to bury his head against his neck. Jim keened softly as his Guide began releasing scent, in a stronger dose that ever before. Blair seemed to realize how close to the edge Jim was walking and was doing everything in his considerable power to back him away from it.

It took a long time for Jim to feel he could move away from the calming influence of his little Guide’s scent. Blair took it all in stride. Gently stroking Jim’s hair with his right hand, his casted one resting carefully against his Sentinel’s back.

Finally Jim pulled away slightly. “Thank-you, Baby.” He said voice trembling.

“Hurt?” Blair asked softly.

“Yeah,” Jim admitted just as softly. “Still hurts. I’m going to need you again. Is that okay?”


Jim smiled shakily. “Yeah, you do. Oh, God, Blair, I bled all over you,” he said regretfully.
“Let’s take care of that right now,” Simon told him, motioning to the nurse.

***

Jim’s left hand, stitched and bandaged, now rested in his room with his little Guide held tightly against him. It took eight stitches to close the wound on the palm of his hand as well as five more to close the wounds scattered all over the top.

William sighed softly as he looked at his two sons from the doorway to the bedroom. “What the hell is going on? Why won’t you talk to us, Jim?” Sadly he turned from the doorway going in search of Simon and hopefully some answers.

Jim woke with a violent start, waking his little Guide. He started up at the bedroom ceiling not really seeing it. Lost in the swirling emotions that had become his life. Slowly he was brought back to the here and now by the scent his little Guide had begun releasing.

Jim moaned softly. Wrapping his arms around Blair tightly, he keened as it eased the deep ache in his soul. Not realizing that tears were coursing down his face until he felt Blair’s tiny hands wiping them away.

“Sad?” Blair asked softly.

Jim sighed. “Yeah, Baby. I am.”

Blair stroked Jim’s face gently, a tiny smile on his cute little face when his Sentinel moved his face into the caress. “Why?”

“Lots of reasons. There’s not just one.” His eyes filling with tears all over again. He thought he’d gotten over the tear thing months ago. He guessed not as Blair continued to wiped them way gently. “Can I listen to your heartbeat for awhile?” Jim asked his voice hitching.

Blair nodded solemnly, allowing his Sentinel to carefully flip him over. Silence filled the room as Jim listen to the calming rhythms of his little Guide’s heart. The only motions were that of Blair gently caressing Jim’s hair and the tears of a Sentinel who had no idea how to control what was happening
to him.

***

WORSE

Thing seemed to calm a bit after that. Jim seemed to be able to get control over whatever was happening. He seemed calmer to everyone at least most everyone.

He still couldn’t see Rafe without wanting to kill him. It had taken H an hour of calmly talking to the sullen Sentinel to get him to see reason. Not to mention he had to own up to his own part in Blair’s accident. That was the thing no one understood. H was there too and Jim had not wanted to kill him. He’d only wanted to kill Rafe.

Steven understood, but he wasn’t about to give away his brother’s secret. He was trying to help without having to tell his Dad and Dr. Banks that Jim was unreasonably jealous of Rafe. Jim would never forgive him for that. So he tried to help the best way he could. Helplessly watching as the days past and a lost, really, sad look came into Jim’s blue eyes all over again. Steven HATED that look.

“Why don’t you get Blair to scent you?” Steven asked Jim as they waited for Blair to finish up with his play dates.

“I…I can’t keep asking Blair to do that. We’d never leave the room. He has a life too.” Jim told him softly.

“He’s your Guide. He understands,” Steven reasoned. Hating seeing his brother so antsy. If Jim keep running his hands through his hair any more he was going to be bald by the time he was fifteen.

“I can’t,” Jim hissed at him.

“You can,” Steven hissed back.

“Shut the fuck up,” Jim told him, glaring blue daggers at him.
Steven signed. “You can’t keep going like this. How long do you think it’s going to be before Blair picks up on it and kicks you fat ass.”

“What the fuck do you want me to do?” Jim asked helplessly.

“Talk.”

“To who? I can’t tell this kind of stuff to Blair. He’s too little,” Jim replied once again running his hands through his hair.

Steven reached over and took the violently, trembling bandaged hand carefully in his. “Then talk to me. Tell me what’s going on. I won’t tell any one. I swear I won’t.”

Jim gave Steven a shaky smile, looking down at their hands. “Don’t you think that’s going to make us look like sissies?”

“I don’t care. You’re my brother and I want to help. Talk to me,” Steven pleaded.


“That cute little redhead with the green eyes?”

“Yeah, that’s her.”

“Nope, can’t say I have.”

Jim smiled at him slightly. “Ass.”

Steven smiled back. Happy he’d gotten his brother to relax a little. He was still wound tighter than a string on a top, but he was a little better. “Yup. What about her?”
“She wants me to go in back of the bleachers with her.”

“She does,” Steven asked in surprise. Daisy McBride had all the boys in school chasing after her. She turned her pert, little nose up at every one of them. Figures she’s set her sights on Jim.

“Are you gonna go?”

“Hell, no.” Jim ran his free hand over his hair again. “Thing is she’s started bugging me even more, now that I told her no. She won’t leave me alone. Lunch room, classroom, she even followed me to the bathroom one time.”

“You could tell her yes,” Steven told him softly.

“I could, but I don’t want to. You do know what she wants right?”

“Yeah, I know. What, you think I was born yesterday or something? Dad gave me ‘The Talk’ too. And quit pulling your hair like that. It’s gonna make you bald.”

Jim’s hand fell away from his hair. “Okay, sorry.”

“Why don’t you wanna go with her?”

“I don’t want her. I want to wait for Blair.” Jim turned the saddest blue eyes Steven had ever seen toward him. “It’s a Sentinel thing. I don’t expect for you to understand.”

Steven looked over at Blair who was glaring at Megan. After all these months he still didn’t like her.

“Course I understand. Blair is your Guide, you love him. I don’t need to be a Sentinel to see that.”

Jim sighed softly, sadly. “He is my heart, Steven. Without Blair…”
“I know, Jim I know. If you want to wait for him, then wait.”

“What do I do about Daisy? She’s driving me crazy.”

Steven smiled at him. “Want I should kick her ass?”

Jim chuckled softly. “Would you?”

“Hell yeah. Better yet, let Blair deal with her.”

Suddenly a shriek echoed through the air. Jim looked up. “What now?” Megan was rubbing the side of her forehead. “What happened?”

“Blair hit me with a block,” The crying little girl said.

Jim looked down at his defiant little Guide. “Did you hit Megan?”


“Why?”

“She call Sandy. No like.”

Jim knelt in front of Blair. “I want you to apologize.”

“No.”

“Blair,” Jim warned.
His little Guide arms went across his little chest. “NO.”

“Blair, I’m warning you. You better apologize.”

“No.”

Jim had had enough, before he could stop himself he swatted his defiant little Guide’s butt.

Blair’s blue eyes widened in shock. “You hit.”

“Yes, I did. I want you to apologize. NOW.”

Blair continued to look at him, big, blue eyes filling with tears. “You hit.”

Jim sighed unhappily. When his life sucked, it really sucked. “I did it because you won’t listen to me. You have to apologize. What you did was wrong.”

Suddenly before he had a chance to react Blair’s little fist came up and smacked him on the nose. Hard. Knocking Jim on his ass.

“No hit Blair. Ever,” He was told angrily.

Jim watched stunned as his little Guide went to Rafe, asking to be picked up. Jim and Rafe had made an uneasy truce, for Blair’s sake. So Rafe was waiting on the other side of the room for Blair, to play hide and seek when he was done with his play date.

Steven reached down to offer Jim a hand up. “Are you alright?”

Jim rubbed at his bloody nose. “Wow, I never saw that coming. Good thing he didn’t hit me with his casted hand.”
Steven handed his brother a Kleenex. “Blair’s got quite a punch for a little fellow. But you know something, big brother?”

Jim looked at Steven holding the tissue against his nose. “What?”

“You’re in a world of shit now.”

***

No truer words had Steven ever spoken. Blair now refused to look at his Sentinel, speak to him or even acknowledge his very existence.

He went to Steven or William for all his needs. Allowing them to bathe him and cut his food, now that he was mad at his Sentinel. He was even reading to Simon. Plus he now shared Steven’s bed.

For Blair-Jim did not exist.

And it was making Jim crazy.

“You could always fake a zone,” Steven told him as he joined Jim by the living room door.

“He’ll know,” Jim replied him as he looked over wistfully at his little Guide who was napping with their Dad on the couch. The Sentinel gently stroking the bandages on his left hand absently.

“Well, what can I say? You should never have swatted him.”

“He hit Megan with a block. He could have seriously hurt her.”

Steven rolled his eyes. “Give me a break it was a plastic block.”
“I had to show him what he did wasn’t right.”

“Oh, yeah, you showed him alright. He kicked your ass,” Steven replied sarcastically.

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Does Blair know you’ve gotten such a gutter mouth?”

Jim sighed sadly. “How could he know? He’s way over there, napping with Dad.”

“Well whose fault is that?”

“Shut up. How am I going to fix it?” When Steven didn’t answer. “Well?” Jim asked impatiently.


Jim straightened up eagerly. “What?”

“I think that Blair’s picking up what you’re feeling. You need to talk to him.”

Jim looked at Steven in horror. “I can’t talk to him about THAT. He’s a baby.”

Steven shook his head sadly. “You are such a moron sometimes. Blair maybe three, but he’s no baby. Like he keeps telling you. You need to talk to him about what’s going on with you.”

Wofie had decided to join Blair and their Dad on the couch. They watched as he carefully making his way to lay on top of his little Guide’s back. Blair didn’t even move.

“Okay oh-wise-one, saying I do decide to tell Blair the truth-how the hell am I going to get him to talk to me. He won’t even look at me.”
“Leave that to me.”

***

That night Steven helped Blair with his bath. Once he was done he left Blair coloring on the bed, telling him he was going to the kitchen for milk and cookies. Sending a nervously waiting Jim into the room.

“Blair?”

Nothing.

“Blair?”

Still nothing.

“Blair, Baby, please,” Jim pleaded. He went to kneel by the bed. Tentatively reaching for a tiny, sock-clad foot. It promptly moved away before he could touch it.

“It’s been three days, Baby.”

Silence.

“Would it help if I said I was sorry?”

Nothing. Less than nothing.

“Whatcha’ coloring?”
No answer.

Jim laid his head on the bed right next to Blair’s little foot. Hoping his little Guide wouldn’t kick him. He still had a bruise on his nose from before.

“I love you, Baby.”

Still no answer.

“I’m sorry I swatted you. We should have talked about what you did. I should never have swatted you. I’m really, really sorry.”

The little foot moved closer to his face. Jim didn’t think it was to kick the shit out of his nose, at least that’s what he was hoping. He inched his face closer to it. Sighing happily when it didn’t move away.

“I miss you.”

Still nothing, but the little foot moved just that little bit closer. Jim tickled the sole with his nose. Smiling when Blair giggled.

“I love you, Blair.”

“I knows.”

“I missed you, very, very much.” Jim whispered.

“I here.”

“I know, but you got mad at me. You wouldn’t even look at me. You were sleeping with Steven. We haven’t slept apart since you bonded m..me.” Jim’s breath hitched. “I… I missed that the most. I didn’t have my little Guide to cuddle with.”
Blair tilted his curly head to one side as he contemplated his Sentinel. “Cuddle now.” He offered shyly.

Jim didn’t have to be told twice. He gathered his little Guide to him with a contented murmur. Burying his nose in Blair’s hair. “I’m sorry, Baby,” He said softly.

“I knows,” Blair told him, little arms wrapping around as much of Jim as the could.

“We need to talk. Steven thinks that you’ve been picking stuff up from me. Things that I’ve been feeling. I haven’t said anything before because you’re so little and this is kinda of an adult thing. I’m not even sure I know how to explain it.”

“Try.”

“Okay,” Jim told a deep breath. “I’m getting older and I’m going through some changes.” Blair touched the fuzz on Jim’s chin. “Yeah, that’s part of it.” Jim looked around the room trying desperately to figure out how to tell his little Guide something he was extremely embarrassed talking about.

“Tell,” His little Guide told him patiently.

“Okay. Well, hmm-I have these feelings it’s kinda like a pain. I…I don’t want to have them right now because I want to wait for you,” Blair tilted his head as listened. “You are my heart, Baby. My life. I want to share everything with you, but right now your way, way to little,” Jim looked at Blair. “Am I making any sense, Baby?”

Blair nodded. “Yups.”

“Well anyway, I want to wait and there’s this girl in school and she keeps pushing me into doing something with her, that I want to wait and share with you. And it’s starting to hurt-a lot.”

Blair growled. “Girl hurt.”
“I don’t think she meant to hurt me,” Jim told him hurriedly. “It’s all part of the changes I’m going through. It’s just that she’s not making it easier.”

“Hurt how?” Blair asked softly. “Where?”

Jim turned bright red, but he waved his hand vaguely over his groin. He needed to tell Blair the truth. There would be no secrets between them. Secrets only caused more problems. “It’s not really a hurt it’s more like a really, really bad ache,” He replied, his face flaming a brighter red.

“Grown up stuff?”

“Yup. I…I want to wait until you’re a grown up too. Share that part to, like we share everything else. I’ll wait however long it takes. Forever if I have to.”

“Even if hurts?”

“Even then,” Jim agreed and he would to. Blair continued to contemplated his Sentinel quietly. “Don’t you believe me?” Jim asked, uncomfortably.

Blair nodded. “Believe.”

“I…Is that okay?” Blair didn’t answer him, just continued to look at him big, blue eyes solemn. “Baby?” Jim watched as his little Guide reached out a tiny hand and laid it against his abdomen spreading his tiny fingers wide across his belly button. “Whatcha doing, Baby?” Jim asked, looking down at the hand.

“I help.”

Suddenly Jim gasped, eyes widening in shock as he felt all the overwhelming tension, fear, uncertainty and heartbreak melt away. Leaving him with a sense of well-being he’d never felt before in his life. Calm, he felt so calm. He’d come close to this feeling when Blair scented him. This time it was different. It was more, so much more. He felt his eyes fill with tears when realized what Blair had done.
“I…I’ll be able to wait for you?” he asked, awed beyond belief by his little Guide. “Oh, God-Blair, I’ll be able to wait for you.”

Blair nodded again. “Jim wait for Blair.”

“Oh, Baby, thank you.”

“You welcome.”

Jim gathered Blair to him. “I love you so much, Baby.”

“I knows. I luvs, too. Berry, berry much.”

Jim peppered kisses all over Blair’s face. “Thank you, thank you, thank you. You don’t know how much this means to me.”

“I knows.” Blair told him, patting his back gently with his right arm. His casted one resting on Jim’s shoulder.

Jim cupped Blair’s face gently. “Steven said you’d understand, but I wasn’t so sure. I was so afraid.”

“I help my Sentinell always.”

Jim kissed Blair’s little nose. “Even if you’re mad at me?”

“Even if Jim makes Blair mads.” Blair touched the bruise on Jim’s nose. “No need swat. Talk.”

Jim sighed. “I know and I’m sorry. I won’t ever do that again. I promise.” He looked at his little Guide shyly. “Will you scent me? Maybe even bond with me? Then we can take a nice long nap. I need to cuddle with you really bad. We haven’t done it in days.” Jim added plaintively.
Blair offered his arms to his Sentinel who promptly picked him up and carried him to their bed. Jim sighed happily as his little Guide tilted his head to the side in offer. He started keening softly as Blair began releasing scent. He’d missed this so much. Missed his little Guide. The keening increased in volume when Blair released the bonding scent as well.

Jim began to swaying slightly, that’s when he realized how tired he really was. He hadn’t slept very well the whole time Blair had been mad at him. Everything had finally caught up with him. Blair getting hurt, him-smashing his hand through the glass panel, being mad at Rafe. The changes his body was going through and all the tension, fear and anxiety it brought with it.

Jim fell against the mattress with a soft sound of pure contentment, holding Blair to him tightly, he closed his eyes. All the worries gone, all the fear gone, all gone, he thought dazedly as Blair continued to weave his magic.

Worries gone, vanishing as if never having been. Blair had somehow even at three understood and given the most precious gift possible, except for perhaps having chosen him for his very own Sentinel. He’d given him the gift of time.
Steven walked into the bedroom half an hour later to find Jim and Blair tightly curled around each other, sound asleep. He smiled, it had worked. Sometimes the best approach was the simplest he thought to himself as he got ready for bed. Well after he just about shoved Jim into the room to talk to his little Guide. Geez, his big brother could be such a wuss. Not to mention being little Guide whipped at times. Steven chuckled to himself as he covered the Sentinel/Guide pairing with a blanket. Didn’t matter though he loved them both just the same.

Jim opened his eyes to find it was now morning and with such a sense of well-being he could almost shout with the joy of it. If it wasn’t so undignified he might have. He looked down at his still sleeping little Guide and smiled. Blair had helped him in a way he’d never thought possible and Jim was happy, truly happy.

“So everything’s okay?”

Jim looked over to find Steven watching him. “Yeah. Everything is great. Blair helped me.”

Steven sat up in the bed. “He did?”

“Yes. He touched my stomach and everything I was feeling went away. I’ll be able to wait for him till he gets older. Now I just have to do something about Daisy.”

“I told you I’d deal with her, but I think you’re probably better off having Blair deal with her. And what exactly did Blair do?”
“It’s hard to explain. He kinda looked at me. You know, kinda like he was thinking about something and then he reached out and touched my stomach near my belly button.”

Steven frowned. You know, that sounds kinda familiar.”

“It does.”

“I think we covered it in school.” Suddenly Steven snapped his finger. “I’ve got it. It was in science. It’s a chakra point. How the heck would Blair know about chakra points?”

Jim maneuvered himself from underneath Blair carefully not wanting to wake him. “I don’t know, he just did, but then nothing about Blair surprises me anymore.”

“Mrs. Carmichael is into all that new age stuff. Been studying it forever according to her. How the heck would Blair know about chakras?” Steven asked again.

Jim shrugged. “Don’t know, but he did.”

“Do you think Blair can see auras as well?”

Jim got his clothes together for the day. “Hmm, maybe. You could ask him when he wakes up if you want. Watch him for me while I take a shower?”

“Sure. What, you’re not going to let him give you a bath?” Steven asked mischievously.

Jim gave him a look that spoke volumes. Well, more like screamed them. “Just watch Blair for me, please. Here, cover my hand with plastic so my stitches don’t get wet and don’t say anything else that might make me want to hurt you.”

Steven helped tape up Jim’s hurt left hand, chuckling softly. When he was done Jim gave him a grateful smile and an affectionate shove, sending him sprawling back onto the bed.
“Don’t forget to keep an eye on Blair,” He was told before the bathroom door closed.

Steven shook his head, still smiling as he righted himself. He picked up a comic book from the floor, after checking on the peacefully, sleeping little Guide.

***

BREAKFAST AND APOLOGIES

William and Simon were sitting down having a quiet breakfast, when the three Ellison young came bouncing down the stair. Well, two of them came bouncing down the stairs. Blair was in Jim’s arms, smiling happily.

“Everything okay?” William asked softly as his sons sat down at the table.

Jim fought Steven for a piece of toast. Winning it, he gave it to his little Guide. “Everything’s great.” He turned contrite, blue eyes toward his Dad and Simon. “About that. I want to apologize about everything. I’m really sorry I lost my temper.”

“It’s alright. We understand that you’re going through changes and being a Sentinel that went online not to long ago, it’s going to cause problems,” Simon replied.

Jim cleared his throat. “Hmm, I guess, but that doesn’t make what I did right and I’m truly sorry about it.”

William smiled at his eldest. “Apology accepted. Just don’t do it any more.”

Jim returned the smile. “I’ll try not to.”

“I hungry,” Blair said plaintively, breaking into the conversation. Tired of waiting for breakfast. Everything was to far away for him to reach by himself. Even if he was sitting in Jim’s lap.

Jim looked at his little Guide. “Oh, sorry,” he said reaching for the platter of scrambled eggs Sally’d
placed in the middle of the table. “Here you go, Baby,” he told Blair, after fixing him a plate. He got a huge smile as a reward. It was returned rather goofily.

Steven rolled his eyes. “Oh, for heaven sakes, quit with the mushy stuffy. Today is Saturday, might we have a day without the mush, please?”

Jim gave him a snooty look. “Well excuse me for being happy about my little Guide not being mad at me.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever.”

Simon perked up at the thought of Blair and Jim making up. “What happened?”

“Blair’s not mad at him anymore,” Steven replied, helping himself to bacon.

“I got THAT much. Tell me what happened.” Three pairs of blue eyes looked at him. No one saying anything. “Well, come on, someone tell me. If it concerns Sentinel stuff I have to know.”

“Why?” Jim asked quietly, offering his little Guide more egg.


“I help my Sentinell,” Blair agreed, giving said Sentinel a brilliant smile. Jim in the meanwhile gave his Guide a look back that could only be considered extremely adoring.


“Blair quit being mad at Jim. Nothing mystical or anything. They made up.” Steven answered for Jim. Knowing how much it bothered his brother to talk about something so personal. And besides not EVERYTHING that Blair and Jim did was for public consumption. No matter what Simon said about it helping other Sentinel/Guide pairings.
Jim gave him a grateful look. “Yeah, Blair quit being mad at me.” Not the complete truth, but not totally a lie either.

“Oh,” Simon replied, looking very disappointed.

“So, what are you boys planning on doing this beautiful Saturday?” William asked, taking a drink of coffee.

“I think we’re going to the library,” Steven answered for Jim again. “We’ve got to do some research…hmm for school. Yeah, that’s it. Research for school. Huh, Jim?”

“Huh?” Steven gave Jim a look. “Oh, yeah. Research. For…ah… school.”

Before they could be questioned any further. “Come on let’s go before they close,” Steven said, pulling on Jim’s arm.

William and Simon watched them leave before the elder Ellison turned to the Doctor. “It’s eight o’clock in the morning.”

“Huh, huh.”

“The library doesn’t open till nine.”

Simon took a drink of his coffee. “Yup.”

“Doesn’t close till 3.”

“Yes.”

“They’re up to something.”
Simon reached for another a piece of toast. “Most definitely.”

***

RESEARCH

“See. I told you it was a chakra point,” Steven told Jim, heads bent together as they looked over a book on chakras.

Jim looked over at his little Guide, who was sitting in his own chair reading. “But that doesn’t really say what he did.”

“You were saying that he touched your abdomen, and that’s where the book says that all sexual things are…” He looked up when he heard a gagging noise, to see Jim looking sick. “Are you okay?”

“I wish you wouldn’t talk that way,” Jim told him, swallowing heavily.

“Why? Blair’s not even paying attention to us. He’s reading his book on Egypt.”

“I know, but I still don’t feel right talking about that stuff,” Jim replied, still looking like he was going to throw up.

“I know you don’t, but we need to figure out what he did.”

“D…does it matter?” Jim asked, uncomfortably.

“Well sort of. You don’t wanna have Blair always having to touch your tummy do you?”

At that Jim paled even more. “No.”
“Okay then. What do you feel now? Any more of those feeling that were making you act like Attila the Hun on a rampage?”

“No,” Jim answered, reluctantly.

“Any feeling that they’re gonna come back?”

“N…no.”

Steven got a thoughtful look on his face as he thought about it. “Well, know what I think?”

“What?”

“I think Blair by touching you at that chakra point turned off that part of you. Kinda like a light switch. Making it so that you’d be able to wait for him without going any dumber than you already are. And since I don’t want you getting sick all over the library table we’re NOT going to talk about him flipping the switch back ON.”

Jim blinked, paled, then swallowed heavily again. Steven thinking that he probably shouldn’t have brought it up at ALL since Jim looked like he was going to be sick anyway.

“Do you need some water or something?”

Jim waved the offer away. “N…No. I just need a minute.” After more than a minute and when he wasn’t quite so pale. “Can he do that?” Jim asked quietly.

“Yeah, I not only think he can, I think he did.”

They both looked at Blair. “Wow!” they both said in awe. Then…

“How come Blair gets to do all the cool stuff? What do I do—stand around and look cute?” Jim asked,
feeling lots better.

Steven looked at him wryly. “I’m sorry to tell you this, big brother, but if that’s all you’re good for, it’s not working. You’re as ugly as sin.”

Jim turned to make sure Blair wasn’t listening. “Ass,” he replied, before chuckling softly.

Steven giggled. “Yeah, huh.” Glad that his brother was feeling better. “I wouldn’t worry to much about what you do. You do all the Sentinelie stuff.”

“Sentinelie stuff?”

“Yeah, you know-all that stuff Simon is forever testing you on. What did he call you-Watchman of the World? You’ll do plenty when the time comes.”

“Oh, please, like that’s as cool as the stuff, Blair can do.”

Steven smiled hugely at Jim. “Never said that. The stuff Blair can do will always be way cooler than what you can do.”

Jim looked at Steven blankly for a moment. “Know something, Steven?”

“What?”

“You’re just so good for my ego that sometimes I just can’t stand it,” Jim told him ruefully.

Steven smiled at him gleefully. “I know, oh-Watchman of the World. Wanna check out a book on auras. Then ask Blair if he can see them?”

Jim shrugged. “Wouldn’t hurt I guess.”
FLOWER POWER

What they found out was that Blair could indeed see auras, but only Jim’s. They figured it was because taking care of his Sentinel was the most important thing in Blair’s life so he only wanted to see Jim’s. But they figured if Blair ever wanted to, he’d be able to see other people’s, too.

After they were done at the library it was close to lunch, so they figured they’d go to Wonderburger before heading to the park. They were sitting outside enjoying their food and the clear, sunny day when suddenly…

“Damn. Sorry, Blair,” Jim said hastily.

“What?” Steven asked.

“There’s Daisy.”

“Oh-Oh. Whatcha gonna do?”

Jim looked around wildly. “Hmm, is it too late to run?”

“I’d say. She just saw you.”

“Shit. Sorry, Blair.” Jim sighed heavily. “Okay, I’d better deal with her. Blair?” The little Guide was growling at the pretty, redhead coming toward them. If the sparks coming out of those beautiful, blue eyes could turn someone to ash, Daisy’d already be scattered to the four winds. “Baby, look at me.” Blair looked up at him, but kept growling. “I want you to stay with Steven. Don’t do anything. Let me handle Daisy. Okay?” Blair didn’t answer. “Baby, please. I can deal with her. Let me.”

“Stupid girl hurt.”

“She didn’t mean too.”
She hurt MY Sentinell. I protect.”

“Thank-you, Baby. I know you want to help. But let me deal with Daisy. If I need you’re help I’ll call you over. How’s that?”

“Promise.”

Jim smiled down into the worried eyes of his little Guide. “I swear.” Jim got up from the bench they’d been sharing. “I love you, Blair,” He told him, kissing him lightly on the forehead.

“I luvs you too.”

Steven and Blair watched Jim walk over to Daisy. “He’s going to be okay,” Steven told Blair quietly.

Blair turned looked at Steven. “I no sure,” He said worriedly.

“I know, but you gotta let him try and if Daisy makes a wrong move you can go in there and kick her as…buns.”

That seemed to help when Blair gave him a brilliant smile. “Yeah, huh?” he said happily.

“You betcha.” Steven said, smiling back.

The whole time Jim was talking with Daisy-Blair’s eyes never left his Sentinel. Not even when he got off the bench to pick some of the flowers in one of the flower beds near where they were sitting. Not when he systematically pulled the petals off the flowers he’d collected, tossing them carelessly over his shoulder.

Steven was pretty sure Blair was making some sort of statement by doing that. Especially since the flowers he was destroying were Daisies.
Jim seemed to be doing okay. Daisy wasn’t scratching his eyes out or anything. She did keep trying to touch him. Jim moved away from her every time she tried.

It was kinda of funny watching Blair. Every time Daisy moved closer to Jim-Blair would growl louder, like a fierce little cat. But Blair kept his word and didn’t make a move to try and annihilate Daisy. Actually he was annihilating her with his eyes and the way he was angrily depetaling the flowers.

“Come here, Blair?” Steven told Blair softly.

The little Guide went. Steven picked him up and sat him in his lap. He held the little Guide close trying to comfort his agitation, chin resting on the top of Blair’s head as they watched Jim.

After about fifteen minutes Jim walked back toward them slowly.

“How’d it go?” Steven asked.

Jim sighed. “She didn’t want to listen. And she kept trying to touch me.”

“How did that part go? Were you able to handle it without going all wacky?”

Jim smiled. “Yeah, no problem at all. I finally got her to listen to me. I had to be kinda mean about it. Told her outright I didn’t want to go in back of the bleachers with her. Not now, not ever. I just wished I hadn’t had to be so mean to her,” Jim said, eyes sad as he looked over at Daisy. Who was now talking to some other kids, looking over at Jim now and then.

“Well she didn’t wanna listen, so I’d say it wasn’t you’re fault you had to be mean.”

“Yeah, that true,” Jim looked at the quietly listening Blair. “So how’s my little Guide doing?”

“I good. You?”

Jim gave Blair a huge smile. “I’m doing good, too,” He offered his arms. “What do you say about
going to the park now? See if we can find any of the guys?"

Blair practically jumped into his Sentinel arms. “Park.”

Blair frowned at Daisy over Jim’s shoulder. The Sentinel didn’t see it, but Steven did. Saw the blue-eyed glare meaning death to all poachers. Saw too when Blair’s blue-casted, left hand opened releasing a handful of crushed Daisy petals allowing them to fall lazily to the ground.

If Daisy wasn’t paying attention, she really should have. It’s meaning clear. She’d had it easily dealing with Jim, next time it wouldn’t be quite as easy. Next time she’d be dealing with an angry, unforgiving, protective Guide. Steven shivered slightly and he sure as hell wouldn’t want to be in her shoes if she ever messed with Jim again. Three years old or not Blair had a mean punch.

***

QUIET TIME?

They didn’t find the guys at the park liked they’d hoped. So they took Blair to the playground for awhile before heading home.

Now they all lazied in the living room. Waiting for it to get closer to dinnertime and the pizza William promised to take them out for.

Steven sat on the floor playing with the kittens. Rolling a ball around for them, watching as they happily chased it.

William and Simon sharing the Saturday newspaper between them, at the moment trying to solve the puzzle.

The little Guide and his Sentinel lay on the couch as Blair read to him from one of the books he’d brought back from Las Vegas, tucked protectively against Jim’s side.

Sally had gone to the store, promising to be back in plenty of time to join them for pizza.
“So Jim?” Simon asked softly, a glint in his eyes.

“Yeah?” Jim said, stopping the soft purring he always did when Blair read to him.

“You seem a lot calmer.”

“Yup, I am.”

“Why?”

Jim suddenly had a slightly panicked look in his blue eyes. “Hmm, why do you ask?”

“I was just wondering, because you’ve been extremely wired for a while now,” Simon replied. Eyes narrowing as he watched the all of a sudden antsy Sentinel. “What happened to make you a calm and collected Sentinel all of a sudden?”

“N…nothing happened. Blair got unmad at me so I’m all better.” The young Sentinel hedged. “You know how I get when Blair gets mad at me.”

“Are you sure that’s all it is and not Blair doing a new Guide type of thing?” Jim looked over at Steven. “No don’t look at Steven for help. I’m asking you.”

Steven frowned. “Hey, wait a minute. Why can’t I answer for him? It’s not like I wouldn’t know.”

Simon smiled. He had them now. “So then you’re saying you do know something?” he asked slyly.

Steven returned the smile cheerfully, to cheerfully. “Never said that. I’m just saying that if I did, I could answer for him if I wanted, he is after all my brother.”

“Well then?”
“Well, then what?”

“Answer the freaking question,” Simon said impatiently.

Steven gasped in horror. “Blair did you hear Simon? He just cursed. Do something. My ears are burning.”

Blair’s head popped up from where it’d been laying comfortably on his Sentinel’s chest. “Freaking bad word?”

Steven nodded. “Oh, yeah. That’s what one of my teachers at school said,” He replied rubbing his ears gingerly. “Now my ears hurt.”

Blair turned big, blue disapproving eyes toward Simon. “No cuss. No nice. See, hurt Steven wiff bad words.”

“Freaking is not a bad word, Blair…” Simon said, trying to save himself from the little Guide’s wrath. Not catching the grateful look Jim sent Steven’s way, but their dad did.

William wasn’t about to interfere. If they thought that whatever happened was personal and not to be shared, it was good enough for him. Suddenly the doorbell rang. He got to his feet to answer it. Simon was still trying to explain to Blair that freaking was not a bad word and that Steven was misinformed.

He opened the door still smiling. “N…Naomi,” he said stunned the smile disappearing.

“Hello, William. I’m here for my son. I’m here for Blair.”
“Mommy,” Blair yelled happily, scrambling to get off the couch, accidentally hitting Jim on the nose with his casted hand.

“Ow!”

“I sorry,” Blair said, touching Jim’s nose regretfully.

“It’s okay, Baby. Go see your Mom,” Blair looked at him for a moment as if unsure if he should go or not. “Go. Your Sentinel will be alright.”

“Sure?”


After a moment Blair bounced off toward his mother. “Mommy.”

“Sweetie,” Naomi bent down gathering her son to her in a tight hug. “I’ve missed you,” She said kissing his forehead.

Blair returned the hug. “Miss you too, Mommy.”
“Where have you been, Naomi? We’ve looked everywhere for you,” William asked frowning.

“I’ve been in Tibet. I’ve found someone that thinks he can break the bond between my son and yours.”

Jim paled visibly when he heard that. “No.”

Steven who’d been handing Jim a Kleenex for his bloody nose told him, “It’s okay, Dad’ll never let that happen.”

“I don’t think so, Naomi. You’ve been gone what-eight, nine months? In all that time you have made no attempt to contact your son. Now all of a sudden you come waltzing in here with intentions of taking Blair. I don’t think so. You lost all rights to Blair. He’s my son now.”

Naomi stood with Blair in her arms. “I told you I was in Tibet. There was no way to contact my son.”

William crossed his arms as he glared at the pretty redhead. “I find that hard to believe that in all this time you never came across a phone or a post office.”

“I don’t care what you believe. Blair is MY son and he’s coming with me.”

Blair wiggled in her arms. “No, Mommy, no I Guide.”

Naomi smiled at him. “Not if I can help it, Sweetie. You’ll be free to live your life the way the Goddess intended.”

Jim turned scared blue eyes toward his brother. “Steven.”

Steven squeezed Jim’s arm. “Not going to happen. Dad won’t let it happen.” Hating the look in his brother’s eyes, he glared at Naomi.
“But what if he can’t stop her from taking him? What am I going to do without Blair?”

“Shh, don’t panic. We’ll think of something. It’ll be okay.”

“You’re not taking Blair anywhere, Naomi,” William told her angrily.

“I can and I will. I’ll break the bond and set my son free.”

Simon moved closer. “It’s impossible. I already told you the bond is unbreakable. The only possible way is if Blair chose to break it and that’s not going to happen. Blair loves his Sentinel.”

“It will happen. I’ll take you to court if I have to—to free Blair,” Naomi threatened.

“You can’t win, but feel free to try, in the meantime Blair stays right where he’s at.” William looked at the struggling little boy in Naomi’s arms. “Blair, son—go to Jim, please. He needs you.”

Blair looked over at Jim who was visibly trembling, renewing his struggles to free himself from his mother’s clinging arms.

“Mommy, let go. Jim need me,” He said, frustrated when she wouldn’t release him.

Naomi reluctantly let him go, watching him run toward Jim as fast as his little feet could take him. “See, that’s what I mean. He’s three years old and shouldn’t have this kind of responsibility. He should be enjoying his young life free from burden.”

“Blair doesn’t see Jim as a burden, Naomi. When are you going to get that through your thick skull?” Simon told her in disgust.

“I’m taking Blair to Tibet. Even if I have to get the cops to get him free him from you people.”

William opened the door. “Feel free to try. For now please leave.”
Naomi looked over at Blair who was gently stroking his Sentinel’s head, murmuring softly to him. “I’ll be back. I’ll be back for you Blair.” With that she was gone, not noticing that Blair didn’t respond, lost in comforting his trembling Sentinel.

William slammed the door. “What an infuriating women. If it’s a war she wants, it’s a war she’s getting.” He went to kneel in front of the young Sentinel/Guide pair. “Jim? Son? Look at me.” His heart broke when he met Jim’s tear-filled eyes. “She won’t take Blair away from you. We won’t allow it. By the end of the day there will be a restraining order not allowing her within ten miles of either of you. Don’t worry,” He said softly, wiping the tears coursing down Jim’s pale face.

“What if you can’t stop her? D…dad, I can’t live without Blair. If she takes him, she takes my heart.”

William kissed Jim’s forehead gently. “That’s not going to happen, Son. I won’t let it.” With that he rose from the floor. “I’ll be in my office if you need me. Steven, take care of your brothers, please.”

“Okay, Dad,” Steven replied quietly.

“I’ll be in my office as well. Get the Sentinel Center on this,” Simon said. “Don’t worry, Jim. Everything will be alright.”

When the adults left the room Steven turned toward Blair. “Baby brother-I’ve got to ask you a very serious question. Answer me the best way you can.” Blair nodded. “Do you want to stay with Jim?” The little Guide nodded again. “Even if your Mommy wants to take you away?”

“Jim, my Sentinell. Mine to protect. Mine to love.”

“Do you want to stay with him?”

“For always.” He replied softly, hugging his still trembling Sentinel.

Jim returned the hug. “I love you, Baby. Very, very much. But that may not be enough. He turned toward Steven. “What happens if she comes back and we find out she can take him?”

“What do you want to do?” Steven asked, not liking the haunted look in Jim’s eyes. Wanting to do
whatever it took to make that look go away.

“I don’t know. I just don’t know. I can’t let her take him.”

Steven bit his lip hard as he thought about it. “Okay. Okay. We’ll think on it. For now do you need to bond?”

Jim nodded. “Y…yes. She’s scared the crap out of me. Sorry Blair.”

“Okay come on. You can bond in our bedroom while I think over a few things.”

Jim rose from the couch holding on to Blair tightly. “What are you planning?”

“Hmm, don’t know yet. All I know for sure is that I’m going to do what Dad told me and take care of my brothers.”

***

Fight or Flight

Steven watched quietly while Blair fixed Jim. Thinking of what to do. He already had some ideas. He needed to go out for a while and talk to some people though.

“How much money you got?”

“Hmm, about a hundred. Saving it to buy Blair a birthday present. Why?”
“I’ve got seventy-five,” Steven said, nibbling his bottom lip thoughtfully. “That won’t get us far.”

Jim looked at Steven in shock. “We can’t run.”

“Of course we can,” Steven replied. “Problem there is a hundred and seventy five bucks isn’t going to get us far.”

Jim shook his head. “No, Steven. We can’t run. We’ve got to have faith that Dad will be able to stop Naomi from taking Blair.” He smiled at his brother. “Besides what will we do when the money runs out? Hold up a sign on the street corner ‘Sentinel/Guide pair on the run, please help’?”

Steven rolled his eyes. “No, moron. More like have you sell your worldly good.”

“What worldly goods? You know I’m gonna wait for Blair. I don’t know shit. Sorry, Blair. You know more than I do.”

Steven narrowed his eyes. “You expect ME to sell my worldly goods for YOU.” He shook his head. “I love you big brother, but I don’t love you that much. And besides what makes you think my worldly goods are any more experienced than your worldly goods?”

Jim smiled at him. “Well, I have heard talk around school about you.”

“You have? What kind of talk?”

“About your worldly good experience.”

“Liar.”

Jim smile widened. “Yeah.”

“Moron.”
Jim blew him a kiss. “Love you too.”

“Geez.” Steven replied, rolling his eyes. “I’m gonna get a haircut.” With that Steven walked out the bedroom.

Jim turned to Blair a puzzled look on his face. “Didn’t Steven get a haircut last week?”
The little Guide shrugged his slight shoulders.

***

A week passed. Then two. Everything seemed calm, but there was a tension in the air that was hard to ignore. Everyone was feeling it. Especially Jim.

Steven walked into their bedroom. Shaking his head, he smiled when he saw Jim bending down by Blair’s bookshelf. “Whatya doing, big brother?”

“N…nothing,” Jim replied hesitantly.

“Nothing, huh? This the same nothing that color-coded, size-coded, material-coded the closet?”

“No.”

“Is this the same nothing that did the same thing to the shoes in the same closet?”

Jim shook his head. “Hmm, no.”

“Is this the same nothing that alphabetized my comic books by hero, villain and writer?”

“No.”
Steven sat on his bed. “Is this the same nothing that has all the underwear, socks and t-shirts in the drawers rolled up into tight little balls you can’t even tell what the hell they are?”

Jim sat down on the floor in front of Blair’s bookshelf. “Are you trying to tell me something, Steven?”

Steven shook his head. “Hell, no.” He waved a finger. “Is this an anal retentive type of thing or a Sentinelic thingy you’ve got going here? Or maybe just a nervous twitch?” he added with a wryly smile.

“Is there something wrong with keeping the room neat and tidy making things easier for Sally?” Jim said defensively.

“There’s a difference in keeping the room neat and tidy and there’s what you’re doing. What next-you gonna scrub the bathroom with a toothbrush?”

Jim sat up straighter. “Why, you think it needs it?”

Steven gave Jim an incredulous look. “You’re kidding right?”

Jim smiled at him. “Yeah.”

“Asshole.”

Yup.

Steven looked around the room. “Hey, where’s Blair?”

“Changing the kitty litter with Sally’s help.” Jim tilted his head. “He’s done and he’s coming up the stairs carrying a plate of chocolate chip cookies Sally just took out of the oven.”
“Cool. Is there enough for all of us?”

“Hmm, yeah. There’s eight on the plate.”

Steven looked at Jim, eyes narrowing. “How the hell do you know that?”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Duh, dumbass. Sentinel here.”

“Did you count the chips in the cookies too? So that you can get the ones with the most chocolate chips?”

“Ooh, great idea. Done. Don’t get the ones on the left side of the plate. I call those.”

“I hate you,” Steven told him with feeling.

“Yeah, yeah. Hmm, there’s three glasses of milk on the counter. Blair couldn’t carry them up here with him being only three and having a broken arm. Wanna get ‘um?”

“Ooh, bossy Watchman.”

“Oh, come on.”

“What are you gonna be doing while I go down and get the milk?”

Jim smiled at him. “Eating cookies with Blair.”

“I hate you.”

“So you keep telling me. Hurry up before the cookies get cold.”
Steven rose from the bed. “Alright, Alright. Why can’t you go get the milk?”

Jim held up his bandaged left hand. “Don’t wanna get my stitches wet.”

Steven sighed as he rose from the bed. “Oh, alright. Geez.” Steven eyed one of the drawers that Jim was working on, conveniently left open. “Oh, Jim?”

“Yeah?” Jim asked, looking up from organizing Blair’s coloring books, next came the colors. Even the broken ones were going to be organized. They were still good after all. To see Steven reach into the sock drawer tossing them all up into the air. Sending socks all over the room. He gasped in shock. “Steven, that took me an hour to organize. How could you?”

Steven smiled at him, an evil glint in his eyes. “Easy. As easy as doing this,” Saying that he reached into the t-shirt drawer and did the same thing.

“I’m going to seriously hurt you,” Jim threatened, reaching for him.

Steven smiled. “Ha,” He replied, easily skipping out of harms way. “Hey, little brother. I’ll be right back with the milk.” He told Blair as the little Guide entered the room. “Don’t let Jim get the cookies on the left, those are mine.”

Jim took the plate from Blair. “Wanna wait for Steven to come back with the milk?”

Blair nodded as he climbed on to the bed. “Yups.” He tilted his head to the side as he quietly contemplated his Sentinel. Finally. “Sad?” he asked softly.

“Yeah. A little,” Jim answered truthfully as he joined Blair on the bed.

“Why?”

Jim tucked a stray lock of hair behind his little Guide’s ear. “I don’t know. I… I was sort of hoping that when your Mom came back that she’d like m…me.” His breath hitched.

“I never really knew my Mom. All I remember was that she smelled really good and she would sing
to me at night, before I’d go to sleep. I was kinda hoping…” his voice trailed off unable of finish the sentence.

“I sorry.”

Jim looked up to meet his little Guide’s sad, blue eyes. “You don’t have anything to be sorry for, Baby. It’s your Mom that doesn’t like me.”

“Mommy wrong.”

Jim tugged at a lose piece of thread on their blanket. “You think so?”

“Yup.”

“Blair?” Jim looked up, blue eyes suddenly vulnerable. “When you look at me what do you see?”

The little Guide tilted his head to the side again. “Pretty.”

Jim blushed. “You think I’m pretty?”

Blair shook his head. “Nope.”

“No?” Jim questioned, oddly disappointed. He felt a tiny hand caress the back of his as he continued to pull on the lose thread.


“I’m beautiful?”

“My aura is pretty, but you think I’m beautiful?”

“Yup.”

Jim smiled shyly at his Guide. “I think you’re beautiful, too,” He replied, stroking the side of Blair’s face with the forefinger of his left hand.

“Oh, God. If it wasn’t bad enough that they get mushy at the drop of a hat now their flirting. Gag,” Steven said, walking into the room carrying three glasses of milk.

“Oh shut up. Blair thinks I’m beautiful,” Jim told him, a goofy, little smile on his face.

Steven handed him a glass of milk. “You’re his Sentinel. What else is he suppose to tell you? That you look like something Wofie threw up?”

Jim gave him a look. “One day I will hurt you SO bad.”

Steven helped himself to a cookie. “Yeah, yeah. Whatever. So Dad’s going to be taking us to school tomorrow?”

Jim handed Blair a cookie. “Yeah. It’s his turn. He said that until the whole Naomi problem is solved. Either Sally, Simon or him will be taking us to school and picking us up. He said that even though the restraining order is in place sometimes it’s not enough.”

“Really?” Steven asked, nibbling on a cookie.

“Yup. He’s even hired guards for the school,” Jim replied, helping Blair get a drink of his milk. “Simon has taken over an empty classroom in the school to be closer to us.”

“Jim?”
“Yeah?”

“That’s something I’ve got to talk to you about?”

Jim looked over at Steven curiously. “What?”

“I’ve got an ‘in case’ thing going on too.”

Jim’s eyes widened in surprise. “You do?”

“Yeah. I won’t tell you the details. If and when you need it, I’ll tell you what you need to know.”

“Thank-you, Steven,” Jim replied softly, eyes misting.

“You’re welcome. Pass me another cookie.”

***

Sleep for Jim was a long time in coming that night. They had dinner, watched TV and did all the same things they did before Naomi. Blair had-had his bath. Now he lay tightly curled against him and Jim still couldn’t sleep. There was something nagging at him. Something was going to go wrong he could sense it. Something he wasn’t going to be able to stop. He sighed heavily.

“No can sleep?” His little Guide asked hoarsely. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes with his fingertips.

“Nope,” Jim replied, sighing again.

“Worry?”

“Yup. A little bit.”
Blair sat up in the bed. “I luvs you.”

Jim looked up. Seeing the pale little face staring down at him. Worry clouding those big, beautiful, blue eyes. “I love you, too.” He reached a trembling hand to caress the side of Blair’s face. “I don’t know what I’d do if your Mom took you away from me.”

Blair moved his face into the gentle touch. “Mommy, no take. No let.”

“You’re so little, Baby. You may not have a choice.”


“I love you, Blair.”


Jim returned the smile. “Yeah, what?”

Blair moved as close to his Sentinel as he could possibly get. Wrapping his little arms around as much of Jim as he could, he began to hum softly. Gently rocking Jim he began releasing scent as well.

Softly, gently, he lured his troubled Sentinel in to sleep.

It worked. The soft humming, the gentle rocking motion and the calming scent did their job, Jim close his eyes and slept. After many minutes the humming stopped as did the rocking, the little Guide joining his Sentinel in sleep.

Across from them, in the other bed Steven wiped furtively at his eyes. Vowing to do whatever it took to keep Jim and Blair together. Naomi would not win. He’d do everything he could to make sure she didn’t win and break up his family. Not ever.
FLIGHT

“So, where’s Blair?” Steven asked as he came up to Jim. Who was leaning against the wall just outside one of the classrooms.

“He had to go to the bathroom real bad, but I had to finish taking a test so Rafe and H took him.”

Steven leaned against the wall near his brother. “Are you feeling any better about Rafe?”

Jim sighed. “Hmm, not really. The only reason I’m still hanging around him is because of Blair.”

“Do you think it’ll ever get better?”

“No.” Suddenly Jim’s eyes widened.

“What is it?” Steven said in worry.

“Naomi. Naomi is here and she brought people to try and take Blair. We got to stop them.” With that Jim took off like a bat out of hell. Steven running after him.

They came to a stop in the hallway right in front of the bathrooms to find Blair backing away from his Mother.

“No, Mommy. No.”

“Come on, Sweetie. I’m not going to hurt you. Come with me,” Naomi said offering her hand.

Blair kept backing away fearfully. “No.”

“Leave him alone,” H told her, picking the little Guide up in his arms. Backing them both away from the crazy lady with red hair.

“Give him to me,” Naomi told him angrily.

“Like hell. You’re not even suppose to be here. Isn’t there a restraining order against you?” H asked, continuing to back away from Naomi and the people she’d brought with her. “Rafe, hit the panic button. Hurry up. We can’t hold them off for to long.”

Rafe reached into his pocket and pulled out small black box, pushing the red button on it quickly. It would alert security, the police, Simon, and William that there was trouble. It had been Simon’s idea. All of Jim and Blair’s teachers had one as well as all their friends. Rafe then placed himself in front of H and Blair blocking the adults as best he could.

“Blair,” Jim said, running toward them. Quickly gathering his trembling little Guide in his arms.

“What are we going to do?” H asked. “There’s too many of them and they’ve already blocked the exits.”

Jim looked around frantically. “Where’s the security guards? Where’s Simon?”

Just then Simon came rushing in as did the six security guards William had hired. “What the hell do you think your doing?” Simon bellowed at Naomi.

“I’ve come for my son.”

“He’s not your son any more. You lost all rights to him.”

Naomi shook her head. “I can never lose my right to him. I gave birth to him. He is my son.”
“The law says different.”

Naomi sneered. “Law. I don’t listen to any laws.”

“I suppose so, since you lost your bid to get Blair through the system. You really didn’t think you could win did you?”

“It doesn’t matter. I’ll take him by force if I have to.”

“Like hell you will,” Simon hissed at her.

William came running into the hallway. Seeing Simon and the bodyguards blocking Naomi and a bunch of strangers from reaching his terrified sons.

“What the hell is going on here?” he said angrily, quickly checking on Jim and Blair, making sure they weren’t hurt, before going to stand in front of Naomi.

“I’ve come for my son?” Naomi said again.

William sighed. “You’re starting to sound like a broken record, Naomi. You have no son.”

“I’ve brought someone with me that can break the bond,” Naomi said as if William hadn’t said a thing, motioning to the man standing near her.

William spared a quick glance toward the tall, green-eyed man watching quietly. “I think not, Naomi. The police are on the way. You have finally crossed the line. I’ll have you arrested for this. You’ve broken the restraining order.”

“Do you actually think a jail cell can keep me? I’ll get out and I’ll come for my son again and again. You won’t always be so vigilant.”

Jim with Blair in his arms, had backed further and further away from the melee. Until they were up against the back wall. He turned frightened blue eyes toward Steven.
“Steven, did you hear her?”

“Yeah,” Steven shook his head. “That’s one crazy lady.”

“Steven, what am I going to do? If she doesn’t take Blair today she’ll get to him one day. What am I going to do?” Jim asked, terrified beyond belief.

Steven turned toward him. “Listen to me, Jim. Come on focus,” He whispered urgently. Finally Jim turned dazed, blue eyes toward Steven. “Okay, do I have your attention?” Jim nodded. “Okay, this is what I want you to do. ‘Go to Mr. Beans. Tell him this one word. Tell him ‘flight’. He’ll know what to do. Do you understand what I’m telling you?”

Jim nodded again. “Yes.”

“Okay. Go. Right now, while they’re busy arguing with one another. And no one’s watching you.” Jim turned toward the nearest exist. “Watchman?” Jim turned back. Steven touched his ear. “Four o’clock.”

Jim understood. “Alright.” With that Jim and Blair were gone.

Steven slumped against the wall sliding down it, burying his face into his bent knees he began trembling violently. H and Rafe, knelt in front of him worriedly.

William as if sensing something looked back. Seeing only one of his sons, he frantically looked around the hallway. Not seeing Jim or Blair he rushed to Steven.

“Steven? Son-where’s Jim and Blair?”

Steven launched himself at his father, sobbing. “They’re gone.”

“What do you mean, gone?” William asked, pulling his nearly hysterical son into his arms. “Gone where? Steven? Please, Son-answer me,” He asked, gently cupping Steven face in his hands.
“Where are your brothers?”

“S…someplace where they can be together, Dad. A…and Naomi can’t d…do a…anything t…to h…hurt t…them,” Steven replied, bottom lip trembling violently.

William pulled Steven tighter against him as his one remaining son began crying even harder. He looked over at Naomi. “See what you done? They’ve run because of you and I’ll see you in hell for this, if it’s the last thing I do.”
“Michael?”

“Yes, Grandma?” Michael responded, walking into the living room.

Mattie, sixty years young, smiled affectionately at her beautiful, eighteen year old, muscle-bound grandson who was once again eating. Michael was forever eating. This time it was a HUGH sandwich.

“Would you take Jim and Blair into their room? They’ve fallen asleep on the floor again.”

Michael shook his curly head sadly as he looked over at the young Sentinel/Guide pair tightly wrapped together by the window. “He finished listening to the update from his brother?”

Mattie nodded. “Yes. Still no progress in finding Naomi.” She sighed sadly. “I wished they could find her, so Jim and Blair could go home. I’ll miss them to be sure, but it tears Jim apart every time he listened to Steven. He needs his family almost as much as he needs Blair.”

Michael reached down to gently pick up Jim, who moaned softly. Quieting at Michael’s gentle words of comfort. He carried the young Sentinel into the room underneath the staircase. They would have given them the bedroom at the top of the loft, but three year olds and staircases were not friends in the best of time. He came back a few moments later to pick up Blair with a gentleness that belied
all the muscles and what he could do with them if he so chose.

“They really need to go home,” Michael said softly, sitting next to his beloved Grandma.

“I know. But the city has not been able to locate her since she met bail and disappeared. Everyone is out looking for her.”

“Do you think that Jim and Blair realize how much Cascade loves them?”

Mattie shrugged her shoulders. “At this point in time, I really think they don’t care,” She said softly, remembering back to when Malcolm had called her asking if she would be willing to look after Jim and Blair the world’s youngest Sentinel/Guide pairing.

Malcolm had told her that Steven-Jim’s younger brother had come to him at the barber shop asking for help in protecting his brothers from Naomi, Blair’s mother who was doing everything she could to separate them.

Together with many of Cascade more-than-willing citizens they had devised a plan to keep Jim and Blair safely away from Naomi and anyone else wanting to do harm to the vulnerable youngsters. At the moment outside the building on Prospect were undercover police watching the apartment complex. Nothing and no one came into the building without them knowing about it.

Doctors had come to look after Jim and Blair’s injuries. The young Sentinel’s stitches had been removed and Blair’s cast was scheduled to come out in another week.

People from every walk of life roamed the streets looking for Naomi and her followers as well as making sure the Sentinel/Guide pair stayed well, safe and above all together.

They’d even started delivering gifts to the pair. Anything from gifts of food, to every game imaginable, to colorful blankets. Everyone touched by the plight Blair and Jim faced and wanting to help in any way they could.

They knew that the pair could still choose to go to another city when they were old enough. It didn’t matter, they wanted to help. Nothing touched the heart of a city more than a child in need. Cascade was no different.
Mattie frowned remembering when Malcolm had brought Jim and Blair to her. Blair and Jim were two terrified children. Both pale and trembling violently from the ordeal they’d just under gone. Blair crying softly into Jim’s shoulder, holding onto his Sentinel tightly.

Jim had been in the same shape. Blue eyes haunted and red-rimmed, fine tremors coursing through his body as he held onto Blair just as tightly as his little Guide held onto him.

She’d taken one look at them and quickly gathered them to her. Her ample, bosom big enough to comfort two hurting children. It’d taken more than an hour to calm them. Blair had been the first, sensing that his Sentinel desperately needed him.

Blair had gathered Jim to him, wrapping those tiny arms around as much of his Sentinel as he could and began rocking him gently, humming a tune Mattie couldn’t place, but knew she’d heard it before.

The little Guide had done that every day they’d been in the apartment, three weeks now. Every afternoon, after Jim listened to Steven’s report.

It was the saddest thing she’d ever seen in her life. The youngsters standing by the window. Blair holding Jim’s hand as the Sentinel listened. Then Jim would fall to his knees, crying softly. Mattie thinking the burden held on such young shoulders was just to great. Blair would gather Jim to him, gently urging him onto a nest he’d made for them using many of the blankets they’d been given as gifts and he gently lured the hurting Sentinel to sleep.

Mattie wiped at her eyes with the back of her hand. If she ever came across Naomi she was going to give her a piece of her mind. Then she was going to kick her ass.

***

Jim was the first to wake. He moaned softly as Blair’s little arms automatically tightened around him.

“Jim okay?”

“I…” Jim cleared his throat. “I’m fine. I just wished we could go home.”
Blair crawled on top of his Sentinel, straddling his chest. “Soon,” He replied, kissing Jim’s forehead gently.

Jim looked into Blair’s big beautiful blue eyes. “I hope so. Mattie and Michael are really nice. Especially Mattie. But I want to go home,” He said, reaching up a hand to caress Blair’s pale face.

His little Guide moved into the touch. “Mattie and Michael very nice.”

Jim smiled. Blair had been trying his darnest to stop talking baby talk-his words not Jim’s. He’d started a week after they’d run, sometimes though he still forgot.

“Yeah they are, but they’re not Dad and Steven.”

“I know.”

“Baby?”

“Yup?”

“I’m sorry,” Jim said, eyes filling with those darn tears again.

“Why?”

“Cause your Mom hates me so m…much,” Jim breath hitched.

Blair shook Jim slightly. “No cry. Mommy wrong. Jim is good. Here.” He touched Jim’s chest over his heart.

Jim sighed sadly. “She doesn’t think so. Otherwise she wouldn’t be trying to take you from me. I’m sorry I’m a Sentinel. If I wasn’t, this never would have happened. You’d be with her and she wouldn’t hate me so much.”
Jim looked up startled at the tone in his little Guide’s voice. “W…what?”

“No …don’t be sad. Being a Sentinel is good. Not bad.”

Jim sighed again. “I wonder sometimes, Baby.”

“Don’t wonder, Jimmy. Never doubt the gift the Goddess gave you. And it was being a Sentinel that brought you together.” Jim turned toward the door to find Mattie watching them, her blue-green eyes solemn.

If Jim had ever had a grandmotherly type in mind it was Mattie. Short, plump with grey hair in a bun on top of her head and she even loved to make cookies. Spending the afternoons baking cookies with Blair while Jim did his homework.

“But if I wasn’t a Sentinel, Blair would be with his Mom and I wouldn’t be away from my family.”

Mattie came into the room. They scooted over to make room for her on the bed. “Yes, there is that, but that’s temporary. You’ll be able to go home soon.”

“And Blair still won’t have his Mom. Mine died, but Blair’s is still alive.”

“That’s what bothers you the most, isn’t it?” Mattie asked softly.

“Yes. His Mom can still sing to him and hold him when he doesn’t feel good, but she can’t do that now because of me,” Jim said, wiping the tears away impatiently.

“Do you see it bothering Blair?”

“Blair’s three. He’s still a baby.” Suddenly his little Guide bit him hard on the shoulder. “Ow!”
“I tell you, I NOT baby.” Blair said, indignantly.

“Sorry, Blair. It’s just that you’re so little. How could you know what you want?”

Blair tilted his head to one side as he contemplated his Sentinel, frowning. “I know from very first,” He told him testily. “I CHOSE you.”

Jim thought about it for a moment. “That’s right you did.”

Blair rolled his eyes at him, the way Steven was always doing. “Yes, did.” He caught himself. “Yes, I did,” He corrected carefully.

“I’m a dork, aren’t I?” Jim asked sheepishly.


“Yes, Blair,” Jim replied contritely. “I’m sorry.”

Mattie smiled. Blair could run rings around Jim, most of the time to the young Sentinel’s utter delight. She vowed to herself she’d talk to him tonight. See if they could straighten out a few things. Make the life of a very young Sentinel easier if she could.

“Dinners ready, lets eat.”

Mattie and Michael watched smiling as Blair carefully checked over Jim’s food as he did at every meal. Jim waiting patiently for his little Guide to finish so he could eat. Tonight was spaghetti with meatballs.

Jim giggled softly when Blair tried to spear a meatball and it went flying across the table, hitting Michael in the face, splattering spaghetti sauce all over him.
“This yours, Blair?” Michael asked, picking the meatball from his lap, where it’d landed. Cleaning his face with a napkin using his free hand.

“Mine,” Blair nodded. “Give it back.”

Michael shook his head. “Nope, mine-now.” He replied, popping it into his mouth.

Blair stared at him in outrage, before looking up at his Sentinel for help. Jim shrugged. “Sorry, Baby. I think you lost your meatball. Want one of mine?”

Blair looked at Jim’s plate. “Der only one left,” He said sadly, glaring at Michael. “and it yours.”

Jim smiled. “How about we share it?” The little Guide nodded, still glaring at Michael. “It’ll be okay. We still got cookies. You and Mattie made oatmeal this time didn’t you? And they smell good.”

Blair forgot he was mad at Michael for taking his meatball as he smiled over at Mattie happily. “Oatmeal. Making cookies fun.”

“Yeah it is. Pretty soon we’ll have you an expert at making cookies,” Mattie replied, handing the heaping plate of cookies to the youngsters. “Are you going to share with Michael?”


“Thank you, most kind sir,” Michael said accepting the plate. “So Jim did you finish your homework?”

“Almost,” Jim replied, helping Blair with his glass of milk. “I just have to go over the chapter on the Civil War and I’m done.”

Mattie, a retired school teacher was making sure that Jim didn’t fall behind. The class assignments had been passed to her from Jim’s regular teachers. The young Sentinel would be done at the same time the rest of his class was. No summer school for Jim because of everything that was happening.
Mattie would see to it.

Blair was still too young to be in school, but reading at a level that was amazing, truly amazing. Night after night they sat and watch in awe as the little Guide lay down on the couch with Jim and read to him from books most adults didn’t understand. Mattie and Michael weren’t quite sure what they got the biggest kick out of, if it was the fact that Blair was reading at the age of three. Or the fact that Jim was purring contently the whole time Blair read.

The young Sentinel/Guide pair had come to mean a lot to both Michael and Mattie. And it would be a sad day for them when they had to be parted from them. From the first day they’d met, to the first night when they’d all cuddled together on the bed at the top of the loft. Blair and Jim protectively sandwiched between them. Mattie and Michael each taking turns easing the nightmares the two children where experiencing.

Morning had found Blair wide awake, gently touching the ridges of Michael’s tight abdomen with a tiny hand.

“Hi, Sweetpea,” Michael had said, hoarsely.

Blair had smiled at him shyly. “Hi. Hurt?” he asked, touching the ridges.

“No. I did that on purpose.”

Blair tilted his curly head to the side. “Why?”

“I like the way it looks and feels.”

“Oh.”

Michael smiled at the little Guide as tiny hands continued to explore the muscles of his abdomen.

“Do you like my muscles?”
Blair nodded. “Like.”

Michael tucked a stray lock of curly hair in back of Blair’s ear. “Do you think you’d want to get a six pack when you get older?”

Blair thought about it then shrugged his slight shoulders, making Michael smile. He looked over to find Jim wide awake and watching them with an unfathomable look in his blue eyes.

“Hi, Jim. How do you feel?”

“Better.”

“Are you hungry?”

“I guess.”

Michael looked at Blair who was watching his Sentinel quietly. Almost as if he was checking him to make sure he really was alright. “And you, Sweetpea? You hungry.”


“Want pancakes?” Michael had asked as he got up from the bed.

“Yes, please.”

“You got it, Sweetpea? Wanna stir the batter?”

“Can I?” he asked looking at his Sentinel for approval.
Jim nodded, smiling. “Anything you want, Baby.”

“Jim say yes.”

Blair offered his arms to Michael, who swung him up. “Cool. Let’s get cracking, Sweetpea.”

Thus began their first day together. Two boys hiding from a vengeful mother willing to do anything to separate them and two stranger willing to do anything to make sure they stayed together.

***

After dinner and clean up, which they all helped with. Jim was finishing his homework at the kitchen table as Blair laid on his floor coloring with Michael. Mattie sat in her favorite chair crocheting, watching her newly acquired family happily.

Michael was her only grandson. She’d helped raise him when his mother had died suddenly when he was just a baby. She’d nurtured him and watched him grow into a fine man. But she regretted not having more grandchildren to spoil.

She looked over at Blair and Michael. The little Guide wasn’t mad at Michael any more, but then Blair never held a grudge. He just didn’t have it in him. She smiled as they passed colors back and forth between them quietly. Hard to believe a grown man of eighteen and some one as muscled as Michael would be on the floor coloring with a three year old.

But then Blair did help Michael with his exercises. Her grandson doing crunches with Blair on his legs or pushups with the little Guide on his back. Mattie wasn’t sure who was enjoying it more—Blair or Michael.

Blair was a loving little fellow. Always ready with a hug and a kiss. Especially with Jim. If there was any one that was truly loved it was Jim. Who soaked it up like a sponge.

Jim on the other hand was reserved with those he dealt with, blue eyes becoming cold and distant at times. Reserved with everyone but Blair. For his little Guide there was no reserve and nothing withheld. Jim adored Blair, the love shone out of his blue eyes every time he looked at his little Guide.
There were times that Mattie would catch Jim looking at her. He’d quickly look away when she noticed. Yet it wasn’t quick enough to hide the wistfulness in those startling blue eyes of his. Jim missed his mother, and he desperately needed a mother figure in his life.

Mattie had tried. Offering affection and cuddling to the young Sentinel in the same measure as she did to Blair. Jim would readily accept the affection, but he held himself back. Aloof at times.

She smiled up at him as he brought over his homework. “Done?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Sit down, Jimmy. I want to have a talk with you.” He sat down next to her on the couch. Mattie pulling him against her side. He went readily enough, sighing contentedly. She gently caressed his hair. “We need to talk about some of the things that are bothering you. If you don’t, it’ll eat away at you until you don’t know which way is up.”

He looked up at her from where his head rested on her shoulder. “There’s nothing to talk about,” He said softly.

“Meet my eyes and tell me that.” Jim wasn’t able to just as she knew he wouldn’t. “Malcolm tells me you’re destined to be one of the best Sentinels the planet has ever known.”

“I guess.”

“That’s a big responsibility for such young shoulders. Not to mention having to take care of a three year old.”

Jim sighed again when Mattie covered him with a colorful, crochet afghan, another gift from the fans of the young Sentinel/Guide pair, with her free hand. “I love taking care of Blair.”

“I know you do, but it hurts you that he’s away from his mother?”
“Yes. He’s still has his mother and they can’t be together because of me.”

“That’s not your fault. It’s hers. She could easily accept you and have Blair in her life. She’s chosen a different route because of stupidity or just plain craziness.”

Jim looked up, blue eyes shimmering with unshed tears. “She hates me and I don’t understand why. Is it because I’m a Sentinel?”

“The problem is not you, Honey. It’s her. I honestly think she doesn’t know why she’s doing it.”

“She’s his Mom. I don’t understand why she’s being the way she is.”

Mattie sighed. “I don’t understand either, Honey. That’s just one of those things that may never have an answer.”

“Maybe it’d be better if Blair broke the bond with me so he could be with his Mom,” Jim said with such sadness it broke Mattie’s heart. “I’m not worth his M…mom.” His voice catching at the end with a sob.

Blair heard his curly head popping up. “Jim?” he asked worriedly.

Jim gave him a watery smile. “It’s okay, Baby. Go back to coloring. I’m fine.”

Blair did as his Sentinel asked, every now and then those big blue eyes looking over to make sure.

“Don’t ever say that, Jimmy. You’re worth a hundred of her. Blair chose you. Doesn’t that tell you something, Honey?” Mattie asked softly.

“Huh?”

“Blair loves you.”
“I know,” Jim whispered. “But maybe he shouldn’t.”

“Oh, Honey, that’s not an option. From what I hear he went into the room at the Sentinel Center where you were and demanded you bond with him. Gave you no choice.”

“Yes, he did,” Jim said, smiling as he remembered.

“He could have loved anyone on the planet, yet out of all those millions and millions of people and a hundred Sentinels he could have bonded. He chose you over all of them, even over his Mom.” Mattie kissed Jim’s forehead. “It makes you one in a million and one very lucky fella. Both of you are.”

Jim looked up at her hopefully. “You think so?”

“I know so. Blair is just as lucky as you are. You James Joseph Ellison are one fine catch. And if I were a lot younger and a Guide I would love to bond with you.” She smiled when Jim blushed a bright pink. “But I’m afraid that Blair would kick my butt.”

Jim looked over at his little Guide who was quietly watching them, no longer coloring. “You’re probably right.”

***

William walked into his boy’s bedroom to find Steven sitting on his bed. Blair’s wolf in his hands. “Are you alright, Son?”

Steven wiped at the tears coursing down his face. “Not really, Dad.”

“I know. I miss them too.”

Steven moved over to make room for his Dad. “When are they going to find Naomi so Jim and Blair can come home? I miss them a lot. I’ll be nicer to Jim about his anally retentive ways. I swear I will, just let them come home.”
William gathered Steven into his arms, rubbing his back soothingly. “I’m sure Jim will appreciate the gesture. But until Naomi’s found they’re better off where they’re at.”

“Why can’t they find her?” Steven asked in frustration. “It’s been weeks.”

“I don’t know, Son. Have you talked to Mr. Beans today?”

Steven had told his Dad what he’d done to keep his brothers safe the first chance he’d gotten. William would have liked to be informed ahead of time what the plans were, but at this point he wasn’t about to be petty about it. He just asked to be kept in the loop next time. A next time that hopefully never came.

“Yeah. They’re doing great according to Mr. Beans. Blair will be ready to have his cast removed next week. Jim’s taken his finals and he passed them all.”

William smiled. “That’s great. We’ll have to celebrate when they come home.”

“Fisherman’s Wharf?”

“If you like and can get your brothers to agree. Perhaps we could go to the mountains for a few days. Get away from everything for a while. Is Jim having any trouble with zones?”

“None at all. And Blair has been baking up a storm with Mr. Beans, Mom. According to Mr. Beans, Blair stirs a mean cookie dough.”

William chuckled. “I can imagine.”

Just then Sally came into the room. “Mr. Ellison, there’s a man to see you.”

“Okay, I’ll be right there. Maybe it’s the police with word on Naomi.” It wasn’t.

William recognized the green-eyed man waiting by the door as soon as he came down the stairs. “What do you want? Planning on scaring more children?”
The green-eyes man had the grace to look guilty. “I am sorry about that.”

“Your sorry’s doesn’t bring my sons home does it Mr.…?”

“Peterson. Daniel Peterson.”

“Mr. Peterson. What do you want? Doing more dirty work for Naomi?”

“Please can we have seat? I’d like to talk to you about your sons.”

William didn’t do what he sorely wanted to and throw Daniel Peterson out the door. Instead he motioned for him to sit. “Alright, but please say what you have to and leave.”

“Alright. I know where Naomi is.”

“And? Are you here to tell me so the police can get her and my sons can come home? Where they belong.”

“Not exactly.”

William sighed heavily. “Then what are you saying Mr. Peterson? You are trying my patience.”

Daniel looked over at William. Noticing the circles under the blue eyes and how tired the elder Ellison looked. “You miss your sons, don’t you?”

“You state the obvious, Mr. Peterson. What the hell do you want?”

“I’ve come to help you.”
William gave him an incredulous look. “Oh, please. You were helping Naomi try to steal one of my sons and all of a sudden I’m suppose to believe you want to help me?”

“I know it’s hard to believe, but it’s true.”

Just then Simon walked into the living room. “What the hell are you doing here?”

“I’ve come to help.”


Steven coming down the stairs gasped. “I am SO telling on you.”

Simon raised a finger at Steven. “You better not. If Blair gives me grief over the cussing I’m coming after you. I know where you live young man.”

Daniel watching the interaction quietly. “I’m sorry for all the grief Naomi and I as well as my followers caused you and your family. Naomi led us wrong. She told us Blair was in danger.”

William frowned. “Blair is in no danger.”

“I know that now. She lied to us about the broken arm and about a bruise Blair had on his face when he first joined your family. She had pictures. She led us to believe he was being mistreated. And that was why she wanted the bond broken. To free her son of the mistreatment.”

“It’s been three weeks Mr….” Simon started

“Peterson. Daniel Peterson.”

“Mr. Peterson, why are you barely coming to us now?” Simon asked sitting next to William.
“After what I saw at the school things didn’t not seem right. It took that long to get the right information and to get Naomi to tell the truth.”

“Now you know it. What now?” William asked, frowning.

“Now we correct the mistakes made. Make apologies and hope they are accepted.” Daniel replied. “Plus I would like to make a most humble request.”

“What?”

“The bond between Jim and Blair is unbreakable.”

“I told Naomi that,” Simon hissed.

“Yes. You did. But I think that you do not realize to what extent, exactly how special Blair really is.”

“What are you saying?” William asked.

“Blair can read auras as well as chakra points, can’t he?”

“We don’t know if he…” William started to answer when Steven broke in.

“Yes.” He’d been quietly listening as he sat on the arm of the couch next to his Dad.

Both William and Simon looked at Steven in surprise. “He can?” Simon asked.

“Yes. He can only see Jim’s though.”

Daniel smiled. “Because he only wants to read Jim’s. If he chose, he could read others as well.”
Steven nodded. “Yeah, that’s what we thought, too.”

“We are going to SO have word later, Steven,” Simon told him grimly.

Steven shrugged unrepentantly. “Hey, if they wanted you to know they would have told you.”

“Yes, I guess,” Simon conceded, reluctantly.

“I can help train Blair to use his gifts.” Daniel offered solemnly. “I did not realize how special this particular bonding pair was until I saw them with my own eyes.”

“Is that the price for telling us where Naomi is? If it is it sucks. And besides Blair can use his gifts on his own, he doesn’t need you,” Steven told Daniel, glaring daggers at him. “How do we know that—that’s not just a way for you to get into the house and get your grubby hands on Blair? On MY baby brother?”

Daniel sighed softly. “I know I’ve given you no reason to trust me. In this you can. On my honor as a Shaman. I will do no further harm to you, your brothers or your family.”

“And Naomi?” William asked, unsure what to believe at this point.

“Sits at the airport as do my followers. They will be taking her back to Tibet and get her the help she obviously needs.”

Simon looked at him in suspicion. “How do we know you’re telling the truth?”

“Oh my word as a Shaman.”


“I know you have no reason to trust me.”
William looked at him. “Do you blame us?”

“No. That is why Naomi waits at the airport. So you can have whoever you like go and check my information as well as see the plane depart."

“Simon would you do the honors, please,” William asked the Doctor after a long moment.

The Doctor rose to his feet quickly. “My pleasure,” He replied, motioning for Daniel to precede him to the door. “I’ll call as soon as I see the plane take off.”

“Good. Mr. Peterson?” Daniel turned back toward William. “There will be conditions when and IF you will be allowed contact with my son.”

Daniel smiled. “I wouldn’t expect it any other way.”

Steven jumped up with a whoop of joy once the front door had close. “My brothers are coming home. Blair and Jim are coming home.” Suddenly Steven stopped jumping around the room. “Oh-oh.”

“What’s wrong, son?”

“I messed up the coding system Jim’s got going in our bedroom. He’s gonna kill me.”

***

GOING HOME

Mattie hung up the phone. “Michael?”

Michael came into the living room carrying a plate of cookies. “Yes, Grandma?”
“That was your father. Blair and Jim can go home.”

Michael gave a huge smile. “That’s great.” Suddenly the smile vanished. “Oh,” he said very, very quietly.

“I’ll miss them too.” Mattie said softly in understanding.

“I promised to show Jim some exercises. Not weigh lifting ones ‘cause he’s to young.” He gave a tiny smile. “I think he wants to buff up for Blair. But some he can do right now. He said that he thinks Dr. Banks will let him join football this school year. He couldn’t cause last year he’d just gone online. Oh, Goddess, I’m rambling. Grandma I…”

“I understand, Michael really I do,” Mattie said, watching Michael paced anxiously back and forth in front of her.

“And then there’s Blair. He so little, so cute. With the biggest blue eyes I’ve ever see. And he so friendly. To friendly. It’ll get him in trouble one day, I just know it.”

Mattie smiled, shaking her head affectionately. “Are Jim and Blair still asleep?”

“Yes, why?”

“Men make everything more difficult than it has to be. Go and pack your bag while I get Jim and Blair’s stuff together.”

Michael looked at her. “Grandma?”

“Go pack your bag. It’ll be alright.”

***
“William!” Blair shouted happily.

“Son!” William replied, reaching for his littlest boy. Laughing happily when Blair gave him the sloppiest kisses it’d ever been his pleasure to receive.

“I miss you.”

“I missed you too. Jim!” William gathered his eldest son to him with his free arm.

“Dad! We’re home. I can’t believe we’re finally home. Steven!”

“Hey there, big brother. I missed you,” Steven replied joyfully, blue eyes filling with tears.

“I missed you. I missed everyone,” Jim said looking around at his family and friends gathered to greet them. Even Rafe, he thought to himself, frowning slightly as Rafe gave his little Guide a welcome back hug. H and Carl close by smiling happily at Blair.

“Okay, everyone. Let’s go outside. We’ve got sandwiches and party food.” William told the happy group. That’s when he noticed the two people he remembered as Malcolm Beans, Mom and Son. “Welcome. Thank you very much for taking such good care of my sons,” He said softly, offering his hand.

Mattie took his hand in both of hers. “You’re very welcome. You have very special boys.”

William turned to see all three of his son’s happily talking and giggling. Blair giving Steven kiss after kiss and Steven returning them just as joyfully. “Yes, I do.” He looked at Malcolm’s son. “Thank you too, Michael. Thank-you for bring them back to us.”

“No problem. I really enjoyed looking after them, a lot,” Michael replied, looking at his grandmother when she gently nudged him encouragingly. “About that…”

“Yes?” William asked, eyeing the suddenly blushing Michael curiously.
“I was just wondering…?”

“What?”

“I know it was just until they could come home and all, but could I stay and help look after them, too?”

William met the blue-green puppy dog eyes Michael was giving him. He’d never in his life seen such a hopeful look, except from Blair. “I…I don’t know what to say.”

“Please? I’ve grown to love Jim and Blair a lot. I’ll help guard them with my life and I promise to help keep them out of trouble. And I don’t eat much.” Mattie snorted ungrandmotherly like. “Grandma, please, your ruining my chances of staying with Jim and Blair,” Michael hissed softly.

“Sorry.”

“And I come free of charge,” Michael added hopefully.

“Free of charge?”

“I’ll do it for free. I just want to stay with them and help any way I can.”

William shook his head. Damn. Jim and Blair’s father wasn’t going to let him stay with them. Michael felt his eyes fill with tears of loss. He was really going to miss Jim and Blair. No more coloring with Blair. No more Blair helping him with his exercises. No more teasing Jim, having Jim tease back. No more watching the way Jim and Blair were together. No more little brothers. No more. Michael wondered if he could use their bathroom so he could have some privacy to cry in a way that wasn’t very manly.

“No, Michael. If you’re going to help us protect my sons, it’ll be as a paying job. It wouldn’t be right otherwise,” William said, looking to where Jim stood watching them quietly. He smiled at his son, who returned it happily.

Michael let out a whoop so loud it echoed in William’s ears. He flinched slightly, but laughed softly when Michael ran over to where his sons waited. “I can stay. Your Dad said I could stay and help
look after you.”

William turned toward Mattie. “Your Grandson moves fast for someone so BIG.”

Mattie watched Michael dance around with Blair in his arms, the little Guide giggled happily. “Yes, he does. He’ll take good care of them as if they were his own brothers. One thing though.”

William looked at her curiously. “What?”

“Michael comes with a built in Grandmotherly type. Who loves to spoil her grandchildren,” Mattie told him with a huge smile, walking toward where all the boys were happily talking amongst themselves.

At this rate he was going to need a new house soon. Real soon. William thought to himself, chuckling softly, as he closed the front door.
Hugs and Kisses


Blair dipped a toe delicately into the lake, pulling it back out quickly. “Huh-huh, it cold.”

“It’s not that bad once you get in.” Jim beckoned his little Guide with his hands. Blair looked so cute in his Batman swimming shorts their Dad had gotten him. The cast had finally come off his arm so there wasn’t a problem there. It was getting Blair into the water.

“I could pick him up and throw him in,” Steven said, coming up to them, holding a can of Coke.

“Don’t you dare. I’ve almost got him convinced to come in on his own,” Jim told him at Blair’s look of horror.

“You’ve been trying—what half hour? I hate telling you this big brother, but it ain’t happening this century. I think he needs a little push.”

“If you want to die, push him in. I’ll hunt you down to the ends of the earth and make you pay and pay and then pay some more. You know I can do it, too,” Jim told him warningly.
“Ooh, another threat and us just being back together a week. I could take that all wrong, Watchman,” Steven replied, sniffing.

Jim rolled his eyes. “Oh, please give it a rest. And besides I still haven’t forgiven you for what you did to the bedroom. It took me three days to get it looking right.”

“Looking right, my buns. You’re so anal, you coded the dust bunnies under the beds.”

“I did not, you exaggerate.”

“Michael, did Jim, using his heightened eyesight, code the dust bunnies he found under the beds or not?” Steven asked the newest member of the family.

Michael smiled. “I cannot tell a lie. He was indeed coding dust bunnies at least until Blair went up and told him to stop it.” He looked over to where Blair had wandered off and was now inspection a bug. “Hey, Sweetpea why aren’t you in the water?”

Blair looked up. “Water cold.”

“Come on. Baby-it’s not that cold. Please for me,” Jim coaxed. Giving Blair a look guaranteed to woe the birds out of the trees or in this case a little Guide into the water.

“Oh, alright.” Blair sighed unhappily, walking toward where Jim waited.

The young Sentinel gave him a brilliant smile. “That’s my, Baby. We’ll teach you to swim in no time.”

“No like,” Blair said as he willingly went into Jim’s arms.

“I know, but it’ll be okay. You’ll see,” Jim replied very carefully moving Blair into the semi-warm water. Showing him it wasn’t that bad.
The little Guide wrapped his arms around his Sentinel’s neck when he got dipped. “Cold.” He shivered.

“It’ll warm up in a second and then we’ll start teaching you to swim.”

“Why?”

Jim moved the water over Blair so he’d get use to it. “Cause everyone should know how to swim.”

“Why?” Blair asked again as Jim moved them further into the water and away from H, Carl and Rafe who were splashing up a storm as they played volleyball in the water. Not wanting Blair to get scared. It taken way to long to get him in as it was.

“Cause I want my little Guide to know how to swim. It’s important to me.”

Blair wrapped his arms around Jim’s neck tighter as they moved further into the lake. “Oh.”

William watched from where he sat on a lounge chair, smiling. It taken some time to find a cabin that would be big enough to bring everyone, but he’d done it. A rambling cabin with a small lake the kids could swim in. It’d taken five cars to bring everyone, plus food and extra clothing, but they’d done it. They had a week with clear skies and family and friends. Could anyone ask for anything more?

He looked over at Simon, who was in charge of the barbeque. The Doctor was trying to cook the hotdogs and hamburgers and bond with his son Daryl at the same time.

Daryl had other ideas as he kept looking longingly at the water and the children playing in it.

“You do know how to get away from it all,” Mattie told him as she made herself comfortable in the chair right next to his.

William smiled at her. “I do my best.”

There was a joyful yell and they both turned to see Daryl dive happily into the water, his father
giving up on the father/son bonding for now.

“Look over there.” Mattie motioned to where Blair sat on the edge of the lake. Jim close to him still in the water, face tucked against his little Guide’s neck. Blair’s cheek resting on the top of his Sentinel’s head. Arms wrapped around each other, both swaying slightly. The contentment coming off of Jim in waves so tangible they were almost visible. “Isn’t that the cutest thing you ever saw?”

“Hmm.”

“What is Blair humming? I’ve been trying to place it and haven’t been able to.”

“It’s a religious hymn Blair heard one day on TV when we were channel checking. Can’t remember the name though,” Steven said on his way to where Sally was still laying out food on the buffet table.

“They love each other very much don’t they?” Mattie asked softly.

“Yes, they do. That’s why it’s very important to keep them together.”

Mattie shook her head sadly. “I don’t understand why Naomi would want to break up something so special. If only she could see them together.”

“Maybe one day she’ll see that she’s wrong.”

“Will you let her see Blair if that ever happens?”

William frowned thoughtfully. “I don’t know. Perhaps. Blair is after all her son.”

“Yes,” Mattie replied, looking over at the young Sentinel/Guide pair still swaying together.

“Come on, let go,” Steven told Michael as they fought over the last hot dog.
“No. You let go. You’ve already had four,” Michael replied, tugging.

“You’ve had four too, let go.”

“You let go. I saw it first, lard-ass.”


“You are SO dead,” Michael told Steven as the little Guide’s head popped up. Already having to suffer through a lecture about cussing from a three year old. “And don’t call me Mikey.”

Steven pulled the hot dog out of Michael’s hands. “Ha. Only if you survive Blair. It’s been nice knowing you, Mikey.”

“I’ll kill you before Blair can get to me. I swear,” Michael said, taking off after Steven.


Jim looked over at the two chasing each other, shaking his head ruefully he went right back to cuddling with his little Guide. Sighing contently when Blair started humming to him again.

“Do you think Steven and Michael noticed that Simon’s just finished grilling another batch of hot dogs?” William asked, chuckling softly as the two continued chasing each other. Steven barely staying ahead.

Mattie smiled affectionately. “Not yet. Give them a second. There you go, the scent of fresh food has now hit their noses.”

Suddenly Steven stopped at the buffet table when he noticed the plate stacked high with hot dogs, Michael almost running into him. “Hmm, food. Here have a hot dog, Mikey.”
“Thank you, don’t mind if I do. Pass the mustard, please.”

“Want relish?”

“Yes, please and don’t call me Mikey.”

Mattie laughed softly. “See. All is well, now.”

“Yes.”

“I want to thank you for accepting Michael so readily into your family. He’s been drifting ever since he got out of high school, not sure what he wanted to do with his life. Well besides the weight-lifting and eating. And he loves your sons. They’ve given him purpose.”

William watched Steven and Michael fighting over a bag of potato chips. Neither of them paying any attention to the other three bags on the table. “Well he certainly fits right in,” he said, chuckling.

As the rest of the youngsters noticed that the food was ready, they started drifting toward the heavily laden table.

“Jim you and Blair quit being mushy now and come eat before muscle-head finishes all the food,” Steven yelled, loudly.


Steven rolled his eyes as he handed Jim two hot dogs. “Oh, please like it takes brains to lift a dumbbell, dumbbell. Oh, and Blair did you hear Mikey? He cussed.”


“No do again? Never ever?” Blair asked, shaking his head when Jim offered him a root beer.
Nodding when offered a little carton of chocolate milk.


“Okay,” Blair replied, as he took his Sentinel’s hand as Jim led them to a nearby tree.


“You just have to have the touch,” Michael preened.

“Yeah, well you’re definitely touched. That’s for sure.” Steven snorted as he followed his brothers with a plate filled with food that belied the fact he’d just eaten enough for six.

After everyone had stuffed themselves they lay scattered around the yard. Most of the children asleep. Happily filled with good food and wooed by the warm sunshine. Jim and Blair lay under the same tree they’d eaten under sleeping peacefully, covered by a blanket Steven had brought over for them.

Steven now sat quietly next to them reading a comic. Michael sat on the other side of Blair and Jim also reading a comic from Steven’s stash. Both watching over the Sentinel/Guide protectively.

Steven had readily accepted Michael into the household. The whole family had. But with Steven it was hard to tell, the way the middle son and the bodybuilder fought. It just seemed to be the type of relationship they’d developed. Steven offered a comic over Jim and Blair’s sleeping forms. Michael smiled at him accepting it.

The adults sat around the picnic table talking quietly. “That’s a beautiful blanket.” William said of the afghan covering two of his sons.

“Yes. It was a gift,” Mattie replied.

“A gift?” William asked frowning slightly. “A gift from whom?”
Simon eyed the eldest Ellison. Damn. He was hoping to put it off for a while, but it didn’t look like it was going to happen. William was eyeing them suspiciously.

“Will, we’ve got something to tell you about the whole Naomi incident and what was involved in protecting Jim and Blair.”

William sighed heavily. “I knew it. Alright tell me.”

“You remember what I told you back at Steven’s birthday dinner. About everyone in Cascade knowing about Jim and Blair?”

“Yes. Go on.”

“I know that you want Jim and Blair to grow up as normally as possible. And I’m not quite sure how you’ll take this,” Simon said worriedly. William was an overprotective father whose sons had been threatened. Had been away from home because of that threat.

“Tell me, Simon.”

“Okay. There were many people involved in protecting Jim and Blair?”

William looked at Simon curiously. “How many people.”

Here goes. “The city of Cascade.”

“What? Say that again. I not quite sure I heard you right.”

“Well, William wasn’t yelling, that was a good sign. Simon thought to himself. “The city of Cascade.”

William blinked. “Okay, I did hear right.”
“Yes. Cascade loves your sons, William. They’ll do and did whatever it takes to keep them safe. The mayor, off duty policemen and women, guarded the apartment they were at. Taxi drivers, metermaids, postmen, regular citizens like you and I went out of their way to make sure Naomi couldn’t get with in an inch of your sons. Dozens of people were at the airport making sure Naomi got on the plane for Tibet. Some were even ON the plane.”

William covered his mouth with his hand as he thought about the implications of what Simon had just told him. “Simon…”

“I know. It’s a bit overwhelming.”

“It’s a bit more than that, Simon.”

“I know, Will. I know. Your sons brought a city together in a way that has never happened before in Sentinel history.” Simon smiled. “They’re rewriting the book and they don’t even know it.”

“They will be told, Simon. There will be no secrets withheld from my sons. And this will also not influence their decision when they get older and are ready to choose where they want to go.”

Simon nodded. “Alright.”

“Is that where the blanket came from as well as the other things they brought back with them?”

“Yes.”

“No more gifts. Urge everyone not to send gifts to my sons. This is extremely important, Simon. I do appreciate the gesture, truly I do, but I will not allow them to be overly spoiled. I want Jim, Blair and Steven to grow into strong, well-balanced men.”

“I think your half way there, William.” Mattie spoke for the first time in a while. “And you should be very proud of all your sons.”
William smiled, looking over to where his sons still rested. “I am. One problem though.”

“What?” Simon asked.

“How do you thank a city for helping you protect your sons?”

***

HUGS AND MANY KISSES

“William,” Blair exclaimed happily, launching himself at his father. Who was sitting in a chair enjoying the sunshine.

“Son!” William replied, easily catching him. “Did you sleep well?” he asked, tucking a stray lock of hair behind Blair’s ear.

“Good,” Blair answered as he made himself comfortable in William’s lap. “I miss you berry, much.”

“I missed you too, Son.”

“Know what?” Blair asked solemnly, blue eyes looking up at him innocently.

“No, what?”

“Gots hugs and many, many kisses to give.”

“You do?”

Blair nodded earnestly. “Yups. Missed my fader, berry much.”
William felt his eyes fill with tears and he had to fight with the lump in his throat. “T…that’s the first time you’ve called me Father.”

Blair smiled up at him. “Can call Daddy?” he asked shyly.

William blinked away the tears. “You sure can. I’d love it if you did.”

“Cool. Know what else?”

“No what?”

Blair’s blue eyes widened dramatically. “I give Steven many makeup hugs and kisses, but no give to Daddy yet,” He said sadly.

William chuckled wetly. “Oh. Well, I think we can take care of that right now. What do you say?” Rubbing Blair’s tiny back affectionately.

Blair smiled up at him brilliantly. “Cool.”

William returned the smile. “Yes, very cool.”

***

William sighed happily. It’d been a great week. The haunted look on Jim’s face had finally lifted. Steven quit hovering over his brothers, thinking they were going to disappear again and Blair had learned to swim.

He smiled thinking back to when Jim had called them all over to show them. Jim had been so proud of his little Guide as Blair paddled toward him in the water. Blair smiling up at everyone shyly, when they’d all clapped encouragingly at his accomplishment.

All three of his sons now looked happy and relaxed. The vacation had done them all good. Blair was still giving him makeup hugs and kisses every chance he got. Steven had started complaining that he
hadn’t gotten that many makeup hugs and kisses and was starting to feel jealous.

Blair looked at Steven, head tilted to the side as he sat in William’s lap and telling him, “Daddy, need more hugs and kisses dan you. He DADDY.”

Steven didn’t have a comeback for that one. Simply saying, “Hmm, I guess you’re right.”

They were going home now. Time to get back to work, but William was thinking of buying the cabin. His family and friend had-had such just a good time there. He’d like to bring them back again someday.

William frowned slightly looking around the gas station, wondering where everyone had gotten to. Simon was near one of the cars talking with his son. Sally was trading recipes with Mattie by her red Mustang, but no sons and no son’s friends.

“And I was, have you seen the boys?”

“I saw them all go toward the house at the back of the gas station,” Daryl answered for his Father.

William nodded, going in search of the wayward youths. He came on them all huddled together.

“How are we going to do this?” He heard Jim whisper to the others.

“We could get Blair to give Dad “The Look”. Steven whispered back.

“But that didn’t word so well the last time.”

“Just ask him,” Rafe suggested.

*Oh, God this didn’t sound good at all.* William thought to himself. “Ask Dad what?”
Six heads popped up startled. “D…Dad, you scared us,” Jim said, nibbling on his lower lip worriedly.

William smiled. “Obviously. Ask Dad what?”

Three boys parted to one side, three to the other, revealing Blair holding a puppy in his arms.

William closed his eyes, biting back a laugh.

“Please, Dad? We’ll all help take care of him. Please?” Steven pleaded.

“Daddy, peeze,” Blair pleaded, big blue eyes widening beseechingly.

“I’ll help take care of him too, “Jim added, eyes just as wide and pleading as Blair’s.

“Me, too. I’ll help train him,” Michael said. “We’ll all help.”

*Oh, God. I can barely resist Blair giving ‘The Look”, how the hell am I suppose to resist it seven times over?* William thought as he looked at his sons and their friends and at the squirming puppy, happily licking Blair’s face.

All of them looking at him so hopefully. Even the owner of the puppy was looking at him, smiling at his predicament. Which really wasn’t much of one when you thought about it.

“Allright. Alright. You can keep him,” William told them. Laughing at the look on all their faces. William guessed that they all thought he would need major persuading. “Oh, don’t look like that, it’s not if I’m immune to ‘The Look” after all. I can barely resist when Bair gives it. How am I suppose to resist seven of you giving it. Blair, bring your puppy here, let me have a look at him.”

William went to his knees allowing the newest member of his family to lick his face. At the rate his family was growing, he was DEFINITELY going to be needing a new house.
“So, how goes the house hunting, Will?” Simon asked, coming into the dining room to see brochures and pamphlets scattered all over the table.

William sighed. “Not that well. I haven’t done this in some time. I forgot how hard searching for a house really is.”

Simon sat next to him at the dining room table. “Have you been able to narrow it down?”

“Some. But there’s something that’s not right with each of the choices. Like this one.” William picking up a brochure, handing it to Simon. “It has enough bedrooms and baths, but the bedrooms are the size of a small, really small closets. The boy’s room has to be big enough to sleep four boys- Steven refused to sleep away from his brothers and Michael is adamant about being close to Blair and Jim as well. And the room has to house all their stuff. This one,” He said pointing to pamphlet. “has big enough bedrooms, but not enough bathrooms.”

“You have your work cut out for you.”

“Yes.”

Just then an excited yapping could be heard coming from the kitchen. Both William and Simon watched as Barkie, the newest member of the family chased Wofie into the living room.
“You could always just add on to this house.”

“I could, but it’s not viable,” William replied. They watched as Barkie ran back into the dining room, now being chased by both Wofie and Blackie. “We need a new house for our expanding family.”

“Will?”

William looked up from one of the pamphlets. “Yes?”

“Are you sure you don’t mind Daryl moving in with us?” Simon asked. His ex-wife had found a job in another state and Daryl refused to go with her. She’d had no choice but to allow him to stay with Simon. “I could always find an apartment for Daryl and myself.”

William looked at him. “Is that what you want?”

Simon gave him a small smile. “No. I love being around you and your sons. Plus Daryl really loves your sons. I think they’re one of the reasons he didn’t want to go with my ex-wife.”

William returned the smile. “Well, that answers the question.”

Simon bit his lip. “Hmm, Will?”

“Hmm?” William asked distractedly as he sorted through the scattered pamphlets.

“I’ve got something to tell you?”

William looked up. “Oh?”

“Ah, yes.” Simon moved around in his chair uncomfortably. “When Daryl moves in it won’t just be Daryl.”
William covered his face with his hands, moaning softly. After a few minutes he looked up. “Okay, who or what’s coming with him?”

“Two hamsters and an aquarium full of fish?” Simon said hurriedly as if to lessen the impact.

“They’re little hamsters, only yay big.” Simon indicated with his thumb and forefinger to about two inches. “Starsky and Hutch won’t be any trouble at all. I’ll make sure of it.”

“And the fish?”

“Angelfish. Three of them. They’ll be in whatever room turns out to be Daryl’s.”

“And if Daryl decides he wants to share a room with the rest of the boys?”

Simon thought about it. “I’ll put them in my office.”

“And Jim?”

The Doctor knew immediately what William was talking about. “Should be okay. He just needs to not concentrate to heavily on the swimming fish.”

William smiled. “Problem solved. Now we just have to find a house.”

***

Steven got up from the bed tripping on Michael, who’d made himself a nest of sleeping bags on the floor between the two beds, landing on the body-builder, hard.

“Must you sleep there?” he groused.
“I need to be near Jim and Blair. I’m a bodyguard. Their bodyguard,” Michael replied as he tried to push Steven off, somehow managing to tangle them both in the sleeping bags.

“Hey, what am I chicken feed?”

“You don’t need guarding,” Michael replied. “Oof! Will you get off, lard-ass?”

“How do you know I don’t? I’m their brother. Unsavory elements could try and get to them through me. Quit it. You’re making it worse. Stop moving and I’ll get us untangled.”

Michael lay back and let Steven try and free them. “You, my friend, read too many comic books.”

“It could happen. There, finally I’m free. Free, I tell you,” Steven said, dramatically as he got up. “I don’t know why you can’t sleep on the other side of the room. Or better yet the living room.”

“Daryl has the living room and there’s not enough room on the other side of the bedroom.”

“Hmm,” Steven replied skeptically as he made his way to the bathroom. Coming out, he tried to get back onto his bed only to trip on Michael’s feet, once again landing on the bodybuilder. “We’ve really got to stop meeting this way.”

“You are just so twisted. If you keep ending up on top of me, I’m going to get ideas that you like me.”

Steven smiled. “Oh, yeah, baby. I JUST love all them beautiful muscles. Flex for me. Come on, baby. You know you want to.”


“Aw, and here I was thinking you loved me.”
Michael snorted. “In your dreams, loverboy. Get off. It’s time to get Jim and Blair from Blair’s play date.”

“No, I’m comfortable,” Steven replied. “Well sorta. It’s kinda like layin’ on rocks.” He moved around trying to find a comfortable spot.

“Ow. Quit it. You’re going to hurt something I might need later.”

“For what? Basically all you are is eye candy for the girls. They’re not gonna want you touching them ‘cause you might break ‘um.”

“Is there something wrong with being eye candy?” Michael asked, no longer trying to get Steven off. It didn’t seem to be doing him any good anyway. “And I’m touchable.”

“As granite.”

“Come on, get off. Or I’m gonna be thinking you like me way to much.”

Steven gave Michael an evil grin. “Oh, yeah-I love you,” he replied, blowing him a kiss. Michael looked up at him worriedly. “Relax, pretty boy. I only love you ‘cause you gotta a Grandma that makes the BEST chocolate cake in the WHOLE world.”

“Whew! You had me worried there for a minute.”

Steven snorted. “Oh, please. Your virtue is safe from the likes of me. I only like you because of Grandma Mattie. Let’s go get Blair and Jim from Mrs. Deans. Where’s my shoes?”

***

They entered Mrs. Deans house to find Blair half-heartedly playing with Megan and Cassie.

“So how goes it?” Steven asked Jim as he sat down next to him.
“Hmm, well not to bad. He hasn’t tried to kill Megan, yet.” Jim told them wryly.

“That’s good.”

It’d taken a lot of persuading to get Mrs. Deans to take Blair back especially since he’d beaned Megan with a block. And then Blair’d had to apologize for said beaning.

Once the play date finished Blair bounced over to them happily. He went straight into Jim’s arms. “She still call me Sandy,” He said woefully, burying his head in his Sentinel’s chest. “No like.”

“Want I should go rough her up for you, Sweetpea?” Michael asked.

Blair’s head popped up. “Really?”

“Hum, hum. Just say the word.”

“Yes, please,” Blair replied, head bouncing up and down enthusiastically.

“Blair, no,” Jim told him sternly. “You don’t do that kinda stuff.”

Blair gave his Sentinel a baleful look, before turning to Michael. “Jim, say no,” he told him, ever so sadly.

Jim sighed unhappily. “See what you’ve done, Michael? Now Blair’s mad. Do you know what I gotta do to get him to stop being mad at me?”

“Sorry, but we can’t have Sweetpea being unhappy. How about I just thump her a couple of times?”

Blair looked up at Jim, who shook his head. The little Guide crosses his arms and ‘hmmphed’ at his Sentinel discontentedly, wiggling free of Jim’s arms he headed toward the door.
Jim turned toward Michael. “Damn you. Now you’ve really done it.” He got no sympathy as both Steven and Michael chuckled.

“Me?” Michael asked. “You’re the one that won’t let me take care of her for him.”

Jim gave him an incredulous look. “She’s three years old, Michael.”

“So?” Michael said, shrugging his broad shoulders indifferently.

Jim looked at him in astonishment for a moment before turning back toward Blair who was waiting impatiently at the door before he walked out of it. The young Sentinel got to his feet quickly, racing after his angry little Guide.

“You do know what this means, right?” Steven asked the bodybuilder.

“Yup,” Michael nodded. “To soothe the peeved little Guide, his Sentinel will have to submit to the dreaded BATH.”

Steven laughed louder. “And just when Jim had Blair convinced that his Sentinel was to grown up to be given baths. You are evil. EVIL.”

Michael chuckled. “Yeah, huh?”

“Hey, Mikey?”

The bodybuilder turned toward Steven. “Yeah?”

“You wouldn’t really have hurt Megan would you?”

Michael gave him a wounded look. “What the hell do you take me for? She’s only three.”
“Sorry. But I know you take your job guarding Blair and Jim very seriously. I was just checking. I’m sorry.”

“You should be,” Michael sniffed. “I’m a bodyguard, not some sort of monster. Now you’ve gone and hurt my sensitive feelings.”

“I said I was sorry,” Steven said contritely. Michael just looked at him. “What if I give you my dessert? Will that make up for hurting your tender feelings?”

“What are we having?”

“Strawberry shortcake.”

“Extra topping?”

“Of course.”

Michael smiled. “Okay. And I want your second and third helpings as well.”

Steven looked at him shocked. “You’re kidding, right?”

“Nope. You wounded me deeply. Thinking I’d beat up a three year old.” Michael looked at him, blue-green eyes, puppy dog sad.

Steven sighed unhappily. “Oh, alright. No need to give me the kicked, puppy look. You can have my desserts.”

“Extra topping?”

Steven sighed again. “Yes. With extra topping.”
Michael gave him a brilliant smile. “I feel better, now.”

“Then how come I don’t?”

“Don’t know. Oh, man-Jim and Blair must be half way to the house by now. Let’s go or we’re going to miss Blair shampooing Jim’s hair,” Michael told Steven, pulling him to his feet. They said a quick bye to Mrs. Deans before rushing out the door.

***

They raced into their bedroom to find Blair sorting through the socks.

“Hey, baby brother-did you already shampoo Jim?” Steven asked the little Guide breathlessly.

“Yup,” Blair answered, bouncing into the bathroom with a pair of white socks in his tiny hands.

“I told you to hurry up,” Michael told Steven in annoyance.

“It’s not my fault I tripped on my shoelace.”

Michael looked at him. “I told you to tie your shoelaces before we left the house. But NO, you had to TRY and be COOL. So what happens? You tripped, almost kill yourself and now we’ve missed the shampooing.”

Steven looked down at the floor ashamed. “I know.” He looked up suddenly cheerful. “But we may still get to see the second shampooing.”

“Hey, your right. Let’s go.”

They entered the bathroom to find Jim sitting in the bathtub looking utterly miserable. He aimed icy, blue daggers at them as the little Guide began rubbing shampoo into his hair.
“To cool,” Steven said chuckling. “We didn’t miss that much.”

“Yeah. We’ve got to sell tickets. The greatest Sentinel the planet will ever know, being bathed by a three year old.”

“You both want to die a horrible, horrible death, don’t you?” Jim growled, menacingly.

Both Steven and Michael shivered dramatically. “Hmm, yeah,” Steven answered for both of them. “It’d be WAY worth it. Besides you gonna go chasing us around the house covered only in bubbles.”

“I won’t always be in this bathtub,” Jim promised, angrily.

Both Steven and Michael shivered again. “Ooh, we’re really scared,” Steven answered, sitting on the closed lid of the toilet. “But that might be ‘cause you’re sitting naked in a bathtub while a three year old scrubs your hair.” Steven shivered again. “Scary sight that.”

Michael chuckled. “Sure is. What next? Gonna threatening us with Blair?” he said, sitting on the floor next to Steven.

Jim sniffed. “I don’t need Blair to fight all of my battles.” Both Michael and Steven snorted. “Well I don’t.”

Steven looked at Blair who was now carefully scrubbing Jim’s arm with a poofy, sponge thingie, not paying the least bit of attention to them. “Next you’ll be telling us you don’t use Blair as a teddy bear at night.”

Blue eyes glared at him. “Shut up.”

“Make us,” Steven told him with a wicked grin.

“Okay. Since you asked so nicely,” Jim replied, a glint in his eyes that guaranteed swift and deadly
retribution. “Blair, Steven and Michael are picking on me. Please, do something.”

It came in the form of big, blue eyes turning toward them with sudden, wide-eyed interest. “Dey pick?”

Jim nodded. “Yup. On YOUR Sentinel.”

Those big, blue eyes narrowed. Making both Steven and Michael move uncomfortably. “Oh?”

“Huh-huh. And your Sentinel is feeling very sad about it,” Jim replied, bottom lip coming out in a pout. The young Sentinel even added a slight tremble to the pout, for added effect.

Those big, blue eyes narrowed even more. “Dey make sad?”

Jim nodded again. “Huh,huh,” He said, bottom lip trembling even more.

“Dey better stop making MY Sentinell sad,” The curly-haired little Guide warned softly, very, very softly.

Jim watched in satisfaction as his brother and bodyguard paled. “I think I’ll go see if Sally needs help with dinner,” Steven said hurriedly.

“We’ll BOTH see if she needs help,” Michael replied, beating Steven to the door.

Steven turned to look at Jim, who was looking extremely pleased. “You should be ashamed of yourself, using a three year old to fight your battle.”

Jim smiled at him. “What I said was that Blair didn’t fight ALL my battles. I didn’t say he couldn’t fight SOME of them.”

“That’s low.”
Jim’s smile widened. “Which is lower? Blair protecting his Sentinel? Or you and Michael being afraid of a three year old?” He chuckled evilly.

“You suck,” Steven took a step back when Blair growled at him menacingly. “I better go see if Sally needs help.”

“You do that,” Jim replied haughtily, turning to his protective little Guide. “Thank-you, Baby. I feel lots better now.”

“Need hug? Make feel lots better.”

The last thing Steven heard as he made his way downstairs was Jim’s reply. “Yes, please. I love Blair hugs. They’re the bestest hugs in the whole world.”

“You fucking wuss,” Steven hissed at Michael, who was waiting for him at the foot of the stairs.

“What can I say? Blair hits hard,” Michael replied sheepishly. “I still have a bruise on my arm from the last time I said a bad word. It hurt,” He added, rubbing his left arm.

“Wuss.”

“And besides you left the bathroom as fast as I did. I’m surprised you didn’t leave sneaker burns on the bathroom tile.”

“We are not talking about me, here, Michael. We are talking about YOU. Some bodyguard you are. You wussing out to a three year old, does not abide well as to how you’ll handle your bodyguard duties.” Steven shook his head sadly. “If Dad finds out about this, you may have to go to bodyguard training school. So they can teach you how to be a MAN.”

Michael rolled his eyes. “Oh, shut the fuck up. You ran out of there as fast as I did. And besides I am a MAN.” Steven snorted. “Well I am.”

“Peeing standing up doesn’t make you a man.”
Michael narrowed his blue-green eyes at Steven. “How the hell do you know I pee standing up?”

Steven looked at him quizzically for a moment. “Don’t have much upstairs do you? Been doing steroids, have we?”

Michael ran a hand over his curly hair. “I have a lot upstairs. I’m not bald and I don’t do drugs. And if you’re doing drugs you better stop or I’m gonna kick your ass all over Cascade.”

“I never said I did drugs, dip-shit.”

“You just told me you did,” Michael said, confused.

“No I didn’t,” Steven replied, looking at Michael as if he were missing more than a couple of marbles from his bag and those remaining were cracked. “Okay, you found me out, I’ll stop,” he said, instead of arguing with the bodybuilder/bodyguard.

Michael suddenly hugged him, startling Steven. “I’m so glad. You’ve made the right decision.”

Steven patted the strange, bodybuilder’s back awkwardly. “Hmm, okay. Let go now before someone sees us.”

“Ah, okay,” Michael replied, pulling away reluctantly.

“Let’s go help Sally,” Steven told him quietly.

“Okay.”

Steven watched Michael go into the kitchen for a moment an odd look on his face before he followed. Thinking he was going to have to ask Mattie if she’d ever dropped Michael on his head when he was a baby.
HOUSEHUNTING

This was the third house they’d gotten a tour of. William was hopeful that it would have everything they needed. It certainly was big enough for his expanding family. All of them had decided they’d like to help. He didn’t mind and he sure could use the help.

Steven and Michael were exploring the upstairs bedrooms. Blair and Jim were close by looking at the kitchen with Sally and Simon. Daryl had just run by to join them.

“This house certainly looks promising,” He told the Mr. Samuel, the realtor. Suddenly Jim came up to him, eyes big as saucers. He went straight into his father’s arms.

“What’s wrong?” William asked softly, rubbing his trembling son’s back.

“I…I…I…” Jim stuttered, unable to get the words out.

“What spooked you?”

“I…I’m hearing things in the walls, Dad,” Jim replied, burying his face tightly against William’s chest, as if to block out whatever he was hearing.

William gently began maneuvering Jim toward the door. “We’re leaving. Sally, Simon, boys, lets go. Mr. Samuel, next house, please.”

House number four was no better than house number two. William was beginning to despair in ever finding one. They’d decided to stop for lunch. They could all use the break. Especially since Jim was still extremely spooked by house number three.

Simon bought them all pizza. Tummy’s full, the adults now watched as the boys played the games scattered all over the pizza parlor. Except for Jim and Blair, the young Sentinel refused to leave his Dad’s side. Blair sitting quietly right next to him.
“You don’t have to stay with me, Baby. Go play. Dad’s here. I’ll be alright,” Jim told his little Guide for the sixth time.

“No, play. Stay Sentinell,” Blair replied stubbornly for the sixth time.

“But I’m okay.”

Blair tilted his head to the side as he contemplated his Sentinel. “Not okay.”

“Well, no not really, but I’m better,” Jim told him, sheepishly.

“Need scent?” Blair asked softly.

Jim thought about it. “Hmm, no I don’t think so. I just got spooked by the termites in the walls. I’d never heard them before.”

William rubbed his Son’s back soothingly. “Is that what happened?”

“Yeah, it just overwhelmed me for a bit. I’m better now, so we can keep looking at houses.”

Simon smiled at the young Sentinel as he sat across from him, noticing how pale Jim really was. “That’s got to be a bit overwhelming the first time you hear it.”

Jim nodded taking a drink of his Coke. “Yeah, like being inside a box with scratching and scrambling going on all around you.” Jim shuddered. “It was really spooky.”

“I bet,” Simon replied. “Could be useful in helping your Dad pick a house though.”

Jim smiled. “Yeah, huh. If I don’t run out of the house screaming.”
They all chuckled. “There is that,” William said kissing his son’s forehead. “But we’ll make sure it doesn’t come to that.”

True to his word, next house they went to William had Jim check for creepy crawlies as Steven called them, standing just inside the door. No one went in until the young Sentinel gave the all clear.

House five and six were a bust as well. Six was large enough, but needed more repair work than it would take to add on to the house they now lived in.

They all came up to house number seven late in the afternoon. They were all hot, tired and depressed at not finding a suitable house.

All of them stared at the three story home from inside the van William was thinking of buying, so they’d all be able to go to the same place together and not have to use three or four different cars to get there.

Everyone in the van was silent for a moment before Blair ‘ooh’d’.

“I’d say,” Steven agreed, closing his mouth.

“Let’s have a look. Now if only the inside is as impressive as the outside,” William said softly. They all got out of the van, waiting by it for Mr. Samuel.

They were all silent as they waited for the realtor to open the double-paned doors. Hoping beyond hope that this house was the answer to their search.

“Jim?” William asked his son.

The young Sentinel tilted his head to the side. “All clear, Dad.”

William smiled at him. “Good. Let’s have a look.” He chuckled when all the youngsters scattering quickly once inside the door.
First floor held a massive living room with a floor to ceiling fireplace. A kitchen Sally immediately fell in love with. A dining room that would be big enough for his family and their friends as well as those that’d adopted or been adopted by the Ellisons. A bathroom as well as two rooms William immediately thought would made great offices for Simon and himself.

Second floor held four huge bedrooms, with connecting bathrooms. But it was the third floor that drew William’s attention. It was a huge, open area with windows that allowed in plenty of sunshine and fresh air. A room that would be perfect for his boys. He turned to Simon.

“This room would make a great dorm style bedroom for the boys. We can have some partitions build to allow for some privacy for each of them, but still allow them the closeness they want.” William was positive that at this point in his boys’ life they didn’t want to be to far from each other. Actually, they had so much as said so.

“You’re right,” Simon replied. “It’s huge. There’s even enough room for them to have a place to study and play if they want.” Simon smiled. “And a area for Blair’s book shelves. That child has enough books to fill a library.”

William chuckled. “Yes, he does.”

“Dad, this house is great,” Jim told his father enthusiastically.

William nodded. “Yes. One of the better ones we’ve seen. What do the rest of you say?”

“This is a great house,” Steven agreed with Jim. “The backyard is huge too. And there’s even a pool.”

“Blair?” William asked his youngest.

Blair looked up at him, offering his arms to be picked up. “Nice.”

William complied. “Would you like to live here, son?” He asked, tucking a stray curl behind Blair’s ear.
“Yups.”


“This is a great house,” Daryl replied, smiling shyly at the eldest Ellison.

Michael looked at him, blue-green eyes twinkling happily. “It is. I wouldn’t mind living here.”

William turned toward Simon and Sally who were quietly watching. “What do you think? Will this house be good enough to raise our expanding family?”

Sally nodded. “I think it’s perfect.”

“Me too,” Simon answered, pulling Daryl into his arms. “Are you going to want your own room or do you want to share with the guys?” he asked him softly.

“If there’s room for me, I want to share,” Daryl said, looking hopefully at the young Sentinel.

Jim smiled at him. “There will always be room for you, but I call the side with the biggest window.”

Steven frowned at him. “Why do you get the spot with the biggest window?”

“Because I’m the oldest and I get first dibs on everything.”

“Say’s who?” Steven asked, punching Jim on the arm.

“Ow! I say. Quit hitting me or I’m going to sic my little Guide on you,” Jim told him rubbing his arm.

“Wuss.”
Jim smiled at him. “Yup and proud of it, too.”

Steven rolled his eyes. “Sissy.”

“That to.”

Steven looked at him in astonishment. “You’re admitting you’re a sissy?”

“Yup.”

“The great Watchman is admitting he’s a sissy?”

“Yup, who has the biggest window in the soon to be new bedroom of a new house.” Steven rolled his eyes at him again. “You know, if you don’t quit doing that, it’s going to make you blind,” Jim told his brother chuckling.

“Yeah, yeah. Whatever,” Steven replied as he walked away. He really didn’t care about the window anyway, he just wanted to give his brother a hard time.

Jim watched Steven for a moment before turning toward his father. “Is the house going to be ours?” he asked hopefully.

William nodded. “Yes, I think so. I just need to talk to Mr. Samuel about the details. Does anybody know where he’s at?”

“I saw him heading downstairs with Simon,” Michael answered from his perch on a window sill.

“Okay, thank you. Here, Jim—take you’re little Guide while I talk to the realtor.”

Jim reached for Blair, giving him a gentle kiss on the forehead. “You like the house, Baby?”
Blair nodded, returning the kiss with one of his own, right on Jim’s nose. “Yup. Nice.”

“Would you like to live here?”

Blair wrapped his left arm around Jim’s neck. “Yup.”

“Cool. Let’s hope that Dad can work out the details.”

***

It didn’t take long. Three weeks later they were packing to move, with not to much mayhem with everyone pitching in to help.

Sally in the kitchen carefully wrapping dishes looked up, to see Blair walking in holding up the forefinger of his left hand.

“What’s the matter, Blair?”

“I cut?”

“You cut your finger?”

“Yup,” He said, walking up to her.

She reached down to picking him up and gently placing him on the counter top. Taking out the first aid kit. “Lets have a look. Oh, it’s not too bad. We can have that taken care of in no time. How did this happen?”

“Cut, putting books in box.”
She carefully disinfected the tiny cut. “Do you want Batman or Spiderman?” she asked, showing the two different types of band aids.

“Batman, pleesh.”

“Okay.” Done Sally tossed away the trash, when she turned back it was to see the curly-haired little boy rubbing his eyes tiredly with the back of his hands. “Are you sleepy, Blair?”

Blair nodded. “Sleepy.”

“Would you like to take a nap?”

The little Guide nodded his head, offering his arms. Sally gathered him to her, carrying Blair to a space know to all the Ellison boys. A space that spoke of caring, love and comfort.

Blair had started coming to her shortly after the young Sentinel/Guide pair had returned from hiding from Naomi. Sharing with her the same amount of hugs and kisses he did with the rest of the family, yet their relationship was slightly different.

The little Guide came to her for attention he would have at one time gotten from his mother, just as had Jim and Steven shortly after their mother had died. She’s love those times spending cuddling with them. Then they’d started thinking they were to old and it had stopped. She had missed those times with an ache that’d never really gone away. Until Blair.

Sally sat in the rocking chair in a corner of the huge kitchen of the home they would soon be leaving. Cuddling Blair close, she began singing to him a song her mother had taught her long ago. Smiling inwardly as she watched Blair’s beautiful, blue eyes began to slowly close, until they closed completely.

Sally gently stroked Blair’s curly hair from his pale face. Reaching to the shelf behind her for the Batman quilt one of her daughters had made, once she’d found out about Blair and his love of all things Batman. Carefully covering him with it.

Sally’s family were all grown and scattered through out the world. Only one daughter out of three girls and two boys lived in Cascade. None of her children had families of their own, something Sally missed greatly.
Grandchildren to love, but now she had William’s sons, Jim, Steven and Blair. Even Michael had found a place in her heart, with his helpful manner and happy-go-lucky and rather quirky nature. And Daryl too—with his shy, reserved manner. She loved them all, each and every one of them.

Sally sighed, leaning her head back against the rocker as she continued to rock, quietly singing to one special little boy who’d didn’t think he was too old to be rocked and sung to. And hopefully wouldn’t for a long, long time.

***

“Where’s Blair?” Steven asked Jim.

The young Sentinel tilted his head to the side. “He’s taking a nap with Sally. She’s singing to him.” Jim looked over at his brother. “Remember that song she always sang to us when we wanted to cuddle?”

Steven smiled, remembering. “Oh, yeah. That was great. It’s too bad we’re too old for that now.”

Jim sighed. “Yeah, huh?”

“She’s singing to Blair?”

“Yup.”

“That same song she’d sing for us when we were Blair’s age?”

“Yup.”

“Rocking him, too?”

“Yup.”
“Damn, I really miss that,” Steven said sadly.

“Me to, but we’re too big now.”

Steven stopped packing away his comic books. “Are you sure?” he asked wistfully.

“Pretty sure,” Jim replied, just as wistfully.

“Damn.”

“Yeah.”

***

NEW HOME

Finally settled into their new home, they all sat around enjoying the fact they had nothing to do but lay around.

Steven and Daryl were playing with Wofie and Blackie bouncing a ball between them, watching the kittens chase it back and forth.

William and Simon were once again trying to solve the puzzle in the newspaper, which had become a ritual every evening. Barkie lay in Simon’s lap, happily getting his ears scratched.

Sally had gone to visit her daughter and would be back in time for William to take them out for dinner to celebrate their move into their new home.

Michael was weight lifting in the dorm/bedroom all five of the boys now shared. William had hired a decorator who’d done a great job turning the huge upper level into a room where they all had a semblance of privacy while at the same time sharing space. And there was even extra room for
Blair’s books, the computer and Michael’s weights.

Jim and Blair were in their usual spot on the couch with the little Guide reading to his Sentinel. Jim purring as he listened contently to Blair’s soothing voice. Jim remembered the last time they’d spent such a lazy day. Everything had gone to hell with the ringing of the doorbell.

When it suddenly rang, cutting into the peacefulness of the afternoon, making Jim jump nervously. Earning a curious look from Blair.

Jim watched worriedly as his father head toward the door. Nothing could happen, right? It could be a door to door salesmen. Or some religious people wanting to talk and leave pamphlets. Or girls selling cookies. Right? It didn’t necessary mean something bad.

William opened the door. A man stood there slight of build, with big, blue eyes and short, gray, curly hair. He smiled at William tentatively. “Hello. Is this the Ellison household?”

William nodded. “Yes it is. Can I help you?” He asked, looking at the elderly gentlemen curiously. He seemed oddly familiar.

“It has taken me many days to find you. My name is Jacob Sandburg. I’m Blair’s grandfather. May I come in?”
"Hey, Baby-whatcha' doing?" Jim asked as he walked into their new bedroom, in their new home, seeing Blair sitting on the floor by their bed.

"Nuffing," Blair replied, giving his Sentinel a brilliant smile when he saw him; still swaying to the beat of music coming from the radio on their nightstand.

Jim knelt by him. "Doesn't look like you were doing nothing," He told him, tucking a stray lock of hair behind his little Guide's ear.

"I listen music. I dance."

"Oh?"

"Yups. Like lots." Blair looked up at his Sentinel smiling, shyly. "Jim?"

Jim pulled him into his arms. "Yeah, Baby?"

"Dance?"

"Hmm?" Jim buried his face in Blair's neck.

"Dance," Blair replied, tugging on Jim's hair impatiently.

"Ow! You wanna dance?"

"Yuppers. Dance wiff you."

"Okay."

Jim placed Blair on his feet, reaching over he raised the volume on the radio. Staying on his knees to be at a level closer to Blair's, he began dancing. Moving his hands back and forth, even doing a little John Travolta from Saturday Night Fever... much to Blair's giggling delight.

He chuckled when Blair began doing the same and moving his little hips enthusiastically to the beat. For such a little guy, Blair had good rhythm and he looked so cute with his long curly hair flying all over the place as he moved. Jim grabbed Blair's left hand, twirling him around, making the little Guide giggle even more.

"What are you guys doin'?" Steven asked, walking in carrying a laundry basket full of clean clothes.

"Dancing. What does it look like?"
Michael followed Steven in carrying another basket of clothes. "Well, it looks like Blair might be killing bugs and you're cleaning the floor with your knees."

Jim twirled Blair around again. "Shut up," he told him cheerfully. He was having too much fun to let anyone spoil it for him.

Steven placed the basket down on the floor. "That looks like fun. Give over your little Guide, Watchman."

Jim frowned at him. "No way. Find your own partner."

"Come on, one dance," Steven cajoled.

Jim tightened his hold on Blair possessively. "No. I told you, find your own partner."

"There's only Michael and I don't wanna dance with him."

"Hey," Michael protested. "I can dance."

Steven snorted. "You can barely put one foot in front of the other without trippin' with all those built-up muscles in your legs. I'm not dancing with you. You step on me, I'll be maimed for life."

Michael offered Steven his hand. "Come on, dance with me. I promise not to step on you." Steven eyed him suspiciously. "I swear."

"Hmm, I don't know if I wanna dance with you-you're a boy."

Michael offered his hand again. "What has that got to do with anything? You were going to dance with Blair and he's a boy. Besides, I'm asking you to dance, not marry me. Come on, let's dance."

Steven eyed the hand for a second. "Why not? Jim, make the music louder."

Jim did. All four boys began dancing, well at least three of them. Blair was in Jim's arms, as the young Sentinel danced them around the room. The little Guide's blue eyes sparkling merrily. It didn't take much to make Blair happy and Jim loved it when he was so happy his blue eyes shone with a life all their own.

The noise brought William and Simon into the third floor to see what was going on, finding Steven and Michael doing the twist and Jim and Blair dancing cheek to cheek.

"Looks like they're dancing," William told Simon. "The way the walls and floors were shaking, for a minute there, I thought we were having an earthquake."

"Me too." They watched for a moment before Simon turned toward William. "Looks like fun. Shall we?" he asked, formally offering his hand.

William smiled, taking it. "Why the hell not?"

They joined in. One minute William was dancing with Simon, next he was dancing with Michael or a giggling Blair. Jim relinquishing his little Guide readily to his dad. Something that earned him an evil look from Steven for not letting HIM dance with the little Guide. The young Sentinel ignored it as he danced with Simon.

Michael once again dancing with Steven, dipped him. Making the middle son squeal like a girl.

"You yell like a girl," Michael told him, smiling.
Steven looked over at the little Guide from his precarious position near the floor. Seeing that he was still dancing with their dad and probably couldn't hear him. "Drop me, asshole, there won't be anyplace in the house where you'll be safe. Revenge will be mine sayth Steven Ellison," Steven said as dramatically as he could being his head was an inch from the carpeted floor and he was hanging on to Michael's hand for dear life.

Michael rolled his eyes. "Oh, brother. I'm not going to drop you. I can hold your weight, plus Jim, your dad's, Simon's AND Blair's."

"You've got ME hanging here, you twit, not everyone else in the family."

"You're such a chicken." Michael tugged Steven up, to twirl him away and then twirled him back toward him.

Steven gasped when he hit the bodybuilder's body. "Ow! Ass, I think you broke a rib."

"Big baby. Stop your whining and dance," He was told, unsympathetically.

The radio started playing a song Steven liked. "Oh. Cool. I like this song," Steven said enthusiastically, singing along with the radio at the top of his lungs, making Michael wince at the off-keyedness of it, but smiling when Steven started shaking his booty, encouraging him to do the same.

Simon looked over at the enthusiastically singing and dancing middle son. "Steven's having fun."

"Yeah, he is."

"How are you doing, Jim? I haven't seen you for a couple of days."

"I'm fine. The white noise generator is working great. Starsky and Hutch being on their wheels all night was starting to drive me batty," Jim told him, referring to the nocturnal hamsters that had become a part of the family when Daryl, Simon's son had moved in.

"I'm sorry about that. I should have realized it would bother you and put in the white noise generator before."

Jim looked up at the doctor as they danced. "That's alright. It's fixed now."

"Are you ready to start football practice?"

"All set. Thank you for letting me play," Jim said as he whirled around Simon.

"I would have let you sooner, but you weren't ready. Being newly bonded and all, but I think you can handle it now."

They both turned to look at Blair when he let out a peal of laughter. William was dipping Blair and swinging him around. The little Guide's hair flying wildly as Blair tossed his head back, giggling hysterically.

Jim smiled. "Blair sure likes to dance."

"Yes," Simon replied, as Blair gave another peal of laughter when William raspberried his tummy. He looked around the room. "But then by the looks of it, so does everyone else in the family. I have never been around a family so in tune with one another. You'd do anything and have for each other. I'm happy to be a part of you all, as I'm sure my son is to. Ah, speaking of the devil." Just then Daryl walked in with a bemused look on his face. "Come in, Son. Join the party."
Daryl smiled at him, taking the hand Simon offered. "Everyone looks to be having a great time."

Steven abandoned Michael to dance with Wofie. The puppy not quite sure what to make of the whole dizzying thing was barking loudly. Oddly enough in tune with the music coming from the radio, making Steven laugh as he tangoed with the not exactly happy puppy.

Michael didn't seem to mind being ditched, when he spotted Sally as she tried to leave off another basket of clean clothing and sneak out before anyone noticed her. Michael would have none of it tugging her further into the room, ignoring her protestations.

Sally watched for a moment before she started swaying to the music, smiling at the cheers of encouragement it earned her from the rest of the family.

Steven released Wofie, danced over to where his Dad, who'd run out of steam, was resting on Blair and Jim's bed. Little Guide sitting contently in his lap, watching everyone dancing. Steven offered his hand. "Blair-little brother, might I have the pleasure of this dance?"

Blair looked up at him. "Dance?"

"Yup."

"Wiff me?" Blair asked shyly, tucking his chin against his shoulder.

"Yup."

Blair looked up at William. "I dance with Steven?" Not sure if he should abandon his father.

William smiled at him, tucking a sweat-soaked strand of hair behind Blair's ear. It was almost time to get Blair's hair cut again. "You can dance with anyone you like, Son. Go have fun."

Blair gave him a brilliant smile. "Tank you, Daddy."

William felt his eyes fill with tears as they had a tendency to every time Blair called him 'Daddy'. "You go and have fun with your brothers and friends. I'll be right here."

Blair reached up tugging William's head down gave him a sloppy kiss on the chin. "Love you, Daddy."

William kissed his little son's forehead. "I love you too, Blair. Very much."

Steven gave his dad a tiny smile. "We all love you, Dad. You're the best dad in the whole world." He said softly.

"I love you, too, Steven," William told him, his eyes filling with renewed tears. "Go, dance with Blair," He said, shooing them away.

Simon sat next to William. "Are you alright?"

They watched Blair and Steven start dancing to a song William vaguely recognized as a Beatles tune. "I'm okay. It's just, sometimes they surprise the hell out of me."

"I know what you mean. You know they love you, but hearing them voice it..." Simon's voice trailed off.

William blinked the tears away. "It means everything. Everything."
Simon patted William's thigh. "Yeah, it does."

They watched their combined family silently for a moment, when William broke out in laughter. "Look at Blair."

Blair was dancing around Steven having just learned to shake his booty. Said booty, tiny as it was—was shaking wildly to the music coming from the radio.

Simon chuckled. "That little guy's got rhythm. I'll give him that."

Twenty minutes later found them scattered all over the house. Sally declaring she had danced enough and was going to make dinner. Michael, offering to help, left with her. Daryl and Simon had gone off to the store for Sally. William declaring he was too old to dance anymore went off to take a nap till dinner. Even Wofie had jumped ship, following Sally and Michael out of the bedroom.

Jim was stretched out on the floor trying to catch his breath. Steven and Blair were the only ones still dancing.

"So, Blair, do you like the new house?"

Blair nodded his little hands around Steven's neck as they swayed together. "Yups."

"Yeah me, too. Do you think Jim'll let you go swimming in the pool with me tomorrow?"

Blair looked over to where Jim lay on the floor, eyes closed. "Don't know. Maybe."

"No. Not unless I'm there to keep watch," Jim replied, without opening his eyes.

"Wow, good hearing."

"Sentinel here, dweeb."

Steven rolled his eyes. "Yeah, yeah, whatever, Watchman."

"Don't roll your eyes at me. I already told you, you're going to go blind doing that."

Steven looked over at Jim in astonishment. His eyes were still closed. "How did you do that?"

"I'm a Sentinel."

"Arrogant, much?" Steven said in disgust. "You get any more of a swollen head you won't be able to fit in the door."

"That's what you're for. You'll make sure I don't get to big for my britches," Jim told him, still not opening his eyes.

"Oh, yeah, like I don't have anything better to do with my life," Steven said sarcastically.

"Tell me you don't like telling me off."

"That's beside the point. I don't want to make it my life's career."

Jim smiled. "But you get such joy out of it."

Steven chuckled. "Sure as heck do," He replied, twirling Blair around fast.

"Wow!" The little Guide said, swallowing heavily.
"You make Blair throw up, you're cleaning it."

Jim still hadn't opened his eyes. "Quit doing that," Steven complained.

"Quit spinning Blair so fast."

Steven thought the best thing to do was ignore the whole conversation. "I'm thirsty. Are you guys thirsty? How 'bout some soda. It's an hour till dinner, maybe Sally would even let us have some cookies."

"I could use a drink. And by Blair nodding his head up and down the way he is, I think he agrees."

Jim eyes were still closed. "I really, really hate you, Watchman," Steven hissed, half-heartedy. Jim was starting to use his Sentinel abilities more and more and it was exciting to watch. No matter how much Steven complained about it.

"Yeah, yeah, I love you to distraction, too."

"Better watch that kinda talk, could get you labeled a sissy, sissy boy."

"Whatever. Weren't you going to get sodas and cookies?"

"I'm going. I'm going."

Jim listened to Steven make his way down the stairs grumbling and growling the whole way. He was chuckling softly, when a solid weight landed on his chest.

"Oof!" He opened startled, blue eyes to see his happy, little Guide staring down at him.

"Hey, Baby," Jim said softly, stroking the baby-soft skin of Blair's face. The little Guide looked down at him, cheeks flushed pink from his exertions; his beautiful, curly hair sticking out in every direction possible. He as going to have to talk to Dad about taking Blair to Mr. Beans for a haircut.

"Hi, Jim," Blair said shyly.

The young Sentinel smiled up at him. "Did you have fun?"

A curly head nodded up and down excitedly. "Lots and lots."

"I'm glad. You're all sweaty. You're going to need a bath before dinner."

Blair perked up. "Bath?"

"Yup. You're smelling a little ripe."

Blair tilted his head slightly as he contemplated his Sentinel. He gave Jim a mischievous look. "Jim?"

That look should have set off warning bells, but Jim didn't see it, too busy trying to pat Blair's curly hair down into some resemblance of order. "Yeah, Baby?"

"Jim ripes, too."

Jim closed his eyes tightly, silently cussing a blue streak. Not wanting his ass kicked by a little Guide who hated cussing with a passion. But he'd blindly walked right into that one. "I...I am?"

Blair nodded his head solemnly, blue eyes twinkling. He had his Sentinel and he knew it. "Jim needs
bath too.”

"I...I could take a shower after dinner."

All hope was lost when Blair shook his curly head. "Nope."

"N...nope?"

"Huh-huh. Nope. Bath now."

"B...but..."

"Nows," Blair said, expecting immediate compliance.

And getting it as the Sentinel smiled up at his little Guide. "Alright, Baby. Bath now. But Blair, could I get one thing first?" The little Guide tilted his head to the side questioningly. "Could I get a hug?"

Blair gave him a brilliant smile. "Silly Jim. Can always get hugs." Wrapping his tiny arms around as much of his Sentinel as he could.

"Hmm," Jim said contentedly, holding Blair close. "You give the best hugs in the whole world. Baby?"

"Hmm?"

"Could we stay like this for a little while before you gimme a bath?"

Blair's only answer was to make himself more comfortable on top of his Sentinel. Laying his head on Jim's shoulder with a tiny sigh.

Jim buried his face in Blair's curly hair, purring contentedly, he closed his eyes.

Ten minutes later Steven came back into the bedroom to find Jim and Blair sound asleep on the floor. He placed the sodas and plate of cookies on the nearest nightstand.

Smiling, he covered them with a blanket, before arranging the pillows on their bed. Leaning against headboard, with the plate of cookies on his tummy, soda nearby. Steven contently watched over his brothers as they slept.

The end.

Thank the author! Back to index!

Acknowledgement: Beta'd by sister, Anna. All final errors are mine-with apologies. Thanks go to Patt for the really cute cover art.
Destiny's Child

What are you doing?” Jim asked as he walked into the bedroom.

“Michael was reading this article in a magazine about therapeutic hugging and he decided he was going to try it on me,” Steven replied, as he hung limply in the bodybuilder’s arms. “Said it might help me with my bad attitude.”

“Oh! Is it working?”

“Hell, no. I like my bad attitude. I’m holding on to it to my last dying day. Could I ask you a favor?”

“Sure, ask away.”

Steven sighed unhappily. “Could you poke him with a stick or something, I think he fell asleep. He’s been trying to hug my bad attitude outta me for half and hour and I really gotta go to the bathroom.”

Jim moved around the two, smiling. “You could just wake him.”
“What would be the fun in that?”

The young Sentinel chuckled. “That’s true. Michael. Come on, Michael, wake up.” Jim gently cajoled. The bodybuilder’s face was resting on top of Steven’s head, blue-green eyes closed. Even asleep, he had his arms securely wound around the very, uncomfortable Steven. A Steven who’d been trying to get free unsuccessfully for the last ten minutes.

“Come on, hurry up. Don’t baby him. Hit him or something.”

“I can’t do that. He could hurt me.”

Steven snorted. “No, he won’t, you woose. He’s YOUR bodyguard. Hurry up before I pee myself.”

“Why can’t you wake him? He’s huggin’ you.”

“Alright! Fine! MICHAEL, WAKE THE FUCK UP.”

Michael startled. “W…what? What is it?”

Steven pushed at the tight hold Michael had on him. “Let me go, asshole, I gotta pee.”

The bodybuilder let go reluctantly, watching sleepily as Steven dashed for the bathroom. “It didn’t work. Did it?” he said sadly.

Jim sat on the bed Blair and he shared. “Nope.”

Michael made his way dazedly to his bed. His first real bed since moving into the Ellison household. “Well, I’ll just have to keep trying,” He said, resolutely.

“Yeah, Steven does have a very sucky attitude.”
“That’s why I’ve gotta kept trying.”

Jim chuckled. “Oh-he’s gonna love that, but you’re right he does need a serious attitude adjustment.”

Michael punched his pillow into submissive softness. “I know. I’ll try again later.” Covering himself with an afghan his grandma had made him promptly fell asleep.

Steven walked back into the bedroom. “I heard that.”

Jim smiled at him. “You were meant to.”

“Asshole.” Steven looked around the room. “Hey, where’s your little shadow?”

Jim made himself comfortable on his bed. “Taken a nap with his Grandpa.”

“Jacob sure is one cool, old dude.”

“Yeah. Completely different from Naomi. Which makes me really happy. I really didn’t want to run again.”

Steven sat on the edge of Jim and Blair’s bed. “I would have run with you this time. If you had-had to run, that is.”

Jim touched his brother’s arm. “Thank you, Steven.”

Steven gave him a brilliant smile. “No problem. So, what time is your first football game?”

“It’s not a real game, it’s only a skirmish. It’s at four.”
“Dad going?”

Jim rearranged his pillows, laying down. “Yup. He’s leaving work early. After the skirmish he’s gonna take us out for pizza. Wake me in half an hour?”

“You bet.”

**SKIRMISHES**

Jim loved playing football. He was glad that Simon had finally agreed to let him play. Only thing he really didn’t like was that there was this other kid on the team, by the name of Lee Brackett, who had taken a real dislike to him. Kept trying to flatten him. Might have something to do with the fact they were both trying for the quarterback spot. Or it might have been cause Lee liked Daisy, who still like him.

Jim had seen Lee around. Never really paid much attention to him before, but now he had no choice since Lee kept trying to kill him. As luck would have it he was on the opposite team for this skirmish. So he was sporting some very real aches and pains by the time they’d finished the game.

Jim limped over toward where Steven, Michael, Rafe, H. and Carl were waiting for him. Smiling as everyone congratulated him, he handed his brother his helmet.

“Nice game. Well except for Lee flattening the stuffing out of you every few minutes.” Steven told him, accepting it.

“Yeah, he hates me.” Jim looked around. “Hey, where’s Blair and Dad?”

“Blair wanted something from the concession stand,” Michael replied, glaring over at Lee, who was giving the whole group the evil eye as he stood with his step-dad Kincaid. Who in turn was giving Lee a VERY loud lecture on the evils of losing.

“Yeah?” Jim said, removing his jersey.

“Yup. I think Blair wanted some cotton candy.”
Jim froze. “C… Cotton candy?”

Michael looked at him oddly. “Yeah, why?”

Jim took off running toward the concession stand, the others trailing behind. Moaning, when he realized he’d gotten there to late. His Dad was rubbing futilely at his very expensive suit.

“I don’t know what happened. It’s as if the bags of cotton candy exploded,” William was explaining to Simon, who was trying to help him get rid of some of the sticky confection clinging to his suit.

Jim bit his lip. Almost afraid to ask. “W… where’s Blair?”

His Dad and Simon separated. Jim moaned softly when he got a good look at his little Guide. Their friends breaking out in laughter. Blair was sitting in the grass, happily eating cotton candy. It didn’t bother him one bit that he was covered from head to toe with it, just like that time at the zoo.

“B… Blair?”

His little Guide gave him a brilliant smile. “Jim.”

The young Sentinel knelt next to him. “Hey, Baby. Whatcha’ doing?”

“Eating cotton candy. Want some?” Blair told him innocently, offering some of the candy in a rather sticky hand.

“Hmm, okay, but I want it from some place better.” Jim lifted his little Guide into his arms and licked Blair’s cheek. Tasting cherry cotton candy and earning a happy giggle from Blair. Jim looked up at his Dad. “I’m sorry. I forgot to remind you about Blair and cotton candy,” He told him apologetically.

William rubbed at a spot, only to make it worse. “It’s okay, Son. I didn’t really like this suit anyway. I think we may have to go home to change though. Blair and I seem to have lost the cotton candy
war and I need to change. Even though we’re only going out for pizza, I don’t feel right going covered in cotton candy.”

***

While Jim cleaned up Blair, William changed into casual clothes, which consisted of jeans and a light sweater. The only reason he’d been in a suit in the first place was because he’d left work early to see Jim play. Shrugging his shoulders, he tossed the ruined suit into the trashcan near his bed. He really didn’t like it anyway.

Walking down the stairs William heard the doorbell. A tall, heavy set man holding a cake stood in the doorway, when Michael opened the door.

“Hello. My name is Joe Taggart, I’m your neighbor to the right. I’m here to welcome you to the neighborhood.”

Michael smiled at him, taking the cake. “Hi. I’m Michael Beans. I work for Mr. Ellison. Won’t you come in, Mr. Taggart?”

“Call me Joel, please. I can only stay for a moment. My wife is holding dinner. Hello everyone,” Joel looked at the group assembled curiously.

“Hello, Joel. I’m William Ellison. I had planned on going out and visiting our new neighbors, but with one thing or another I just haven’t had time,” William told him offering his hand.

Joel shook it, warmly. “I understand. My wife Gladys and I would like to schedule a block party in the next week or so-welcoming you to the neighborhood, if that’s all right?”

“That’d be great. Let me introduce you to my family. This strapping young fellow is my eldest son-James Joseph-Jim for short. The little guy in his arms is Blair, my youngest. Next to him is Steven, my middle son. Next to Steven, is Daryl and his father Simon. You’ve already met Michael. The two of our household who aren’t here at the moment- Sally, she’s gone to visit her daughter. Also missing is Jacob Sandburg-Bair’s grandfather. He’s out of town for the next couple of days.”

Joel smiled at all of them. “It’s a pleasure to meet all of you.”
“Can you stay for a few minutes?” William asked Joel, leading him to the couch.

“Sure. My wife will understand, if I’m a little late.”

“So Mr. Taggart, what do you do?” Simon asked, from the loveseat he was sharing with his son.

“I’m a Detective with Cascade Police Department.”

Jim sat up straighter. “You’re a policeman?”

Joel nodded. “Been doing it for ten years.”

“I want to be a policeman”.

“You do?” Joel asked, eyeing the boy sitting on the floor. Jim was a cute fellow, couldn’t be more than eleven or twelve years old with piercing blue eyes.

Jim nodded. “Yes, have since I was very little.”

“That’s great,” Joel said smiling. “Maybe one of these days I can take you to the station and you can have a look around.”

“Really?” Jim asked, hopefully.

“I don’t see why not.”

“One thing,” William said, raising a hand. “Jim is a Sentinel. There are special precautions that need to be taken. Jim doesn’t go anywhere without Blair, his Guide, or Michael, their bodyguard.” Steven cleared his throat. “Or Steven, their very protective brother.” He chuckled when Steven gave him a brilliant smile.
Joel nodded. “That’s fine. No problem there.”

During this whole time Blair had been staring at him in wide-eyed fascination. He whispered something to Jim, without taking his eyes off of Joel.

Jim chuckled softly. “Yeah, I guess.”

That seemed to give Blair all the encouragement he needed as he got off Jim’s lap and walk over toward Joel and promptly climbed into his. He wrapped his tiny arms around as much of Joel’s expansive frame as he could. Jim’s chuckling increased.

“What?” Steven asked, curiously.

“Blair says that Joel looks like a big teddy bear.”

Joel Taggart smiled, enchanted by the little boy looking up at him with blue-eyed adoration. “I guess I do. You sure are a cute little fellow,” Joel told him, stroking a baby fine cheek with his forefinger. “My wife Gladys is going to love you. You ever need a babysitter let us know.”

William returned the smiled. Another had fallen before the mighty little Guide. Not surprising, no one could withstand Blair’s cuteness. “That’s nice, thank-you.”

“No problem.”

“Can you come over for dinner tomorrow? I know you said that you wife was waiting dinner for you or I’d ask you both to join us for pizza.”

“I’ll have to check with Gladys, but I think we’ll be available. Good thing you mentioned my wife, I better get going. About what time would you like us to come over?”

“Six, okay?”
“Perfect.”

Joel tried to get himself free, but the little Guide wouldn’t let go and he really, really, didn’t want to hurt the feeling of a child so small. He looked pleadingly over at Jim.

“Blair, Baby-you gotta let Mr. Taggart go. He’ll be back tomorrow,” The young Sentinel told his little Guide. Blair sighed unhappily. “I know, but he’ll be back tomorrow.”

Blair looked up at Joel for confirmation. “I’ll be back. You can cuddle this big old teddy bear all you want.”

“You promise?”

Joe tugged gently on a soft curly. “You betcha’.”

After saying good night to Joel, William turned toward his family, clapping his hands together. “Who’s for pizza with everything on it?”

***

DESTINY

The next evening found everyone gathered around the dining room table enjoying a spaghetti dinner. Laughing and talking as they passed around big bowls of spaghetti and breadsticks.

Blair sat in Joel Taggart lap’s enjoying his spaghetti, face covered in sauce. “So, Blair, what did you do today?” Joel asked the cute little boy not minding in the least that Blair was smearing spaghetti sauce all over his white shirt.

“I go swimming wiff Steven and Jim,” Blair replied, offering his teddy bear a bite of his breadstick.

“Hmm, good breadstick. You know how to swim?”
“Yippers. Jim teach.”

“That’s really good.”

“Yup. Jim punch Steven for hitting me with ball. Dey fight.”

“It was an accident. I didn’t expect you to be where the ball went. I was aiming at Michael,” Steven protested with a weak smile. Already having being raked over the coals for beaming the little Guide with a beach ball.

Jim stopped twirling spaghetti onto his fork. “I told you not to throw the ball, didn’t I? Told you, you were going to hurt someone, didn’t I?”

Steven glared at his big brother. “Alright, already. Blair wasn’t hurt and he forgave me. LET IT GO.”

Jim put down his fork. “Know what I think, Steven?”

Steven looked at him uneasily. “W...What?”

Jim gave him a tight grin. “I think you need a therapeutic hug.”

Steven shook his head violently. “No, I don’t. My attitude is just fine, thank you very much.”

“I really, really think your sucky attitude needs adjusting,” Jim told Steven, who was now glaring at him. Knowing exactly where this was heading.

“And I’m telling, you I don’t?” He hissed at his brother.

Jim turned toward the bodybuilder. “What do you think, Michael?”
Michael contemplated Steven for a long moment. “Hmm, he has been unusually hostile lately. You may be right, Jim. I’ll take care of it after dinner.”

Steven paled slightly. “I told you, I don’t need an attitude adjustment hug.”

“I beg to differ, oh-brother-mine. I think you do,” Jim told him, picking up his fork.

Joel looked down at the little boy in his lap calmly eating as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening. “Does this go on a lot?”

Blair nodded. “Lots.”

“Oh.”

“Maybe next time you’ll listen to me when I tell you not to do something,” Jim told him smugly.

“Oh, give me a break. The ball didn’t even hurt him. It bounced right off,” Steven replied, eyeing Michael nervously. He really didn’t want a therapeutic hug. Maybe he could outrun the bodybuilder. How fast could someone that was solid muscle run anyway?

“Blair could have been hurt. He’s only three.”

“The ball bounced off,” Steven insisted.

“That doesn’t matter. I told you not to throw it.”

Steven narrowed his eyes. “And since when do I listen to you oh-mighty, Watchman?”

“In all things concerning MY Guide. I demand IT.”
“Oh, shut up,” Steven told him in disgust. “It was a ball, a BEACH BALL.”

Blair looked up at Joel. “May I have some milk, please?” Not in the least bit worried about the escalating yelling.

“You know what you need, Watchman?” Steven asked Jim, blue eyes sparking angrily.

“Oh, I’m sure you’ll tell me. Simon, can I have a breadstick?”

Simon passed the breadsticks, watching enthralled. He’d rarely ever seen Jim and Steven fight. This was interesting and bound to get even more so. William, Sally, Michael and Daryl continued eating, just as unconcerned as Blair.

“Oh, I’ll tell you alright. I think you need to get knocked down a peg or two,” Steven said, tossing a cherry tomato from his salad at his brother.

Jim caught it in midair, handing it to Blair, who promptly popped it into his mouth. “Oh and are you the person to do it? I don’t think so,” He said, arrogantly.

It was the arrogance of Jim attitude that finally pushed Steven over the edge. “That fucking does it,” He hissed, coming to his feet so fast he knocked over his chair. “I’m going to fucking kill you, you anally retentive twit.”

It didn’t matter that there were guests in the house. Well, it might have if both brothers hadn’t been so angry. But it was an explosion that had been building all day.

Jim pushed his chair away, a little more calmly than Steven. “Bring it on, asshole,” He said, motioning to Steven with his right hand.

Joel and Gladys turned toward William. “Aren’t you going to do anything?” Joel asked, eyeing the tussling brothers on the floor.

“No. They’ll take care of it themselves.”
“They could get hurt,” Gladys, Joel’s wife of twenty-nine year, said worrisedly when Steven bit Jim on the shoulder. Making him yelp in pain.

“It’ll be stopped in a second,” William told her, taking a drink of his ice tea. “I do apologize for their attitude. It happens every year, around this time. It’s the ‘going back to school anxieties’.”

Blair was wiggling in Joel’s lap. “Down,” He demanded.

“No, Blair. Stay with me until the fighting is over,” Joel told him, tightening his hold on the struggling toddler.

“Let Blair go,” William requested softly, just as a yell of outrage rented the air as Jim was once again bitten, this time his right hand.

“But…” Joel protested.

“He won’t be hurt. Let him go.”

Joel reluctantly released the little Guide. Watching as Blair moved over toward his brothers. “STOP,” He yelled at the top of his lungs. “NO FIGHT.”

Surprisingly the fighting stopped as quickly as it had begun. The adults at the table watched in amazement. Except for everyone in the Ellison household, already use to the power the three year wielded over his two brothers.

The Taggarts looked at William in shock. “Watch.” He told them, smiling.

Blair went over to his two brothers, glaring down at them. “Bad. Fighting no good. Cussing no good.”

“Jim started it,” Steven told him defensively. Yelping, when he was smacked by a little fist to the arm.

“I’m sorry, Blair,” Jim said repentantly. “Don’t be mad. I don’t like it when you’re mad.”

“I no mad. No fight, no more.”

“Alright,” Steven whispered softly. He looked up at his little brother. “You’re not mad are you? I don’t like it when you’re mad either. I don’t hate it as much as Jim, but I don’t like it either.”

Blair shook his curly head. “No mad. No like fighting. Want stop.”

Joel turned toward William unwilling to break into the drama unfolding in front of him. “How did you know he’d be able to stop them fighting?” he whispered.

“They love Blair,” William told him. “Sometimes love is all it takes. Michael, would you get the first aid kit? I think we may need to pass out a few band aids.”

“Aren’t you afraid that one of these days Blair will get hurt when he steps in like he just did?” Gladys asked.

“No. Jim is a Sentinel, attuned to his Guide so finely he knows about every breath Blair takes, every sigh, every single smile. If you had watched closely, you would have seen that the fighting had stopped the minute Blair got off Joel’s lap.”

“That answers about Jim, but what about Steven?” Joel asked, watching Michael patching up two very remorseful little boys.

“Steven loves his brothers. He’s attuned to them both.”

“That’s putting a lot on the power of love,” Joel replied.
William shook his head. “It’s not only that. The minute Jim felt Blair get off Joel’s lap, he stopped fighting, Steven felt it and stopped as well.”

“Are you saying Steven is a Sentinel?” Joel asked, as the boy they were talking about let out a yelp when Michael started cleaning a cut over his right eyebrow.

William turned to Simon who was the expert on all things Sentinel. “Steven is not a Sentinel. But he is just as rare and special, he’s their Guardian/Protector, if you will,” Simon told them.

Steven listening turned to Jim. “See asshole, your not the only special one in this family. Ow! Blair, that hurt,” He complained, rubbing his arm where the little Guide had hit him.

“No cuss,” Blair told him, disapprovingly.

“Alright, I’m sorry.” Steven looked over at his Father and Simon. “How come nobody said anything about this before?”

“I wasn’t sure. There was something odd about the way you acted toward Jim and Blair. It set off warning bells,” Simon said, taking off his glasses to rub his nose.

“Heh, I always knew you were off,” Jim heckled.

Steven glared at him. “Shut up. What’s odd about the way I am with them? They’re my brothers.”

“Don’t get me wrong, Steven. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with the way you are with them. It’s just that at times it’s not within the norm.”

“So, what you’re saying is that I’m abnormal. I should just let crazy Moms, sorry Blair, separate my brothers? I shouldn’t protect them and take care of them? Watch out for them? I should let them fend for themselves? Is that what you’re telling me?”

Simon sighed heavily. They really should have talked to Steven about this sooner. “No, that’s not what I’m telling you. Okay-I have a ‘what if’ for you. Say Naomi came back what would you do? Truthfully?”
“If she meant to harm them, I’d protect my brothers with everything I had.”

“Like you did before?”

Steven nodded. “Yeah. What’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing. What do you do at night when your brothers are sound asleep? Tell me the truth. I’ve seen you do it.”

Steven looked at his brothers nervously. “I walk around the house making sure it’s secure and that they’re safe.”

“Every night?”

Steven nodded. “Yeah, I still don’t see what’s wrong with that,” He said defensively.

“There’s nothing wrong with that. Neither is there anything wrong with you watching over them while they sleep. You’re their Protector. It’s instinctual. You couldn’t fight it if you’re life depended on it.”

Steven tilted his head. “Why would I want to do that? They’re my brothers, I love them. I’ll protect them with my life, if I have to.”

“No, Steven, no,” Jim said, in horror.

Steven turned toward Jim. “I understand it now. It all makes sense. Kinda like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fitting together. I am your Protector. Like Blair centers you and keeps you from going loonier than you already are. While you do the work you were meant to do, I protect you, so you can. I protect you both.”

Jim’s blue eyes filled with tears. “No, Steven, no.” He repeated again. “I won’t let you do it. I don’t want you getting hurt.”
Steven looked at his brother calmly. “You can’t stop me doing what I have to anymore than you can stop being a Sentinel. Or stop Blair from being a Guide. Being your Protector is what I was born to do. I know that now.”

“But Steven…”

“No, don’t argue with me. It won’t do you any good anyway.” Steven smiled at him. “I think it’s kinda cool, actually. Knowing at eleven what my life’s work will be. Just like you, I’ve got a destiny and you better not fucking get in my way. And besides it’s something I already do anyway.”

Blair let the cuss word go. Instead he went to Steven and gently touched his face. “Do you understand what I gotta do, Blair?” he asked, blue eyes pleading for understanding as he looked up at his baby brother.

The little Guide nodded. “Yup.”

“You’re going to let me do it?”

“Yup.”

Steven hugged Blair. “Thank you, little brother. And you Jim?”

The young Sentinel rubbed at his eyes. “I don’t like it?”

“You don’t have to like it, just accept it.”

Jim sighed heavily. “Alright, Steven, alright.” Tears streaming down his face he gave his brother a weak smile. “My little brother, the Protector.”

Steven pulled him into a hug. “Damn straight and don’t you ever forget it. Let finish eating.”
They rose to their feet, Jim carrying Blair. “I’m sorry for getting out of hand, Dad.” Jim told his Father, wiping his face with the sleeve of his shirt. He then turned toward Mr. and Mrs. Taggart. “I apologize for fighting. It’s something you shouldn’t have seen and I’m sorry.”

Blair offered his arms to Joel, who took him from Jim. “That’s alright. That sort of thing happens in every household.”

Steven smiled at him sheepishly as he sat down. “We’re not exactly your normal household.”

“That’s true.”

Steven looked at his father. “How long have you and Simon known about me?”

“About a week,” William replied, gently touching his son’s shoulder. “There were things about your attitude toward Jim and Blair that bothered Simon. Especially seeing how overly protective you’d been getting as time went on.”

Simon broke in. “Your over-protectiveness set off all sorts of bells. It was oddly familiar, so I did research. Found something in the ancient text on Sentinels and Guides. I had a lot of trouble finding what I was looking for. You, my little friend are as rare as Jim and Blair. Actually rarer. A protector to the Sentinel/Guide like you has not been seen in three millennia. Which is why I had so much trouble find information.”

Steven smiled at the quietly listening Jim. “See I’m special, too.”

Jim snickered. “I’d say.”

Steven frowned at him. “Did you just insult me?” Jim didn’t answer, wiggling his eyebrows at his frowning brother instead. Steven narrowed his blue eyes as he tried to figure out what the wiggling eyebrows meant. After a moment he gave up, shrugging he turned to Sally. “So, what’s for dessert?”
“So, am I going to have to go to Protector School like Jim goes to Sentinel School?” Steven asked Simon, who was rubbing his nose with a Kleenex.

“I wont no,” the Doctor said, sneezing.

Steven looked at him. “Huh?”

“I wont no,” Simon replied again, rubbing at his nose.

“You wanna try that in a language I can understand?”

William handed Simon another tissue. “I think he said, that he didn’t know.”

The Doctor wiped his eyes with the fresh Kleenex. “Oh, God, I hate my life;” He said miserably as he sneezed again.

William smiled at him. “Isn’t there anyone else you can send down into the archives to research Sentinel Protectors?”
“I could, but I want to do this. Steven’s my little buddy and I want to make sure nothing is missed. Will, can I have another tissue?”

William handed it to him. “You could always have someone go down there and at least dust for you. How about I have a cleaning crew go down there and take care of it for you?”

Simon shook his head. “The books down there are very delicate and thousands of years old even if they do have six inches of dust.”

“There has to be someone that specializes in this sort of thing,” William insisted. “Otherwise you’re going to rub your nose right off your face by the time you find something on Protectors.” He replied, handing the suffering Doctor another tissue.

Simon sighed heavily. “I suppose.”

“I’ll look into it tomorrow.”

Simon nodded his agreement. “Alright. Thank you.”

William smiled at him. “No reason to thank me. You’re putting yourself through a lot to help my family.”

Simon patted William’s arm. “My family as well.”

“Yes, that true too,” William replied softly. He turned toward Steven who was quietly watching them. William, Simon and Steven were having a late Wednesday afternoon snack at the dining room table as had become a sort of habit, at least when they had the time. “So, Son-are you ready to start a new school year?”

Steven bit into a chocolate chip cookie. “Not yet. Still have to buy clothes and writing paper. Need odds and ends mostly.” He sighed. “It’s just that Jim is so anal about everything and he’s being more analie than usual. Has to have everything matching, the socks have to have the same amount of threads. If the color is off even a little on a pair of jeans he’s looking at, he flips. I told him it didn’t freaking matter if the blue wasn’t dark enough, they’re just jeans.” Steven rolled his eyes. “That got
me the look that Jim gives— you know the one that can freeze you at fifty paces,” he shivered dramatically. “Brr, I’m still cold.”

William and Simon laughed. “Where’s Jim and Blair right now?” William asked smiling at his middle son.

“Jim’s helping Blair pack his new Batman backpack. Making sure that Blair’s got the right amount of pencils, that they’re lined up right, that his crayons aren’t broken or chipped or heaven forbid just a tad off the color they claim to be.”

“And what’s Blair doing during all this?” Simon asked offering Steven another cookie.

Steven took it. “Don’t mind if I do. Reading a book on tribes in Peru. Couldn’t care less that Jim is stressing himself into an early grave. Well, until the he gets tired of Jim’s grumbling and pops him one.”

“Hey, Michael’s not in here stealing all the cookies?” Simon said, looking around.

Steven took a drink of his milk. “Went to go see Mattie. He’ll be back by dinner. Especially since dinner’s fried chicken and muscle brain loves chicken.”

“Oh,” Simon said, wiping his nose with another tissue. It wasn’t so bad, now that the allergy pill had taken effect. “Maybe Mattie’ll send some chocolate cake.

Steven smiled happily. “Yeah, huh.”

***

“B…but Blair?”

“Nows.”

“I don’t need to be scented?” Jim said stubbornly.
“Do,” Blair replied, tilting his head to the side as he contemplated his Sentinel. “Jim acting cuckoo. Need scent.”

“But Blair, I need to finish packing your backpack for school. It’s starts on Monday.”

“NOW!”

Jim flinched. Standing quickly he practically raced to the bed where Blair sat. The book the little Guide had been reading forgotten. “Okay. Okay. Don’t get mad.”

Jim picked his little Guide into his arms, burying his face against a warm little neck. He sighed softly as Blair began releasing scent. He began keening as the bonding scent was released as well. He pulled Blair closed, wrapping his arms around the slight body tightly as he rocked them both.

Jim felt Blair’s little hands gently stroking his hair. Comforting him in a way no one else on the planet could. Stabilizing his out of control emotions as well as his senses. Blair had been right he had gone a little cuckoo. He knew it now that he could think straight.

He pulled away slowly. “I’m sorry, Blair.”

His little Guide tilted his head slight as he contemplated him. “Better.”

“Yes. Lots,” Jim replied, gently kissing Blair’s forehead. “I didn’t realize that I was so out of control.”

“Cuckoo?”

Jim smiled slightly. “Yup, cuckoo. It’s that getting ready for school, football practice. Lee Brackett trying to kill me. It got to me and I didn’t even realize it. I’m sorry. Did I make you, Steven and Michael crazy?” He flinched slightly when Blair nodded. “Sorry.” Jim apologized regretfully.

“Better?” Blair asked him, stroking his cheek with a tiny finger. It never failed to amaze Jim that
Blair being as little as he was, knew so much. Especially on stuff that kept him from going off the deep end.

“Much,” Jim replied, moving into the gentle touch.

“Dat all that madder.”

“Hmm,” Jim said, pulling Blair into a tight hug. “I love you, Baby.”

Blair wrapped his arms around his Sentinel’s neck. “I luvs you too.”

“Baby?”

“What?”

Jim blinked at him sleepily. “I never realized being cuckoo took so much out of you. I could use a nap. How about you.”

Blair gave him a brilliant smile. “Yuppers.”

Jim returned the smile. “Cool.” The smile deepening when Blair giggled. He was to tired to pull the blankets free, so all he did was lay back with his Guide held protectively in his arms and closed his eyes.

Steven walked into the bedroom twenty minutes later carrying a plate of cookies and two glasses of milk to find his brothers sound asleep, tightly wrapped around each other. It looked like Blair had fixed Jim. Laying the cookies and milk down on their nightstand right next to Blair’s stuffed panther.

He covered them with a blanket off his bed before stretching out on it. He picked up a comic book from the stockpile he had on his own nightstand. Ready, willing and able to guard his brothers’ sleep, no matter how long it took. He looked over at them making sure everything was alright before he opened his comic book.
The first one to stir was Jim. He opened his eyes and looked over at Steven who was watching him. “How do you feel?” Steven asked quietly.

“Better. I’m sorry, Stevie.”

Steven smiled at him. “Don’t be sorry. It’s not like you can help being an asshole.”

Jim chuckled softly. “Geez, thanks.”

“No problem. I brought you milk and cookies. I don’t know how cold the milk is now though.”

“How long till dinner?” Jim asked, wiggling very carefully out from under Blair.

Steven looked over at the large Obi Wan Kenobi wall clock Daryl had brought with him when he’d moved in. “I’m saying half an hour. Use your nose if you want to be more accurate.”

Jim closed his eyes and tilted his head to the side. “Hmm, potatoes are done, carrots just about. Sally’s frying up the last pieces of chicken. Michael’s back and he’s talking to Dad about starting to train you in self defense techniques.”

“Yeah, okay, whatever. More importantly, did he bring back chocolate cake?”

Jim opened his eyes and gave Steven a brilliant smile. “Oh, yeah.”

“Cool. How soon till dinner, then.”

“Sally just told Dad it’d be ten minutes.”

Steven frowned. “Hey, could that be considered an invasion of privacy?”

Jim shrugged. “Don’t know. We’ll have to ask Simon the rules on that.”
Steven rolled his eyes. “Don’t be so anal. You can break the rules now and then if you want, Watchman.”

“I really wish you’d quit calling me anal.”

Steven looked at his brother smiling slightly. “Why? That’s what you are.”

Jim tsked at him. “Not all the time,” He protested. Steven just looked at him. “Well, I’m not.”

Steven stole a cookie from the plate. “Yeah, okay-keep telling yourself that and eventually you might actually convince yourself.”

“I hate you,” Jim told him affectionately.

Steven smiled at him. “Yeah, I hate you too, Watchman. So when does Blair’s Grandpa get back in town?”

“Monday, I think.”

Steven stole another cookie. “Is he gonna move in here with us after all?”

Jim took a cookie from the plate before Steven could finish them all. “Hmm, I think he’s only gonna stay with us until his apartment is ready.”

“Cool.”

Jim took a drink of his now lukewarm milk. He grimaced. “Yuck. Yeah it is. He wants to start taking Blair to religious services with him. Wants him to meet his Rabbi.”

“I did warn you about the milk not being cold any more. Is Dad gonna let Blair do it?”
Jim put the glass of milk back down on the nightstand. Maybe Wofie and Blackie’d want it. “Last I heard Dad’s still thinking about it. I’m not sure he trusts Jacob to well after everything Blair’s Mom did.”

“Hmm, don’t blame Dad one bit, even if Jacob is a cool old dude. The safeties are in place in case anything like that happens again. So you don’t have to worry that you and Blair will ever be separated. Remember, this week it’s Joel. If anything happens go to him and he’ll protect you and Blair. Every week the person to go to will change. I’ll tell you at the beginning of the week who it is.”

Jim smiled at his little brother. “Thank you, Stevie. You’ll never know how much I appreciate everything you do for Blair and me.”

“I know, Jim. You don’t have to tell me.” Steven smiled at him. “I still hate you,” He replied punching Jim hard on the arm.

Jim returned the smile. “Ow! Yeah, I know. I hate you too.”

***

BACKPACKS, RULERS AND TROUBLE

“Is Jim growling?” Michael asked Steven, looking at the young Sentinel in astonishment.

“Yeah, that he is,” Steven replied, picking up a really nice Star Wars ruler. “Hey, Daryl look at this ruler.” Knowing how much Simon’s son loved Star Wars. “It’s got Yoda. You gonna want it, cause it’s the only one left, so if you’re not going to take it, I am.”

Daryl came up to them carrying a backpack, pencils, and ruled paper, everything needed to start a new school year. “Oh, that is a nice ruler.” He looked at it longingly. “No you can have it,” He told Steven generously, “You found it.” Still looking at it wistfully.

“God, Buddy-do you have enough stuff? Here let me help you with some of that.” Steven said, relieving Daryl of the ruled paper and the backpack. “No, that’s okay. I know how much you like
Star Wars, you take it. I bet if we looked through all the school supply mess we’ll be able to find another one.”

They started searching through piles of paper, torn packages of pencils and scattered crayons. Until…

“Eureka. And we have a winner,” Steven shouted triumphantly.

Daryl smiled at him in relief. “I’m glad. It’s a really nice ruler.”

“Yeah it is.” Steven turned to an impatient Michael who was practically stomping his foot. “What the hell is the matter with you?”

“I want to know if Jim is growling?”

Steven looked at him quizzically. “And I told you he was. What, did all the muscles you’ve built up squish your eardrums so you don’t hear so good?”

Michael rolled his eyes at him. “Funny. I want to know WHY Jim is growling, Numbnuts.”

Daryl had gone off in search of glue. Leaving Steven holding the backpack and the ruled paper. Steven turned to look over at his brothers. Blair was looking at coloring books with Rafe and Jim was trying unsuccessfully to choose some pencils having more success with the growling bit. Which was low, steady and menacing, but then Steven figured that was the whole point of growling. “That’s what he does when Rafe is near Blair,” Steven told him.

Michael looked over worriedly. “Should I go get Blair?”

“Naw. It’ll stop once Blair notices that his Sentinel is upset,” Steven told him, picking up a Star Wars binder. “Cool. Hey, Daryl.”

Right on cue the little Guide looked over toward Jim sensing that his Sentinel was not happy, he went over to him.
“Up.”


Blair tilted his curly head to the side, contemplating his Sentinel. “Now,” He said quietly.

“No, Blair. I said I was fine.”

Before it could go any further Lee Brackett swaggered up to them. “Well, well, well if it isn’t the freak.”

Jim taken away from the contest of wills he was having with his little Guide. He groaned inwardly. “What do you want, Lee?”

“Nothing. I’m school shopping just like you,” Lee replied, smugly at Jim.

“Huh, huh.”

Lee picked up a pack of erasers. “So did you know I’m dating Daisy?” he asked looking at it, before tossing it back in the pile with the other erasers.

“That’s nice,” Jim replied with a tense smile.

Lee looked at him. “Yeah, I bet. Considering you want her for you.”

Jim shook his head. “No, I don’t.”

“What, she not good enough for you?” Lee asked moving toward Jim menacingly.
Jim rolled his eyes. “Oh, please. It’s not enough you try and kill me on the football field you gotta start harassing me elsewhere too?” he said with a heavy sigh. “Go away, Lee.” He really didn’t need this. His head hurt and he was starting to feel funny.

Lee’s blue eyes narrowed. “Last time I checked it was a free country. I’ll go wherever the hell I want.”

Blair who’d plastered himself along Jim’s side, began growling. The young Sentinel looked down at his Guide. “It’s okay, Blair.”

“Go away, Lee,” H told him, coming up, carrying his own just-bought stuff for school.

“No.”

H put his bags down. “Look we all know that the only reason you’re hassling Jim right now is because of Daisy. Jim doesn’t want Daisy, so you’re more than welcome to her. Quit looking for an excuse to pick a fight.” H put his hands on the top of Blair’s curly head in an effort to calm the agitated little Guide. “The way I see it you’ve got two choices. One, go away if all you wanna do is fight. Two, behave and join us in getting ready for school. We’re going for ice cream after were done here. The choice is yours.”

Lee tilted his head to the side. “Why the hell would I want to join you for ice cream?”

H smiled at him. “Because we’re sharing one of those ice creams from Harold’s Ice Cream Parlor that’s got everything, but the kitchen sink in it. It’s going to take all of us and a few more to finish it. Behave and you are more than welcome to join us. Right, Jim?”

Jim nodded. “Yup.”

H turned toward the quietly watching Rafe, Carl, Steven, Daryl and Michael. All of them ready to step in if Jim needed help. “Right, guys?”

They all nodded. “Yup,” Steven replied. “There’ll be enough ice cream in that thing to give all of us a sugar rush for the next week.”

Lee looked at him for a moment before turning to look at Jim. Jim returned the look steadily with one of his own. Lee then looked over at the other guys.

“I didn’t bring any money.”

“That’s okay,” Jim replied. “Our treat.”

Lee met Jim’s eyes. “Are you sure?”

The young Sentinel nodded. “Yeah, it’ll be great. I don’t wanna fight with you. I’d like to be friends if we could.”

Lee looked at the floor then up at him. “Alright.”

All the guys huddled around Lee slapping his back in welcome. Glad that it hadn’t ended up with someone getting hurt.

“So do you have all your stuff for school?” Rafe asked Lee.

Lee shook his head. “No. Haven’t started yet.”

“School starts in two days,” Carl replied.

“I know, but my Step-Dad forgot to give me money before he went off on his business trip to Paris.” Lee’s face flushed brightly in embarrassment.

“When will he be back?” Rafe asked.

“Next Saturday.”
“Oh,” The group said almost at the same time.

They all seemed lost in contemplation until. “I can lend you money so you can get school supplies,” Michael said, smiling happily.

Lee shook his head. “No, I wouldn’t feel right.”

“You’re only borrowing the money. You can pay it back when you Step-Dad gets back. It’ll all work out.”

Lee looked at him eyes troubled. “I don’t know.”

“Go on, do it. Take advantage. Michael doesn’t lend money to anyone. Uses all his money on muscle building drinks that taste like chalk water,” Steven said, sticking out his tongue. “Yuck.”

Michael looked at him. “Hey, when did you get a drink of my protein shake?”

Steven rubbed his forehead with his forefinger. “Hmm, let me think on that. Oh, yes, it was yesterday when I accidentally spit into it.”

“Accidentally spit in to it, huh? You are SO asking for an attitude adjustment hug.”

Steven backed away quickly from the bodybuilder. “I didn’t really spit in to it. I was kidding. I was a very good boy all day yesterday,” He said hastily going to stand in back of his brothers.

Everyone laughed knowing how Steven felt about attitude adjustment hugs. Lee looked at them curiously having no idea what they were talking about.

Michael gave Steven a finally warning look before turning back to Lee. “Please, do it. I don’t mind. Really I don’t.”
“I…if your sure,” Lee replied still looking really uncertain.

Michael nodded his curly head, blue-green eyes solemn. “I am. What do you wanna look at first? Clothes or school supplies?”

“Well, I could use some new jeans. Could we start there?”

Michael nodded. “Sure thing.”

Jim watched Lee and Michael head toward the jean section, before looking down at his little Guide. Blair’s blue eyes were flashing angrily up at him.

“B…Blair? B…baby?” he stuttered softly.

Blair frowned at him before he went over to Rafe and offered him his arms. Steven came up to him. “What’d you do?”

“I…I don’t know?” Jim replied, frowning. Rafe gave him a thoughtful look before taking Blair back over to the coloring books.

“Well, you must have done something. Blair is seriously pissed at you.”

Jim glared at him. “I told you, I don’t know what the fuck I did. Are you deaf?”

Steven just looked at him. “Don’t use that tone with me, Watchman. Might work on other people, but it sure as hell doesn’t work on me.”

Jim sighed. “I’m sorry, Steven. I really don’t know what I did,” He replied, rubbing his head. It was really starting to hurt.

H came up to them carrying his bags. “I know what you did. Wanna know?”
Jim nodded eagerly. “Yeah.”

H smiled at him. “It’ll cost you.”

“Don’t make me hurt you,” Jim growled menacingly.

H shivered dramatically. “Oooh, scary.”

Jim shook his head giving his friend a small smile. “Just tell me, already.”

“When you were growling, Blair wanted you to pick him up and you said no.”

“I…I did?”

H. nodded. “Yeah, you did. Told him you were fine.”

“Oh, shit.”

Steven nodded. “I’d say you’re in a world of it right now, Watchman.”

Jim glared at him. “Shut up.”

Steven smiled at him tightly. “Okay.” And walked away. Jim had been a real ass the past few days. Steven had had enough.

“Hey, weren’t you going help me figure out how to fix this.”

Steven turned around giving him another smile, before going to where Daryl and Carl were looking at pencils.
“Shit,” Jim cussed under his breath. “I’m pissing everyone off.”

H nodded. “Yup. You’ve really got to get a handle on that anger problem you’ve got.”

Jim frowned at him. “I don’t have an anger problem.”

“You sure as hell do. I heard about you trying to beat up Steven the other day.”

“That was different. Steven hit Blair with a beach ball,” Jim told him dismissively. “By accident.”

“I told him not to throw the freaking ball,” Jim replied angrily, lowering his voice when everyone turned to look at him. “Blair could have been hurt.”

H sighed. “That’s what I’m talking about, Buddy. You need to lighten up. You’re taking everything way to serious. I know that you’ve got a lot of pressure on you right now, being the world’s youngest Sentinel and all, but you’re only twelve. Don’t take everything so serious.”

Jim looked over at Blair who was giggling at something Rafe was telling him. “You’re right. It’s just…”

H interrupted. “You’ve got a lot of responsibility and it get’s to be too much for you sometimes?”

“Yeah,” Jim whispered softly. “it does.”

H touched his arm. “Don’t let it. You’ve got your family and friends around you to help, if you need it.”

Jim smiled at H. “When did you get to be so smart?”
H returned it. “I hang out with Steven, it kinda rubbed off.”

Jim snorted. “I bet.” He looked over at his little Guide. Blair was looking at a Batman comic book. Rafe, Carl, and Daryl were all on their knees looking it over with him Steven had wandered off to join Michael and Lee at the school supplies. Jim sighed heavily. “Okay. I better go apologize to my little Guide. If I don’t, he won’t talk to me for a week.”

“Good idea,” H replied. “Hey, if you need someone to talk to I’m here. So is Rafe, even if you’re not getting along with him to well right now. So’s the rest of the guys. You can always talk to your Dad. He’s got to be the coolest parent on the planet.” H touched his arm. “You’re not alone in this, remember that.”

Jim nodded. “I’ll remember.” He looked up, meeting H’s eyes. “Thanks, H,” he said softly.

“No problem, Buddy.”

Jim approached Blair cautiously. “Blair?” The little Guide didn’t look up. “Come on, Baby, I know you can hear me.”

Blair continued to look at his coloring book. The other guys had moved away when they’d noticed Jim approaching. They’d all joined Steven, Michael and Lee at the school supplies.

Jim went to his knees in front of Blair. He was still being ignored. He moved as close as he dared. Warily of his little Guide’s tiny fists. “Baby?” Nothing. He inched a little closer. “Blair?” Still nothing. “I love you,” He said softly. That got a twinge of a reaction as Blair flickered his big blue eyes at him, before darting away. “I really love you and I didn’t realize I was being mean to you when you only wanted to help. I’m sorry. Do you wanna hit me? You can if you want. I know I deserve it for the way I’ve been acting. I’ll hold still if you wanna hit me. Go on, hit me,” Jim said, sticking out his chin in offering. Still when the punch came he wasn’t expecting it. It sent him sprawling on his ass. “Ow! Feel better?”

Blair shook his head sadly. “No.”

Jim rubbed at his blood nose. Damn, Blair could hit hard. His nose really hurt. “I’m sorry, Blair.” He was shocked to see Blair’s blue eyes fill with tears.
“I wanted to help,” Blair’s sentences were starting to come out clearer even though most times they were still in baby talk. “Make Jim feel better.”

“I know you did,” Jim replied softly, sitting up straighter.

“You hurt feelings,” Blair told him, rubbing at his tear-filled eyes with the back of his hands.

Jim leaned against the back of the magazine rack. “I know. Sometimes I don’t know what comes over me. I never, ever meant to hurt you. You are my heart and soul, Blair. Without you, I don’t live. I can’t even exist.”

Blair climbed into Jim’s lap. He wrapped his arms around his Sentinel waist, cuddling close. “I luv you.”

Jim buried his face in his little Guide’s hair. “I love you too.” He murmured softly, wrapping his own arms around Blair carefully. “I’m sorry, so very sorry.” He added tearfully.

“Need scent?”

Jim lifted his head to look around the store. They weren’t exactly in a place to do something the young Sentinel considered extremely private or at the very least not to be shared with that many people.

Steven was quietly watching. He saw his older brother looking around knowing instinctively what he needed. With a quiet word to the others they formed a protective barrier between his brothers and what was essentially the outside world. Their backs to the Sentinel/ Guide pair, allowing them the privacy they needed. Jim could be an ass sometimes, but he was his brother and he would protect him with everything in him. His little brother too.

When he heard Jim began to keen softly he knew that Blair had started to release the scent that was critical to his brother’s well being. He hoped that it would work to steady him. Jim had been on edge for the last few days. Finding fault with everything and trying to pick fights over the stupidest things. Steven and Jim had almost come to blows over Jim’s attitude. It wasn’t as bad as when Joel and Gladys Taggart had come over, but it’d been close.

“How long is this going to take?” Lee whispered.
“A little while more,” Steven whispered back. “Jim needs this to keep him sane. Not that you can tell much difference.”

“Is this what life is like living with a Sentinel?”

“Pretty much. There’s times where everything gets to be too much for him and he flips and then Blair needs to straighten him out,” Steven said, reaching into his pocket for a packet of bubble gum. Taking one he offered it to Lee. “Gum?”

Lee took the strip. “Thanks.”

“No problem.” He offered it to the rest of their friends. They all quietly chewed while they waited for Blair to fix Jim.

“Is this my fault?” Lee asked, guiltily.

“Yeah, I think partly.” Steven touched Lee’s arm when he flinched. “It’ll be okay. Blair will take care of it. Jim will be a different person, you’ll see.”

“I shouldn’t have been so rough on him.”

“Well, trying to kill him at every skirmish and football practice didn’t help,” Steven told Lee truthfully and with quite a bit of censor.

Lee bowed his head. “I know. It’s just…”

Steven looked at Lee curiously. “What?”

“My Step-Dad said some not so nice things about your family. Saying your Dad is always beating him out of contacts that should have been his. That you’re family was…well not very nice. I believed him and there was Daisy. She said some not so nice stuff about Jim too and I believed her.”
“And now?”

“I’ve seen with my own eyes that you guys aren’t all that bad,” Lee told him with a smile.

Steven smiled back. “Yeah, we’re not that bad once you get to know us. I’m okay. Blair’s okay too. I’m not sure about Jim, though.”

Lee chuckled. “Yeah, huh?”

“So where’s your Mom? How come she didn’t give you money to buy school stuff?” Steven asked curiously. Jim’s keening had risen a little bit in volume. Steven knew that Blair was now bonding Jim as well. He wondered what that felt like? Sometimes when Blair bonded Jim it kinda sounded like it hurt.

“Mom’s in a rehab place,” Lee said ducking his head again in shame. “Mom likes to drink a little too much.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. Went in two months ago and it just leaves my Step-Dad and me.”

“Hey,” Steven said, getting Lee to look at him. “Your Mom can get better. Mine’s dead,” He told him quietly.

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. I don’t really remember her, but Jim does and he misses her something fierce sometimes. He’d been hoping that maybe Naomi-Blair’s Mom, would kinda be substitute Mom, but that didn’t work out to well.”

Lee looked down at his feet, thinking. He looked up after a moment. “If my Mom ever gets better I’ll share her with you. She can be real cool when she’s not drinking,” He offered softly.
Steven felt his eyes fill with tears. “Really?” No one had offered to share their Mom before.

Lee nodded. “Yeah.”

“That’d be really cool. Thanks. But what would she think about being substitute Mom for three not quite normal Ellisons.”

Lee gave him a shy smile. “She’d think that—that would be way cool. Just like me thinking that I have three friends by the name of Ellison is way cool.”

“Yeah.”

Lee nodded. “Yeah.”

Michael listened to Steven and Lee talk, he’d never realized how much Jim and Steven missed not having a Mom. He was going to have to talk to Sally and Mattie about that. See if they could help ease the pain of them not having a Mom around just a little.

Their real Mom couldn’t be replaced, but there were many people who would love to step in and be substitutes. His heart hurt for them. He’d never really had a Mom either. His dying too when he was very young. Like Steven he didn’t really remember her, but that didn’t make the missing any less. More so because Jim at least had his memories, something he could touch. Him and Stephen didn’t even have that. So lost in thought he didn’t hear Jim. Startling slightly when the young Sentinel spoke.

“A…are we ready to go get ice cream?” Jim said hoarsely.

Steven turned around to look at his pale brother. Jim’s eyes were swollen and red-rimmed. “Are you okay?” he asked softly.

Jim carrying Blair nodded. “Yeah, I’m a lot better. I’m sorry guys.”

H shook his head. “There’s nothing to apologize for. Let finish up so we can go get ice cream.”
Steven watched Jim carefully at the ice cream parlor. Not liking that Jim was way too quiet and he was still too pale.

“Are you sure you’re alright?”

Jim offered Blair a piece of banana from the huge bowl of ice cream in the middle of the table. “I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine.”

Jim looked at him. “I’m just a little tired.”

“Wanna go home?”

“In a little while. Let Blair enjoy eating ice cream with the guys.”

Steven frowned. “Don’t you like it? You haven’t eaten very much of it. You’re not keeping up with the rest of the guys like you usually do.”

“I’m not really hungry for ice cream.”

Steven noticed the look Blair was giving his Sentinel. A deep frown between his eyebrows. “Blair?” The little Guide looked at him. “Should we take Jim home?”

Blair nodded. “Home.”

“Okay. Michael, we need to take Jim and Blair home. Guys we’ll see you later. Michael can come back and take you guys home, if you like.”
H shook his head. “No, that’s alright. My Grandma said she could pick us up if we needed a ride.”

Steven hesitated. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah, go.”

“Okay, see you.”


“Okay,” Jim replied quietly. He really wasn’t feeling good. He was shaky and really dizzy.

Steven frowned as he followed his brothers. Jim wasn’t being himself. He would have insisted that they stay. Something was really wrong.

Once they got home, Steven flew out the car to get their Dad and Simon who he knew were home. He flung the front door open startling them as they sat on the couch watching TV.


Both men jumped to their feet and raced to the door just as Michael carrying Jim came through it. A very worriedly little Guide holding on to the body builder’s muscle shirt. “He passed out when I was helping him out of the car,” He explained.

“Put him on the couch,” Simon directed. “Steven get my bag from my office, please.”

“What is it?” William asked worriedly.

“I don’t know.” Simon looked up at Steven when he handed him his bag. “Steven, did Jim come into contact with anything unusual? Did something happen when you guys were shopping.”
“Lee was at the store, started hassling Jim. But that got worked out. Blair smacked Jim on the nose cause he was being an ass again.” Steven looked at Blair when the little Guide gasped. Seeing Blair pale as a ghost. “No, Blair. Don’t think that. This wasn’t your fault.”

Blair’s eyes filled with tear. “I do. I hurt my Sentinell.”

William quickly gathered the trembling little boy in his arms. “No, Son. It wasn’t you.” He tightened his hold on Blair who’d begun crying. Suddenly Jim’s body arched up off the couch. “Dear God, Simon-Jim’s convulsing, do something.”
“Michael, hold Jim steady,” Simon told the bodybuilder. Filling a syringe he quickly injected Jim. In seconds the convulsions stopped and Jim lay on the couch silent and so very still.

“What’s wrong with him?” Steven asked, tears rolling down his face.

Simon frowned, gently stroking Jim’s sweat-slick forehead. “I don’t know. Until we find out we better get him to the hospital.” He picked up his phone and quickly dialed for an ambulance. Then the hospital to make arrangement to care for one very sick Sentinel.

Once Jim had stopped convulsing Blair had calmed down somewhat. He still had a strangle hold on William’s neck, whimpering quietly. “It’s okay, Son. It’s going to be okay,” William said, trying his best to calm his youngest son.

“I do. I hurt my Sentinell.”

Simon looked up. “No, Blair. You didn’t do this.”


“Watch Jim carefully,” Simon told Michael, who’d been hovering nearby. He went to where William
held the trembling little Guide, rubbing his back soothingly. “Listen to me. Blair. I’m your Doctor and Jim’s. I wouldn’t lie to you. You didn’t do this.”

Blair looked over at him. “I no do?” he asked so hopefully it made Simon close his eyes for a moment to fight back the tears.

“No, Son. You didn’t do this. Something else made Jim very, very sick. We’re going to take him to the hospital to figure out what did. It wasn’t you.”

“I okay Guide?” Blair asked in a small voice, lower lips trembling.

Simon reached out to touch Blair’s curly head. “I can say for a fact that you are the best Guide ever.”

Blair’s big blue eyes shimmered with tear. “No lie?”

Simon shook his head. “No, Son. I wouldn’t lie to you. Do you want to be with Jim? You can if you want.”

“Really?”


They all watched as Blair very carefully made himself comfortable on top of his unconscious Sentinel, burying his curly head against Jim’s shoulder. Then he very, very softly began singing to him.

Steven covered his mouth with his hand. “Oh, God.” When he was more or less under control he turned to Simon. “Is Jim going to be okay?” he asked Simon.

“I can’t say for sure. We need to find out what caused this. Until we do Jim will be put in a sterile environment. Everything coming and going will be strictly regulated. I’ve already called ahead, by the time we get to the hospital everything will be ready.”
“And Blair?” William asked, letting the tears fall unchecked.

“Will be with his Sentinel, where he belongs. He’ll be bathed in sterile solution and changed into clothing that contain no chemicals or anything that could be potentially harmful to a sensitive Sentinel. Where the hell is that damn ambulance?” On cue the sounds of the sirens could be heard in the distance. Simon met William eyes. “We’re going to do our very best. You won’t lose your son.”

William wiped at the tears. “Simon, I won’t be losing one son, I’ll be losing two,” He replied looking over at his sons. “Blair can’t live without Jim. He won’t want t…to,” His breath hitched.

Simon laid a hand on William’s arms. “We’ll see that-that doesn’t happen.”

***

William looked into the room that contained his sons. All three. Steven refused to be parted from his brothers. Enduring a painstaking sterilizing procedure along with Blair to be able to stay with the Sentinel/Guide pair.

Jim still had not woken. Blair had finally fallen asleep against his very ill Sentinel. Steven asleep in a chair head resting on top of Jim’s right hand. The left hand hooked up to IV’s and monitoring equipment.

Simon came to stand next to him overlooking the room that held William’s sons. “Anything?” William asked softly. “It’s been two days.”

“I know. The toxicology report shows an elevation of some sort of pollutant. It’s being narrowed to get an exact reading of what it was that made Jim sick. We’ll know what to do then.”

“Blair has stopped eating.”

Simon looked at William in surprise. “When did this happen?”
“This morning. He refused breakfast. Steven tried, b... but Blair refused to eat anything.” William turned to Simon. “How long can someone so little go without food before they die? Simon, if something isn’t done soon I’ll lose two of my sons and the life will go out of my third.”

Simon took off his glasses to rub the bridge of his nose. “Damn.”

William turned back to look at his sons. Willing to give everything he had to hear them laughing, joking, even fighting. Anything as long as they weren’t so silent, so still.

“When Grace died I thought my life was over. The night after I buried her I went into my sons’ room and watched them sleep. Steven woke as I knelt by the bed they were sharing. They had their own separate beds, but that night they shared. Giving each other comfort, even though Steven was very young, around the age Blair is now. Somehow he knew that Jim needed him, that I need him. He looked at me all blue-eyed sleepiness and he lifted the bed cover.” William smiled slightly. “Without saying a word he knew, asking me to join them. That night my boys gave my life new meaning.” His breath hitched again. “Then came Blair. All of two, smartest little thing I’d ever seen. All bouncy blue-eyed happiness. With a smile that could light up a room.” He turned to look at Simon his own blue eyes brimming with unshed tears. “I’m the proudest man you ever did see when he calls me Daddy. He touches everyone he meets. There’s no denying that. You’ve seen it as well as I have. If my sons die…”

Simon touched his arm. “They won’t die. On my word, I’ll do everything in my power to keep them alive. We’ll figure it out. We will. Why don’t you go home and get some rest.”

William shook his head. “No. I’ll stay here until I can take my sons home with me.”

“At least let me get a cot set up for you,” Simon urged. “You won’t be doing them any good if you pass out from exhaustion. And when was the last time you ate?”

William rubbed his face wearily. “Breakfast. Steven came out to eat with me even though it meant he was going to have to go through decontamination again. He wanted to make sure I was eating and okay.”

“How’s he doing?”

“As well as can be expected. If something happens to Jim and Blair, I’m not sure what will happen to Steven. I’m so afraid that all that feistiness that is my middle son will vanish. He loves his brothers,
very much. I am so worried, Simon.”

Simon rubbed William’s back soothingly. “So am I. We’ll figure it out. You won’t lose your family, Will. I’ll make sure of that.”

“My sons should have been getting ready for school. They were looking forward to it.” William chuckled softly. “At least Jim and Blair were. Steven called it going back to the salt mines for another year.”

Simon smiled. “He would. Where’s Steven’s big shadow?”

“Michael? He went to get Jacob at the airport. I sent Sally home. There’s nothing she can do here anyway and she was dead on her feet.”

“As you are, my friend. I’m going to go get you something to eat and then you’re going to lie down. I’ll be right back. I’m going to see if the toxicology report is in, too.”

William nodded. “Alright.”

***

Half and hour later found a plate of barely touched food sitting on the table and William laying down, not really sleeping, but resting on a cot Simon had brought in. Which was a compromise Simon wasn’t happy with, but it would have to do.

The door opened slowly to the observation room allowing all of Jim, Steven and Blair’s friend in.

“How’s Jim doing?” H whispered.

“As well as can be expected. There’s no real change.”

Rafe, H and Carl gathered around Simon looking in. Steven saw them and gave them a small wave. They all waved back.
“Damn, I’ve never seen Blair so still before. Usually he’s bouncing around the room like a ping pong ball on the loose,” Rafe said softly.

“He stopped eating this morning,” Simon told them. They were the boy’s friends and they needed to be told the truth.

“Damn,” Carl cursed softly. “Oops, don’t tell him I did that. I don’t wanna get hit. Well, you know what? I don’t mind getting hit just this once.”

H laughed softly. “Yeah, huh? How’s Mr. Ellison doing?”

“Alright considering.”

“You couldn’t get him to eat?” Carl asked, looking at Steven who was watching them with the saddest blue eyes he’d ever seen.

“No. He did try, but he said it kept getting stuck in his throat.”

Rafe looked at the unmoving figures of two of his friends and they were his friends, even if Jim was mad at him for reasons he didn’t really understand. “Dr. Banks?”

“Yes, Rafe?”

“You know that Blair is really special, right?”

“Yes,” Simon turned to look at him curiously.

“Why hasn’t he fixed Jim?”

“Huh?”
Rafe touched the cold pane. “Yeah. Blair’s been able to fix Jim before. He did it at the store when we were getting ready for school. There hasn’t been much that he can’t do when it concerns his Sentinel, he should be able to fix this as well.”

“Yeah, doing that aura and chakra thing he can do,” H said, understanding what Rafe was saying. “He should be able to pinpoint where the problem is and fix it.”

Simon’s eyes widened in astonishment. “You’re right. Out of the mouths of babes. Hot damn, but you’re right.” He went to where the phone that connected isolation to the waiting room, motioning for Steven to pick up the other end.

“Steven! Steven, wake Blair. Have him scan Jim’s aura, chakras or whatever it is he does. See if he can fix what’s wrong with Jim. Do it now.”

Steven nodded. They all watched as Steven went to where Blair lay curled around his Sentinel, half tangled in all the wires. He very gently called to him. Trying not to scare the little Guide. Blair was scared enough as it was.

“Little brother, wake up. Come on, Blair, wake up. Simon thinks you can fix Jim, but you need to wake up.”

Blair opened his big blue eyes and looked at Steven. “Stevie?” he asked softly, using the nickname Jim had just started using for him.

Steven smiled at him. “Yeah, little brother. Are you awake now?”

Blair nodded. “Yup.”

“Okay, good. Simon,” They both turned to look at where Simon and their friends stood waiting. Their Dad had joined them when he’d heard all the commotion. “thinks that you might be able to fix Jim. Can you see his chakra points?” Blair nodded. “Are the colors off-not right?” Blair nodded again. “Okay. Do you remember when you turned Jim off ‘cause he wanted to wait for you?”

“Yup.”
“Okay, I want you to do the same thing. Well, not exactly the same thing. I want you to try and fix whatever is making Jim sick. Can you do that?”

“I tink so.”

Steven cupped the earnest face looking up at him. “I won’t lose you or Jim over whatever the hell this is.” He bit his lip when he felt his eyes fill with tears. “I won’t. You’ve got to fix Jim. Please Blair, fix Jim.” He pleaded.

Blair reached up a tiny hand and gently wiped at the tears coursing down Steven’s face. “I fix,” He promised solemnly. “No lose. Luv you, Stevie.”

Steven moved his face into the gentle touch. “I love you too, little brother. Now fix Jim.”

Blair nodded. Turning toward Jim, he silently contemplated his Sentinel. For the longest time he simply stared at him. Everyone beginning to despair that Blair wouldn’t be able to do it.

He finally reached out placing his hands over Jim’s torso he gently pushed in. Then carefully removing the heart monitor he touched the middle of the young Sentinel’s chest and did the same. He moved away to once again contemplate his Sentinel.

Unable to stand the wait. “Did you fix him? Did you fix Jim, Blair?” Steven asked.

Blair nodded. “I fix.”

Steven turned toward where everyone was anxiously waiting and gave them a thumbs up. He couldn’t hear, but saw when everyone broke out in cheers.

“Why isn’t he waking up?” he asked, frowning.

Blair sat cross-legged on the bed, watching and waiting. “He wake soon.”
“Do you know what it was, Blair? Do you know what hurt Jim?”

Blair shook his curly-head. “Nope, but it make Jim berry sick.”

Just then Jim started moving around restlessly. “Come on, Watchman, come on you can do it,” Steven urged desperately. Jim slowly opened his eyes, swallowing heavily. Blinking he looked around.

“What the hell? Where am I? Why are you guys dress all in white? And smelling like disinfectant? You guys really stink.” He said wrinkling his nose.

Steven gave him a brilliant smile. “Oh, man-you gave us quite a scare, Watchman. You’ve been sick since Saturday.”

“I have?”

“Yup. What do you remember?”

“Getting in the car with you, Blair and Michael. After that nothing,” Jim replied. He looked at his little Guide who was holding his hand. “Are you okay, Baby?”

Blair lifted Jim’s hand and kissed the top of it. “I is LOTS better now.”

Jim smiled at him weakly. “I’m sorry I scared you.”

“You scared all of us,” Steven replied, pointing over toward the window where everyone waited.

Jim looked over to see his Dad, Simon and all their friends looking at them anxiously. “Dad,” he whispered softly, his eyes filling with tears when he saw how tired and worn his Father looked. He hadn’t looked this bad since Mom died. “Oh, man-Dad looks awful.”

“Yeah, well, he was really worried. He got more worried when Blair quit eating.”
Jim looked at his little Guide. “You weren’t eating? Why?”


Jim gasped in shock. “No, Baby. No.” Blair just looked at him. There was no denying what his little Guide had just said, but first things first. “We will talk about this later. Stevie could you get Blair something to eat? Have you and Dad been eating?”

“Dad hasn’t, not really. I have.” Steven shrugged his shoulders. “You know me and food.”

“Yeah, I know.” He looked around the room now that he was starting to feel stronger. “Hey, where the hell are we?”

“Isolation room. Simon thought it best to put you in here till we find out what happened,” Steven replied. “You had us really worried. You wouldn’t wake up. Till Simon told me to tell Blair to fix you doing that chaka/aura thing he does. Thank God, it worked. I don’t know why none of us thought about it before. You going into convulsions musta thrown us for a royal loop.”

Jim smiled at his little Guide who was quietly watching. “My little hero,” He whispered affectionately.

Blair gave him a brilliant smile. “Yup. I luvs you.”

“I love you too,” Jim replied, lifting their tangled fingers to kiss Blair’s forefinger. Earning a happy giggle. The Sentinel smiled, before turning back to Steven. “I’m sorry I scared everyone.”

“It’s not like you did it on purpose,” Steven told him slightly annoyed. “so quit apologizing. We’re all just happy you’re better. I’ll see about getting Blair some food.”

Jim nodded. “Okay. Tell Dad I’m alright and for him to go home and sleep. And Stevie?” Steven looked back at him. “Can you get someone to come in and take these things out? They hurt,” Jim asked indicating the IV’s.
Steven nodded. “You got it, Watchman.” Going to the window he motioned to the phone. Simon quickly picked it up.

“How is he?” The Doctor asked, eyeing the Sentinel/Guide pair cuddling and sharing happy kisses on the bed.

“He’s good. He wants the IV’s out. And he wants to see if someone can get some food for Blair.”

“No problem. I’ll have the nurses take care of it.”

“Simon-when can we get out of here now that Jim’s awake?” Steven asked the Doctor, but was watching his Dad who was swaying unsteadily.

“To soon to even consider that. We need to find the reason Jim got sick in the first place then deal with that. You can come out any time, but Blair and Jim are going to be in there for awhile.”

Steven shook his head. “I’m not going anywhere. As long as my brothers are in here so am I. Simon-can I ask you something?”

“Of course you can. What is it?”

“While we’re in here can you look after Dad? Make sure he’s eating and sleeping. He doesn’t look to good.”

“No problem there either. Now that Jim’s awake maybe I can get him to go home for a while.”

Steven gave the Doctor a huge smile. “Cool. Could I talk to him, please?”

Simon nodded, handing the phone to William. “Steven wants to talk to you.”

William gave his son a small smile. “Steven, how are you, Son?” he asked, touching the glass that separated them.
Steven placed his hand against his Father’s, wishing the glass wasn’t there. “I’m okay. But Dad you look dead on your feet. Please, go home for a little while and rest. Jim’s awake and Simon’s going to get Blair something to eat. Everything is better.”

William shook his head. “No. I’m staying here. We go home together.”

“But, Dad—you’re really tired. Sleep, shower, change, eat. Get Sally to make you a roast beef sandwich.” He smiled at his Dad. “And have her send one over for me. And maybe some chocolate chip cookies.”

William smiled. “I can do that, but I’m not leaving the hospital. When we go home, we go together.”

“But Dad—everything’s really okay. Go home. Nothing can happen while we’re in here. If you’re really worried you can always hire some bodyguards to watch over us.”

William looked over at Jim who was quietly watching and listening. “I don’t know,” William said hesitantly. “We’ll be okay. I swear, Dad everything we’ll be okay. I’ll protect Jim and Blair while you rest. Please, Dad.” Steven’s eyes filled with tears. “You look so tired. I don’t want anything to happen to you. Please, Dad. Please?” he pleaded softly.

“Alright, Son—I’ll go home.” William replied, very reluctantly. “But I’ll be back in a couple of hours.”

Steven shook his head. “No, Dad—you need more than a couple of hours. Rest as long as it takes to feel better. I swear on the Ellison name I’ll guard Jim and Blair.” Smiling when William nodded unwillingly, but he was going to do it. “Cool. I love you, Dad.”

William gave him a tiny smile. “I love you too, Son. And don’t think you waving your ‘I love you’s’ around will always get you your way. I’ll be back later.”

Steven nodded. “That’s okay. It got me what I wanted for right now. Don’t forget my sandwich and cookies.”
William shook his head smiling. “I won’t.” He looked over at his other sons. Jim was still quietly watching, Blair asleep in his arms. “I love you, son,” He whispered, knowing he would be heard. The young Sentinel gave him a brilliant smile, mouthing. “I love you too, Dad.”

William put the phone back into its cradle before turning to Simon. “I have been ordered by my sons to go home,” He told him, rubbing his eyes tiredly.

“They have you’re best interest at heart, Will. If you collapse because you’re exhausted you won’t be any good to yourself or them.”

William sighed. “Let’s go then. The sooner I rest, the quicker I can get back.”

Steven watched worriedly as Simon led his Father out of the waiting room. He looked at Rafe, H and Carl motioning for them to follow. They understood what Steven was asking and quietly followed the adults out. He watched them leave before turning back toward Jim and Blair.

***

“Is that good?” Jim asked Blair as his little Guide ate a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Blair nodded. “Good,” he said, trying to chew the sticky peanut butter.

Jim smiled offering a Blair a glass of milk. “I’m glad. Baby, can I ask you something?”

“Ask,” Blair told him offering his Sentinel a piece of sandwich.

“If I asked you not to do this again, would you?” Jim asked, taking a tiny bite.

Blair tilted his head. “What?”

“If something like this happens again, I want you to live.”
“No,” he was told firmly.

“Blair…”


“Simon could get you another Sentinel with no problem,” Jim whispered softly, earning him such a look of horror he regretted with everything in him having mentioned it.

“NO!” The little Guide screamed.

Jim flinched. “But Blair…”

“NO! Jim my Sentinell. MY SENTINELL.” Blair shouted angrily. “No otter. EVER.”

“But Blair…”

“I’d let it go if I were you,” Steven advised from his newly acquired bed.

“But Stevie…”

Steven shook his head. “Let it go, Watchman. Now’s not the time.”

“But Stevie…”

“You’re starting to sound like a broken record. You almost died. LET. IT. GO.”

“I want what’s best for Blair. Is that so hard to understand?”
Steven sat on the edge of his cot. “Let Blair decide what’s best for Blair?”

“He’s three years old.”

Steven shook his head sadly. “Damn, but you almost dying musta done something to your brain. Blair is almost four. And smarter than you and me put together. Smarter than you and me and Rafe and H and Carl put together. You could probably put Michael in there to, but all the weight lifting he does squashed his brain to mush. So I don’t think he counts. But do you see where I’m going here?”

Jim pulled Blair into his arms. “He’s still only three.” Kissing his little Guide’s forehead affectionately. Loving the blue-eyed sleepy look his little Guide was giving him. Worn out by days of worry and a now full tummy.

“Did you know you bring up his age when you’re afraid?” Steven asked him curiously.

“So?” Jim asked, pulling the now sleeping Blair higher into his arms. It felt good to be free of the monitoring devices and the IV’s. Now if they could only get out of the hospital. But Simon had been adamant—not until they found out what had made him sick.

“Wanna know what I think?”

“Most times, yeah—I guess.”

“Are you sure you wanna hear what I’m about to tell you?”

Jim tilted his head. “Is it that bad?”

“Yeah,” Steven told him softly.

Jim sighed heavily. “Alright. I know I’m not going to like it, but tell me.”
“You don’t have a choice in this. You never did. Blair made it the moment he bonded you,” Steven told him, waiting for the explosion.

“What the fuck are you saying?” Jim hisses angrily. Shushing Blair when he moved restlessly.

“What I’m telling you, Watchman-is that if you die Blair will go with you and there’s not a damn thing you or anyone can do about it,” Steven told him baldly. He watched Jim blanch.

“No.”

“I’m afraid so.”

Jim looked down at Blair. His beautiful little Guide. No. No. It wasn’t right. “There’s gotta be something we can do.” He pleaded softly.

“No. Nothing that Blair wouldn’t fight tooth and nail and win.”

Jim stroked Blair’s forehead gently. “It’s not right. He’s his own person and shouldn’t be tied to me. There’s gotta be something we can do?”

Steven went over and sat next to his brothers on their bed. “fraid not.”

Jim looked up at Steven blue eyes filled with misery. “What am I going to do then?”

Steven touched Jim’s arm. “I have one suggestion.”

“What?”

“Don’t die.”

***
Steven had finally gotten Jim to lay back and sleep. It hadn’t really taken much. Jim was still worn out from whatever had almost killed him. Simon was no closer to figuring it out. And they in the meantime, were stuck in a sterile room, with not much to do.

They’d been allowed to bring some things from home and Dad had talked to their teachers at school. So even in the hospital they couldn’t get away from homework. Mattie was making sure of it. To Steven’s eyes that really sucked. He did kinda like the art class, though. Simon had made sure his art supplies were Sentinel safe before allowing it into the room, but come to think of it everything in the room had to be Sentinel safe.

So Steven sat on his Sentinel safe bed drawing with his Sentinel safe pencils, on his Sentinel safe pad-his brothers. He was so engrossed in it he didn’t realize there was any one in the waiting room until he saw a slight movement.

He looked over to find Michael staring into the room with such wistfulness it kinda hurt to see.

Steven went over to the window and they just started at each other for a minute before he placed his right hand on the glass. Michael reached up and placed his corresponding hand over his. They stared at each other for a long time. Steven brought up his left hand. The body builder covered it with his right.

He acknowledged the look in Michael’s blue green eyes with a small nod. The body builder missed being with them. Michael nodded back as they stared at one another. Something passed between them as they continued staring at each other. Steven frowned not quite sure what it was.

Steven tilted his head to the side as he silently contemplated Michael. The body builder’s blue-green eyes darkened to jade telling Steven everything he needed to know. The question Michael was silently asking.

Steven watched as Michael’s eyes darkened even more to a color he’d never seen before. Almost black yet with a hint of the green that was prevalent most times. He wanted an answer.

Steven turned his head to look at his sleeping brothers. Before meeting Michael’s eyes again. Silently asking the body builder a question.
Michael nodded his curly head in understanding. Knowing what was being asked. Vowing silently to help Steven protect his brothers. Offering more. Everything he was he now offered to Steven. A commitment of life, body, heart and soul.

The middle son of William Ellison understood this as well as he understood his role in Jim and Blair’s life and all with Michael not saying a word. They continued to stare at one another, the silent communication between them almost tangible.

Steven’s frowned as he thought about it. The fact that he may have been to young to make such a commitment never entering his head. Being to young never seemed to bother Blair. Michael seemed willing to wait for him. Steven may be young, but he wasn’t stupid, he knew exactly what Michael was offering. And the body builder didn’t come with an off switch like Jim or at least not one Steven knew how to work. Yet he was willing to wait for Steven no matter how long it took.

Steven thought fleetingly if he could ask Blair to do that chakra thing for Michael the same way he’d done for Jim. If he accepted the bodybuilder’s offer, that was.

He saw the thoughts racing across Michael’s face so fast he almost couldn’t read them. He pushed his hands against the pane of glass, seeking a little closer contact or trying to. Seeing it, Michael pushed from the other side.

“Are you sure about this?” Steven asked wordlessly as Michael’s thoughts came through clearer.

“Yes,” Michael answered back just as wordlessly.

“It’s a huge commitment you wanna make, musclehead.”

Steven watched a small smile touch Michael’s face. “I know. I want it.”

Steven tilted his head slightly. “Why? I’m not exactly a prime catch.”

The smile deepened. “Says who?”
“Says me,” Steven thought back. He frowned. “How the hell are we doing this?”

Michael shrugged. “Who the fuck cares? I like it.”

Steven smiled. “Yeah, huh? Now we can cuss all we want and Blair can’t get mad.”

Michael chuckled. “Yeah. There is that. Well?”

“Well what?”

“Are you going to take me up on my offer?”

Steven gave him a huge smile. “Can you afford me? I don’t come cheap.”

“Yeah, I can afford you, Numbnuts.”

Steven rolled his eyes. “Geez, what kinda marriage proposal is that?” He watched Michael pale.

“Marriage?”

“Hell yeah. What the fuck did you think you were offering me? A trip to the mall?”

“Huh…”

“You really are a dip, you know that? Do you even know what the fuck you want?” Steven asked sarcastically.

Michael looked away for a moment before. “Yeah, I know,” he replied shyly.
“I’m only eleven you do know that right, perv?”

Michael sighed heavily. “Yeah, I know, dumbass. What the fuck do you take me for?”

Steven smiled at him mischievously. “A perv. I am after all only eleven.”

“Asshole.”

“You wanna ring?”

“Hell, yeah. Be happy I don’t wanna big wedding.”


Steven looked away fighting the tears. Damn, he was getting as bad as Jim. “Thanks.”

“We could always ask Blair to turn me off like he did Jim?”

“ Heard that did, you?” Steven asked sheepishly.

“Yeah.”

“Is that what you want?”

Michael looked at him shyly from underneath his lashes. “Yeah.”
“You positive. Don’t wanna hear later that I made part of your anatomy blue.”

“Huh?”

Steven rolled his eyes. “Been sniffing to much sweat from the gym have you? Killed a couple million brain cells, did it?”

“What the fuck are you taking about?” Michael asked in frustration. Half the time he had no idea what the hell Steven was saying. Now he was going to have to figure out what he was saying when he thought it too? Goddess help him.

“Well, you certainly aren’t going to be the brains of this outfit, that’s for sure.” Steven told him snootily.

“Oh, please. Like you’re that smart.”

“I am.”

Michael just looked at him. After a moment. “You are SO going to get an attitude adjustment hug when you get out of there.”

Steven returned the look equally. “Well, the way I see it—it’s your right.”

“Huh?” Confusion once again lit the bodybuilder’s face.

Steven’s blue eyes crinkled in amusement. “Seeing as we’re engaged and all,” He chuckled softly when Michael turned a bright pink. “You’ll get all the hugs you want since you’re gonna be waiting for me. And that’s all you’ll be getting till I’m of age, perv. You better treat me right or I won’t be of age till I’m forty.”

Michael turned even redder. “Oh, man. Is it to late to withdraw the offer?”

“Yup, way too late. You’re mine from here on end, musclehead. Get use to it.”
Michael gave him a shy smile. “You’re gonna take my offer?”

Steven nodded. “Yeah, I think I will.” He blinked when Michael gave him a brilliant smile as if Steven had just given him the best present in the universe. “You are fucking crazy to want me, you know that?” he told him smiling slightly.

“You’re gonna take my offer?”

“Yeah, I know, but I want you any way. Will you talk to Blair?”

Steven nodded. “Yeah, first chance I get. You better go now. Don’t wanna break this telepath thingie we got going here.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Michael replied reluctantly.

“Hey, it’s not forever. We’ll be outta here as soon as Simon figures out why Jim got sick.”

“I just don’t like being away from you guys.”

“I know, but it’s better you’re out there. We need for you to take care of Dad. Make sure he’s eating and everything,” Steven told him softly.

“I will,” Michael promised.

“You better. I don’t wanna get out of here to find Dad’s faded away to nothing.”

Michael shook his head. “It’s been a week. How much fading could he do in a week?”

“Enough to worry us.”

“You don’t have to worry. Sally, Mattie, Simon and I are looking out for him. So are the guys. He’s getting mad at us for hovering, but we’re doing it. Jacob said he’d be in tomorrow to visit. Said he apologizes for not being in sooner, but he had things to take care of.”
“I’ll tell Blair when he wakes up. You better go.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Michael replied, slowly taking his hands away from the pane of glass that separated him from where he really wanted to be. “I’ll see you later.”

“Okay. Hey?” Steven called Michael back as he walked reluctantly toward the door.

“What?”

“Don’t forget about my ring.” Steven chuckled when Michael turned bright red. “I want it by the time we get out of here.”

“Huh, okay,” Michael told him, with a tiny yet happy smile.

Steven was still chuckling when he turned back to his brothers. To find Jim sleepily watching him.

“What was all that about?”

Steven made his way to his bed. Jumping on it. “I got me a bond kinda like the one you and Blair have.”

“With Michael?”

“Yup,” Steven told him, picking up his sketch pad.

“Cool,” Jim replied, pulling Blair closer he went back to sleep.
Football, Birthdays and Holidays 3

Title: Football, Birthdays and Holidays 3
Author: Angelee
Fandom: The Sentinel
Pairing: Jim/Blair, Steven/Michael (preslash)
Summary: Changes aren’t always bad.
Beta: By my sister Anna. All remaining errors are mine-with apologies.
Note: There’s been a slight change in one of the storylines-yet again. This time concerning Rafe. I bow to the wishes of the muses and when feedback makes the plot bunny’s dance. They look so cute doing the cha-cha. (o:

Football, Birthdays and Holidays 3.

“Blair, can I talk to you for a minute?” Steven asked the little Guide.

The curly-haired toddler put down his book. “Yup.”

“Will you come over to my bed for some privacy?”

Blair nodded again. “Yuppers.” Offering his arms to Steven.

Steven looked over at Jim who was watching quietly. “No listening. This is between Blair and me, Watchman.”

Jim frowned at him. “Sentinel here. How do you expect me to not listen? We’re stuck in an isolation room. It’s not like I can just get up and move to another room.

“Turn your ears off. Listen to some music or something. Focus on it.”

“Want me to zone? Besides what could you wanna talk to Blair about that could be that private?”
Jim asked him, curiously.

Steven tilted his head to the side as he thought about it. “Hmm, you may be right about that. There really haven’t been any secrets between us. We shouldn’t start now. And maybe you can help.”

Jim gave Steven a shy smile, letting him know how pleased he was that Steven trusted him. “What’s up?” he asked, jumping onto the bed.

Steven turned a bright red. “It’s gotta do with my fiancé.”

“Michael?”

“What other fiancé could I be talking about, dweeb?”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Whatever. What about him?”

Steven looked at the little Guide. “I need to ask you something very important to my future, Blair.”

“Ask.”

“You remember when you turned Jim off so that he could wait for you?”

Blair nodded. “Yup.”

“Do you think you could do that with other people? Other people like Michael?” Steven chewed on his lip as he nervously waited for the little Guide’s answer.

“Yup. I can do. Piece of cake.”

Steven gave him a huge smile. “Cool. Will you do it when we get out of here? It’d mean a lot to Michael and me.”
“I do.”

Steven gave his little brother a hug. “Thank you, thank you. You’ll never know how much this mean to me.”

Blair returned the hug. “I knows.”

Steven looked at Jim. “Is that alright, Jim? Can Blair help us?”

Jim nodded. “Sure. I don’t see a problem with it. Besides, he says he can do it. His exact words were ‘piece of cake’. So go for it.”

“Thanks, Watchman.”

“No problem. Hey, dinner’s here. Let’s eat. I’m starving,” Jim said as a nurse came in pushing a cart loaded with food trays. Couldn’t see her face, being she was covered from head to foot in the spaceman suit they made them wear before they came in. It kinda looked liked she was smiling though, when she dropped off the trays.

Steven chuckled. “I thought that was my line.”

Jim handed him his tray. “I’m borrowing it this once.”

Steven took it. “Okay, just don’t make a habit of it.”

“Okay. Hmm, fried chicken. This looks pretty good considering it’s hospital food. Here Blair take a taste, what do you think?”

Blair took a delicate nibble of chicken. “Good. I like.”

“Do you want milk or soda?” Blair just looked at him. “Milk it is.”
Steven chuckled. “You should know by now.”

Jim opened the tiny box of chocolate milk. “Yeah, I should. Maybe it’s just wishful thinking that Blair will become a junk food junkie like the rest of us.”

Steven opened his own milk. “Not in a million years.”

“Yup. How’s your chicken?”

“Good,” Steven replied, taking a long swallow of his chocolate milk. Chocolate milk always tasted so much better when it came in little boxes, for some odd reason.

“Yours?”

“Okay.” Jim looked at Steven. “Do you think we’re getting bored stuck in here when we can’t even find something interesting to talk about?”

Steven sighed. “Yeah. How much longer do you think Simon’s gonna keep us in here?”

“He told Dad that they’ve isolated the cause of me getting sick.”

“Yeah.” Steven frowned. “Where was I when all this was happening?”

Jim took a bite of his roll. “Taking a nap with Blair.”

“Oh. What was it?”

“He thinks it was a severe food allergy,” Jim offered Blair a green bean. Blair took it, making the Sentinel chuckle when he began nibbling on it like it was corn on the cob. “Is that good, Baby?”
“Yup. ‘Nother.”

“You betcha,” Jim replied, giving him another bean. Watching in fascination as his little Guide did the same thing to it.

“Well?” Steven asked impatiently.

“Well, what?”

“What the fu…” Steven caught himself. “What the heck was it?”

“He thinks it was Urban Paprika,” Jim answered, absently. Getting the biggest kick out of the way Blair ate green beans. “Have you always eaten green beans like that, Baby?”

“Of course he has?” Steven told him, handing the little Guide his green beans since he’d already gone through his and Jim’s. Blair loved green beans.

“How come I never notice?”

“Cause you’re usually hanging out in the twilight zone.”

“Excuse me,” Jim said, offended.

“You are,” Steven told him, unrepentantly. “You spend too much time counting the fibers in socks and checking out the textures of flowers. And I must tell you, Watchman—it ain’t healthy or pretty, for that matter.”

“Oh, please. That was only a couple of times.” Steven raised an eyebrow. “Okay, it was twice. It was only two times.” The disbelieving eyebrow didn’t come down. “Okay, fine. It was three times,” Jim said in exasperation. “And what was so unhealthy about it?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe it was the way you ZONED on a rose. Big sissy.”
“It wasn’t that bad a zone. And it was a beautiful color of burgundy.”

“That just proves my point. What guy in their right mind knows that a rose is the color of burgundy. Sissy.”

Jim glared at his brother. “Shut up. Besides Dad’s the one that told me the rose was burgundy. Are you gonna call Dad a sissy? Go on, I dare ya.”

“Oh, please. Dad is Dad. He is on a higher plane than the rest of us mere mortals.”

“What?”

“Dad can never be a sissy. He can say a rose is burgundy all he wants.”

“But I can’t?”

“Yup.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because that would make you a sissy,” Steven told him, blue eyes twinkling. He loved the way his brother was such easy prey.

“Well, that’s just dumb.”

Steven smiled at him. “No, Watchman. That make’s you a sissy.”

“Oh, shut up,” Jim said, tossing his biscuit at Steven. Who caught it mid air and took a healthy bite out of it, before tossing it back.
Jim frowned as he looked at his biscuit, now half gone. Shrugging he bit into it. How many cooties could Steven have? And besides they were brothers. He thought to himself as he gave Steven the chicken leg on his plate he was eyeing hopefully. They shared everything else—might as well share a few cooties too.

***

HEALING A FRIENDSHIP

Later, much, much later Jim, Blair and Steven had found a way to occupy their time. Being bored, bored, bored. BORED.

“Okay, Blair-jump.”

Blair curls happily bouncing up and down on the bed dived trustingly right into Jim’s arms.

“Nice jump,” Jim told him, kissing his forehead.

“Again. Again,” Blair said, excitedly.

Jim placed Blair back on the bed carefully. “Okay. Hang on a second.” He turned toward Steven who was once again sketching in his pad. “Wanna join us?”

“Not right now. Let me finish this.”

“Okay,” Jim replied. That was when he noticed someone had entered the waiting room. Without having to look he knew who it was by the happy waves Blair was giving.

“Rafe’s here,” He said, unenthusiastically.

Jim scowled, but made no comment. He went to stand in front of the pane of glass separating them from the outside world. He looked at Rafe, but made no move to pick up the phone.

Rafe looked at him sadly. He really didn’t want to lose Jim as a friend. They’d been buddies since Pre-K. Jim had shown him how to tie his shoes. They’d shared comic books, lunches, secrets for as long as he could remember. And now for reasons he didn’t understand Jim hated him.

Rafe sighed unhappily, motioning for Jim to pick up the phone. The young Sentinel did it so reluctantly, Rafe felt his eyes fill with tears.

“H…Hi. How are you guys?” Rafe asked, blinking away the tears.

“Fine. You?”

“Okay.”

“Good. How’s school?” Jim asked, ignoring the fact that Rafe’s eyes were glittering with tears.

“I…it’s there. Why?” Rafe asked, trying to clear the lump in his throat.

“Why, what?”

“Why do hate me all of a sudden?”

“I don’t hate you.”

Rafe wiped at the tears impatiently. “You could have fooled me. Is it because of my friendship with Blair? I’ll stop being friends with him if it bothers you so much.”

Jim moved from one leg to the other nervously. “You can’t do that. Blair loves you.”
“And we’ve been friends since we were babies.”

“Yeah,” Jim replied, reluctantly.

“Tell me what it is,” Rafe urges. “Tell me what it is and I’ll stop doing it. So we can be friends again.”

“You can’t stop doing it,” Jim replied, turning to look at his little Guide and Steven playing on the bed. “What’s going to happen-is going to happen.”

Rafe frowned. “What are you talking about?” he asked, in confusion.

“You can’t change what’s about to happen any more than I can. And you are the only one on the planet who could take Blair away from me, if you wanted. Did you know that?”

“I’d never do that,” Rafe replied, stunned by what Jim had just told him. “Why the hell would I want to do that?”

“Blair loves you.”

“And I love him, but what has that got to do with anything?”

“You could take him from me.”


“If you wanted to, you could make Blair your Guide,” Jim told him, reluctantly.

Rafe couldn’t have heard right. “What? What did you just say?”
“I’m estimating you’re four to five years from coming online.”

Rafe blinked. “Huh?”

“You are a Sentinel.”

Rafe’s brown eyes widened in disbelief. “You’re fucking lying.”

Jim shook his head. “No.”

“Yes, you are. You got mad at me for something else and now you’re trying to punish me.”

Jim gave a small smile. “Is that what you think being a Sentinel is? Some sort of punishment?”

“Tell me you’re lying. Please, Jim, tell me you’re lying,” Rafe pleaded.

Jim shook his head. “I’m not lying.”

Rafe looked into the solemn blue eyes watching him. He sighed heavily. “How long did you say I have?”

Jim chuckled. “It’s not some sort of fatal disease. Four, five years. Blair could probably make it sooner, if you like.”

Rafe sighed again. “Yeah, then you’d kill me for sure. How are you so sure I’m going to be a Sentinel?”

“There’s something in you that’s starting to shift. Kinda like blocks that aren’t quite in place. I can see it. When it’s aligned, you’ll become a Sentinel.”
“I hate you,” Rafe hissed at him.

Jim gave him a tight smile. “Bearer of bad news?”

Rafe ran a trembling hand through his brown hair. “Not exactly the bearer of bad news. It’s just not that good a news.” He met Jim’s blue eyes. “I don’t want Blair that way. He’s my friend. And I want you to start being my friend again too. Please,” He pleaded, when Jim looked away. “Please, Jim.”

“I don’t know if that’s possible any more,” he was told quietly.

“But I don’t want Blair. I love him like one of my little brothers.”

“I don’t know.”

Suddenly something occurred to Rafe. “Jim, if you can see I’m going to be a Sentinel could you use your Spidey senses to figure out who my Guide will be?”

Jim frowned. “I don’t know. Maybe.”

“Will you try? I don’t know how else to show you I don’t want Blair that way. Will you try?” Rafe pleaded.

“Alright.”

Jim went through all the smells, tastes, touches and sights he had stored. Like he’d been taught by Simon. Feeling Blair join him, holding onto his hand as a touchstone to keep him from zoning.

Steven had joined them as well. They’d been playing on the bed when little Guide had gone still. Watching Jim, big blue eyes solemn.

After a moment Blair had demanded “Down.” And now they watched as Jim did his Sentinel thing. Not really sure what it was and not wanting to interfere. Only knowing they wanted to show support.
After what felt like forever to Rafe, but couldn’t have been more than a couple of minutes Jim’s blue eyes cleared and focused. “I did it?” he said with a huge smile. “I know who it is.”

“Well, don’t keep me in suspense, tell me.”

“Are you sure you wanna know?”

“Well-YEAH,” Rafe told him in exasperation.

“I don’t think I need to tell you. As long as it’s not Blair, then I’m happy. I feel LOTS better now,” Jim replied, looking down at his little Guide who was looking up at him, a huge smile on his cute little face.

“Well, I’m glad you’re feeling better. You’ve already told me I’m a Sentinel. That’s bad enough. You might as well tell me the rest of it. It’s going to be Matilda Higgins from our class, I just know it. Just my luck I’m going to have to spend the rest of my life with someone who looks like something the monster from the Black Lagoon ate, but spit out cause he couldn’t stand the taste. And then he up and died because someone that ugly was inside his tummy and the shock of it gave him a heart attack.”

Jim chuckled. Rafe was off on a rant. He hadn’t seen one in so long-he kinda missed it. Missed his friend. He was happy now that he didn’t have to worry about Rafe taking his little Guide. Rafe was the only one on the planet that could, because Blair loved him.

“No it’s not Matilda.”

“Who is it then?” Rafe asked, impatiently.

“Hey, wait a minute. I thought you said you were just jealous,” Steven asked, frowning at his brother. Able to put together what was happening by the bits and pieces Jim was saying.

“I am or rather I was. But there was more to it than I thought. It didn’t hit me till just now, when I was looking at Rafe.”
“Like a two by four across the forehead.”

“Yeah. I can see it.” Jim frowned. “Rafe is standing there, but I can see something in him shifting. Like blocks starting to align. Moving around inside of him.”

“You sure it’s not going to be a critter like in Aliens?” Steven asked worriedly, moving away from the window slightly. “I gotta happy future to look forward to. Got me a job, a fiancé and everything is looking up, I don’t need to end up as snack food.”

“No. No, alien critters.”

Steven looked at Rafe then at Jim. “Maybe it’s the chicken you ate at lunch. Gave you food poisoning. Making you see things.”

“Nope, not the chicken,” Jim replied, reaching down to pick up Blair.


Rafe’s face softened from impatience to something that almost made his face glow. Jim understood now what it was and wasn’t threatened by it. Rafe loved Blair, truly loved him, but not in a way that threatened Jim’s bond with the little Guide.

“It’s shaking fine, Blair. How are you?” Rafe asked, placing his hand against Blair’s wishing there wasn’t glass between them.

“I is cool. I miss you,” Blair said sorrowfully.

“I miss you too,” Rafe replied. Looking over at Jim to make sure the Sentinel wasn’t taking it wrong. He wasn’t, he was smiling. Rafe sighed in relief. “When do you get out of here?” he asked the young Sentinel.
“Tomorrow. Simon says we can probably go home tomorrow. He’ll tell us what happened to me and how we’re going to prevent it from happening again.”

Steven frowned. “Where was I when this happened?”

“Asleep with Blair. AGAIN. Which is about all you’ve been doing since we’ve been here. Well, that and sketching.”

“It’s not like there’s a whole lot to do in here,” Steven replied, unapologetically, “Nothing other than HOMEWORK.” He crinkled his nose distastefully.

“Yeah, that’s true.”

Jim watched Rafe and Blair play itsy bitsy spider up and down the pane of glass for a while.

“Blair?” His Guide looked at him. “Did you know that Rafe was a going to be a Sentinel?”

Blair nodded. “Yup.”

“And you didn’t say anything?”

Blair tilted his head as he contemplated his Sentinel. “No ask,” He said, simply.

Jim rolled his eyes. “Dang. That would have saved me months of worry.”

“That’ll teach you,” Steven told him.

“Teach me what?” Jim asked, knowing better, but deciding to bite the bullet and ask anyway.

“Little Guide is all knowing, all seeing. Kinda like Dad. They’re way above us mere mortals and especially way, way, way WAY above you, Watchman.”
“Shut up. I hate you. You know that, right?”

Steven smiled at him. “Oh, yeah.” Not in the least bit hurt by his brother’s comment.

“Okay, just so you know.” Saying that, Jim turned to his little Guide. “Blair, do you know who Rafe’s Guide is gonna be?”

Blair nodded. “Yup.”

“Then will you tell me?” Rafe pleaded, from the other side of the glass. Hearing everything from where Jim held the phone. “Jim won’t tell me.”

Blair looked at Jim who nodded. “Go ahead and tell him.”

The little Guide turned to the window. “Hang on.” Steven broke in. “This could be blackmail material for years to come. Don’t tell him.”

Rafe moaned, banging his head against the glass in frustration. After a few minutes he looked up and glared at Steven.

“I am going to kill you,” he threatened, menacingly. “slowly.”

Steven crossed his arms. “Ooh, I’m scared. I’m in here. You’re out there. How are you gonna get to me?”

“You’re not always gonna be in there. You’re coming out tomorrow.” Rafe smiled at Steven showing his very even, very, white teeth, in such a way that did not mean good health and a long life.

“Oh, I did forget about that,” Steven said, weakly. “Okay, go ahead and tell him, Blair.”
Everyone looked at Blair expectantly. “Da boy we meet at mall.”

Rafe frowned. “What boy?”

“Oh, boy at mall. Da one Michael buy clothes for.”

Steven rolled his eyes at the confusion on Rafe’s face. “Must be a genetic flaw in all Sentinels, making them dumb as doorknobs. The whole lot of them,” He mumbled, in disgust. “Lee Brackett, you twit,” He said louder, when Rafe continued to look confused.

Rafe looked at Jim for confirmation. The young Sentinel nodded. “Yup.”

Okay, okay at least it’s not Matilda. I can live with Lee. Does he know?”

Jim shook his head. “He doesn’t even know he’s a Guide. He was tested like everyone else, but the test was negative when they took it. Just like your tests were negative. Didn’t mean anything, you’re still gonna be a Sentinel before to long. Just like he’ll be a Guide.”

Steven looked at Jim blue eyes dancing merrily. “Does that mean they’re freaks like the rest of you?”

Jim glared at him. “Shut up. And who’s the one that has a fiancé at eleven years old?”

Rafe looked at Steven curiously. “You got a fiancé?”

Steven nodded. “Yup.” He frowned. “Wanna make something of it?”

Rafe shook his head. “Heck no. I think it’s cool. Did you get a ring?”

“Not yet.”

“What is it with you guys and rings anyway?” Jim asked, curiously.
“Can’t get promised without a ring,” Rafe told him. “Read that somewhere.”

Steven slapped his arm with the back of his hand. “Yeah, where you been. Hiding under a rock?”

“Ow! I’m sorry I asked,” Jim replied, ruefully, rubbing his arm.

“You should be. So who’s gonna tell Lee that his life’s plans have now drastically altered for all times?”

“Isn’t that a bit melodramatic?” Jim replied, still rubbing his arm.

“No really. Cause whatever he had planned for his future ain’t happening now. It veered hard left.”

“OH MY GOD!” Rafe exclaimed in horror.

“What? What is it?” Steven yelled, blue eyes wide in alarm. “You’re not turning Sentinelie now are you?” Jim held Blair close when the little Guide startled at Rafe’s yell.

The Sentinel-to-be ran a trembling hand through his hair nervously before looking up to meet Jim’s eyes. “What the hell am I gonna do?” he whimpered pitifully into the phone.

“About what?” Jim asked, curiously.

“About Lee,” Rafe replied as if that answered everything. “You at least got lots of money. I got nothing to offer a Guide. What if he doesn’t want me? Oh, man-he’s not gonna wanna be my Guide. I just know it. I’m going to die before my time. Zoning on a bread crumb. I am so dead.”

Steven bit his lip as he watched the extremely agitated Rafe work himself into a fit. He hadn’t seen anything so funny since H hid Rafe’s GQ magazine. Threatening them, their children, grandchildren, even future pets with dire consequences if his magazine wasn’t returned IMMEDIATELY. He turned to Jim and Blair, who were looking at Rafe in utter fascination.
“I…is that how I act?” Jim asked him, blue eyes widening in understanding and embarrassment.

“Oh, yeah. Only worse. Must be a Sentinelie type of thing. You guys are all bonkers.”

Rafe glared at him. “I heard that, asshole. Sorry, Blair. My life is over and you mock me. Some friend you are. Friends do NOT mock.”

“I’m not mocking you,” Steven replied, biting back a chuckle.

“Yeah? Laugh it up, furball. Let’s see who’s laughing when I’m twitching on the ground dying ‘cause I zoned on those floating things you see in sunlight.”

“Dust motes?” Steven asked, chuckling.

“Yeah, that’s it. Dust motes.”

“Sentinels don’t twitch on the ground,” Jim told him haughtily. “We are a dignified class of people.”

Steven broke out in laughter, unable to hold it back any more. “Oh, man, you guys are just too much. Dignified, my buns. Is the same person who’ll spend hours color coding Sally’s yarn box? Is this the same person who zones on the different colors of Blackie’s BLACK fur? Is the same person who…”

“SHUT UP,” Jim told him in annoyance with just a tad bit of embarrassment mixed in. “Can’t you see Rafe’s having a crisis?”

Steven wiped at his eyes, fighting to hold the laughter back. “Okay. Okay. I’ll stop. But, oh-God you guys are hysterical.” He replied, not in the least bothered by the glares one Sentinel and one Sentinel-to-be were giving him.

Jim decided to ignore his crazy brother and turned to look at Rafe. “He’ll accept you.”

“But what if he doesn’t. I got nothing to offer a Guide. Nothing, nada, zip, zero, not happening,” Rafe replied, shaking his head sadly. “I am so dead.”
“You could always offer him a ring.”

Both Rafe and Jim turned to look at Steven who had finally stopped laughing, sort of. Now he was just snickering. “What?” Rafe asked, into the phone.

“Yeah, offer him a ring. A promise to do right by him when you get older. You’ll probably have to get a three or four jobs, though. His Step-Dad’s really rich.”

Rafe whimpered. “I am so dead.”

“No, you’re not. It’ll be okay. We’ll help,” Steven promised.

“You promise?” Rafe asked, hopeful for the first time since Jim had told him he was going to be a Sentinel.

“You betcha,” Steven replied, smiling at him confidently.

“You and Michael will be our Protectors too?”

“You want Michael and me to be your Protectors?” Steven asked, in surprise.

“Yes, please.”

That’s when Steven realized how overwhelmed Rafe was about everything he’d been told.

“I’d be honored. It’s going to be okay. You’ll see,” He promised him, again.

“Are you sure?”
“Yup.” Steven turned to Blair. “Right, Blair?”

Blair nodded. “Yups,” He replied, placing his hand on the glass offering Rafe all the comfort he could—considering there was a pane of glass between them.

Rafe placed his hand against Blair’s, taking a deep steadying breath. “Okay. I feel better now. Except for one thing?”

“What?” Jim asked softly.

“What am I going to do about Lee?”

Steven tsked at him. “I told you, get him a ring. Are you deaf, moron?”

Rafe ignored the insult. He needed help more than he needed to beat the snot out of Steven. “Are you sure that’ll work?” He asked, uncertainly.


Rafe took another steadying breath. “Yeah, I can do that. Where’s Michael now?”

Steven looked at Jim whose eyes became unfocused as he searched Cascade for the curly-haired body builder, using scent and sound. “He’s at the mall. Upper level. He’s just walking into Kay’s Jewelers.”

“That is just SO cool,” Steven said, proudly.

Jim gave his brother a smile, pleased by his brother’s praise. “He’s talking to the Jeweler right now.”

“Okay. The mall is only three blocks from here. If I hurry I can catch him.”
“Hey, Rafe?” Steven called out. Not surprised when Rafe turned, considering they weren’t using the phone to communicate any more. “It’s going to be okay. You’ll see.”

Rafe looked at him searchingly before giving them a short nod and walked out the door.

***

RINGS AND THINGS

“Did Rafe catch up to you?”

“Yeah, he did,” Michael replied into the phone. “He was kinda hysterical there for awhile, though. Had to buy him a banana split from Hagan Daz to make him feel better.”

“Being told you’re a Sentinel and who your Guide is all in one day can be a bit of a shock to the system.”

“I’d say. He was whiter than Casper the Ghost. But we talked awhile-while he ate his ice cream. By the time he finished it he was feeling a lot better. Then we went shopping.” Michael looked at Steven, blue-green eyes thoughtful. “Steven, how the hell are we going to protect two Sentinel/Guide pairings? We’re having trouble with just one.”

“We’ll manage,” Steven told him confidently.

“Yeah, how?” Michael asked, not so confidently.

“We’re Protectors. It’s instinctual. It’ll come to us.”

“Are you sure?”

Steven smiled at him. “Positive. So did you find what you were looking for?” he asked hopefully.
“Oh, yeah. Even found something for Lee.”

“Was Rafe going to go talk to Lee today?”

Michael shook his head. “No, he wants you to break the news to Lee.”

Steven frowned. “Me? Why me?”

“You’re the Great Protector. He wants you to protect him from committing suicide if Lee says no.”

“I told him Lee wasn’t gonna say no,” Steven said, in exasperation.

Michael reached into the pocket of his jeans. “He’s still afraid. So he’s gonna wait for you to tell Lee.”

“Damn, what a chicken shit. Whatcha got there?”

“Your ring,” Michael told him shyly.

Jim and Blair just having woken from their nap came up to the window just as Michael opened the tiny box. They all oh’d and ah’d when the bodybuilder opened the box. Nestled inside was a gold band encircled with Celtic rings.

“That’s one nifty ring, Michael,” Jim told him, smiling.

Michael returned the smile. “Yeah, huh? The Jeweler promised me that I’d be able to get it resized as Steven’s finger grows. Jim?” Michael bit his lip nervously.

“Yeah?”

“Is it okay with you? You know, about Steven and me?”
“Sure is. I think it’s great.”

Michael looked at him hopelessly. “Really?”

“Yup. Blair has even agreed to help. Huh, Baby?” Jim asked his little Guide.

“Yups. I ‘elp.” Blair replied, from the comfort of his Sentinel’s arms.

Michael smiled at them brilliantly. “Cool.”

Steven turned to look at his brothers never prouder of them than he was at this moment. “Yeah, I think it is too,” He told them both, softly.

***

All the Ellison’s including Sally and Michael were gathered around a conference room Simon had reserved once Jim, Blair and Steven had been released from isolation.

After a jubilant reunion between father and sons. Sally and Michael receiving their fair share of hugs and kisses as well. Even if things were a bit awkward between Michael and Steven.

“Okay. I confirmed what made you sick, Jim. Took a fair amount of research I must tell you,” Simon said, sighing heavily. And it had been to. He’d checked with everyone about everything the young Sentinel ate, drank, touched or even remotely came into close contact with for weeks before Jim got sick.

“What was it?” William asked, hugging his littlest son close.

“Urban Paprika.”

“So it was that?” Jim said, thoughtfully.
“Yes. You remember when we all ate at the Indian place awhile back?” Simon asked, looking through his charts.

“Yeah,” Steven answered, “but that was at least a week before Jim started acting twitchy. And then he didn’t even wanna eat it-trading with Sally cause what he was gonna eat, burnt his nose. Oh…,” Steven said, blue eyes lit in understanding. “that’s how it got it.”

Simon nodded. “From the research I’ve done and talking to an allergist, an allergen can sometimes make it’s way in to the system and you may not get a reaction for weeks after. That’s what happened to Jim. Symptoms most times are mild, but due to Jim’s heightened sensitivity the reaction was far worse after having built up in his system. We’re really lucky that all the food served at the hospital is spiceless and sometimes quite tasteless. And we’re really lucky Jim didn’t eat any on the Indian food or we wouldn’t be here talking.”

“Thank God for that,” William replied gratefully. Thankful someone somewhere was looking out for his son. “What go we do now?”

“I’ve scheduled Jim an appointment with an allergist. We will test him for any possible food allergies and a few other things that may cause problems.” Jim groaned softly. “I know, Jim. But it needs to be done. And we need to move slowly considering how sensitive you are. The test will be at a far lower dosage than those given to others. We don’t want what happened before to happen to you again.”

“And if he shows sensitivity?” Steven asked, playing with a pad of paper.

“Then he’ll start receiving shots to slowly build his immunity. It’s going to take some time, but it needs to be done.”

William nodded. “I agree. We’ll do whatever it takes. What do we do in the meantime?”

“Jim will have to follow a special diet.” Simon turned to the young Sentinel. “You’re going to be eating plain for awhile.” Smiling when Jim groaned again. “It won’t be too bad. It’s about the same stuff you got while you were here in the hospital. You’ll be able to eat Wonder Burger before you know it.”

“We’ll all eat the same things so you won’t be tempted to cheat,” Steven told his brother, offering
“You don’t have to do that,” Jim replied softly, touched by how thoughtful his brother could be. Rare as it was. “I’ll keep to the diet. I won’t cheat.”

“I know, we don’t have to. We want to. Right, guys?” Steven looked around the room at his family. Smiling when everyone nodded in agreement.

“Good,” Simon replied, “Sally, let’s go talk to the dietician. Come up with a plan that will meet Jim’s requirements. Okay, boys you’re finally free to go home,” Simon told the three Ellison boys. Chuckling when they let out whoops of joy at finally being released from the hospital.

***

Home. Finally home. Jim thought happily as he sat on the couch resting as close to his Father as he dared. He wasn’t a baby anymore, but he still needed his Dad. He wasn’t that grown up that he didn’t realize that.

Steven was along their Father’s other side, practically in his lap. Not caring that he was pretty close to sharing said lap with Blair. The little Guide in the meantime was giving William sloppy kiss after sloppy kiss.

The eldest Ellison chuckled happily as he returned Blair’s kisses. Hugging his youngest close. The house had been to quiet with his sons gone. He’d missed them with a depth that hurt to think about. He had Sally, Simon, Daryl and Michael. And they’d taken good care of him. Making sure he ate and rested. Doing the above and beyond in keeping him sane. Especially Michael.

The body builder had even taken to sleeping in a chair in William’s room to make sure he rested. Catching him one to many times roaming the hallways of the house that seemed so empty. And no matter what William tried, be it threats, promises of sleep nothing had worked to get Michael to sleep in his own room.

The bodybuilder had stuck to his guns telling him he was more afraid of Steven than him. Oddly enough it had worked. Just having Michael there in the room seemed to bring William’s sons closer. Even if it couldn’t have been that comfortable for Michael. Perhaps being with William had brought the boys closer to Michael as well.
Now his family was together once again and William couldn’t be happier, he thought to himself as he returned more of Blair’s kisses. And Michael, Michael had earned a special place in William’s heart with his deep sensitivity.

“So Simon-did Musclehead tell you about Rafe?” Steven asked, looking up from drawing Blackie as he played with Daryl.

Simon sitting on the loveseat, looked up from the medical magazine he was reading. “What about Rafe?”

Steven frowned at Michael. “You didn’t tell him?”

“I didn’t have time. He was busy letting you guys out of the hospital and talking with the dietician. And don’t call me musclehead.”

“What about Rafe?” Simon asked, impatiently.

“Rafe is a or rather will be a Sentinel,” Steven told him. “What did you say Jim. Four or five years?”

“Yup.”

“And how do you know this?” Simon asked, curiously. No longer surprised by anything the Ellisons told him or did for that matter.

“The same way I know that Lee Brackett will be his Guide,” Jim answered, rubbing his face against his Dad’s arm.

“Oh. And do Rafe and Lee know this?”

“Rafe does. We haven’t told Lee yet,” Steven responded. “He’s coming over later with H.”

“Wasn’t Lee tested when he turned two?” William asked, kissing the top of Blair’s curly head as the toddler now rested against him, playing with his fingers.
“The tests were negative. If he’s tested again, the results will be different this time. They’d be positive,” Jim told him.

“And Rafe?” Simon questioned, digging out a pad and pencil to write down the new and startling information Jim and Steven were readily giving him. That it itself was extremely rare.

“The same. He’s starting the changes that will make him a full-fledged Sentinel. I can see it happening,” Jim answered.

“How?”

“There’s something in him that’s shifting. Lining up, kinda like bricks that are out of place, but starting to straighten.”

“And you can see this?” Simon asked, writing as fast as he could.

“Yup.”

“And how do you know that Lee will be his Guide?”

“There’s something drawing him toward Rafe and Rafe to him, connecting them. Right now it’s kinda hard to see cause its not that strong, but it’s there.”

“Do you have this same connection with Blair?”

“Yes. It’s a lot stronger than Lee and Rafe’s though.”

Before Simon could ask any more questions the doorbell rang. Michael answered it letting in a very nervous Rafe.

“Are they here yet?” he asked, moving into the living room. Waving a greeting to everyone.
Michael shook his head. “Nope. Any time now.”

Rafe ran a trembling hand through his hair. “Oh, God. Kill me now. Put me out of my misery.”

Steven went up to him. “It’s gonna be okay.” He told him. Placing his hands on Rafe’s shoulders feeling the fine tremors coursing through the Sentinel-to-be. “God, you really are afraid aren’t you?” he asked, in surprise.

“No shit, Sherlock. Sorry, Blair.”

“Do you need for Michael to give you a hug?” Steven asked, offering the watching body-builder.

Rafe shook his head. “Thanks. But that won’t help. I’m way too nervous.”

The doorbell rang again causing Rafe to startle and pale at the same time, making Steven think Rafe was about to pass out.

“Relax. It’s gonna be okay,” Steven told him as Michael went to answer the door again. Letting Lee and H in.

“I…I’m going to be s…sick,” Rafe told him, swallowing heavily.

“No you’re not. Take a deep breath. Fight back the butterflies and let’s do this.” Rafe took a deep breath. “Good. Another.” When Rafe got back a little color, Steven turned to Lee and H. Still close enough to offer Rafe moral support or to catch him if he keeled over. “Hey, Guys.”

“Hey,” Lee answered first. “I’m glad you guys are out of the hospital.” He said, waving to Jim and Blair. Smiling shyly at William and Simon.

“So am I.” Steven frowned, moving closer to Rafe as the Sentinel-to-be started swaying unsteadily. “Rafe and I need to talk to you. Will you come upstairs with us for a while?”
Lee looked at Steven then at Rafe, dark blue eyes curious. “Sure,” he said readily enough.

“Rafe, do you want Jim and Blair to go with us?”

“Yes,” Rafe replied, paling even more.

“How about Michael?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Let’s go. H there’s some just-made cookies in the kitchen if you want. I think Daryl went in there for some a while ago. We’ll be back in a bit.”

H nodded heading to the kitchen. “Cool.” He said, heading to the kitchen. Already knowing about Rafe and frankly he didn’t want any part of it. Especially if Rafe threw up all over everything. His odd friend was not handling this well at all.

Steven looked over at his Dad and Simon. “We’ll be back. We need to take care of a few things.”

Both adults nodded. “Alright,” William said, answering for both of them.

Watching the youngsters heading up the stairs. “Steven sure is a take charge kind of guy, isn’t he?” he said, not really meaning it as a question.

“Yes. He is. And what I wouldn’t give to be a fly on their wall right now.”

Simon chuckled. “Me too. Life certainly isn’t dull around here. And I think I’ve added another chapter to my book.”

William smiled. “Maybe two. Let’s get some cookies while we wait, this could take awhile. Bring the crossword. It may be a LONG while.”
Steven led an almost comatose Rafe toward his bed. Carefully sitting him on it before turning to Lee-who’d been led by Jim and Blair to their bed. Michael sat next to Rafe.

“Lee, what do you know about Sentinel?” Steven asked, sitting on the other side of Rafe.

“Hmm, just what H and Carl have told me?”

“What’s that?”

Lee’s blue eyes became thoughtful. “Hmm, Sentinel’s have heightened senses and they need Guides to keep them from going completely bonkers.”

Rafe gave a tiny whimper. Which Steven ignored. “That’s true. But from what I’ve seen Sentinels are already bonkers. Take my brother Jim. Prime example there.”

“Oh, shut up. Don’t listen to him. I’m not that bad. I just have a few glitches to work out because of Sentinel sensitivities,” Jim told Lee, glaring at his brother as he raised Blair higher into his lap.


Lee shrugged his slight shoulder. “Don’t care either way.”

“I am so dead,” Rafe murmured softly. “Kill me. Kill me now.”

“Shh! It’s going to be okay,” Steven reassured him, yet again.

“What’s the matter with Rafe? Is he getting sick or something?” Lee asked, eyeing the boy sitting next to Steven who was paling more by the minute.
Steven smiled. “Or something. He’s got a slight problem.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, it came to his attention yesterday that he was a Sentinel and he’s afraid that his Guide won’t accept him.”

“Why wouldn’t he?”

Rafe perked up a little.

“You don’t think there’s anything wrong with being a Guide or a Sentinel for that matter?” Steven asked, softly. Now they were getting somewhere.

“Heck, no. I’ve seen how Blair and Jim are together. I think it’s really cool,” Lee said, turning to smile at the Sentinel/Guide pair quietly watching.

Rafe perked up a little more.

“And what if you were a Guide?”

Lee shook his head. Making Rafe’s perkiness fade a little. “No go there, I was tested. I’m no Guide and no Sentinel.”

“But if it suddenly came to your attention that you could be a Guide? You know, hypothetically speaking”

Lee scratched the side of his face thoughtfully. “Well…” he seemed to be at such a loss for words. Michael had to pat Rafe’s thigh comfortingly to try and keep him steady. The Sentinel-to-be was two shades from passing out. “I guess it would be okay. I won’t mind it. Why all the Sentinel/Guide questions anyway?”

“You’re a Guide,” Steven told him, bluntly.
“No, I’m not. I told you I’ve already been tested.”

“The tests were wrong. Jim says you’re a Guide and he’s been classified as the best Watchman the world has ever known. So I’d trust his word.”

Lee turned to look at Jim who nodded. “Okay. And?” he asked, eyeing Steven and a very, very pale Rafe, suspiciously.

“And-what?”

Lee gave him a rueful smile. “When’s the other shoe gonna drop?”

Steven frowned at him. “Huh?”

“Well, when are you going to tell me the rest of it?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m in a room with a Sentinel/Guide pair and their two protectors. And then there’s Rafe who looks like he’s about to pass out. I’d say there’s a story involving me in there somewhere.”

“You’re Rafe’s Guide.”

Lee suddenly went totally and completely still. No facial expression whatsoever. If it wasn’t for him blinking now and then, Steven would have thought he’d turned into a statue.

“I think he took that rather well, don’t you?” he told Rafe, who’d begun whimpering softly.

Michael put his arms around Rafe, rocking him softly. “Shh, it’s okay. He’s just in shock. He’ll come out of it in a second.” Looking over to where Jim and Blair were trying to reach Lee. The little Guide patting Lee’s face gently, while Jim talked to him softly.
“He hates me. He thinks I’m the ugliest Sentinel on the planet. I am so dead. And I went and got the coolest ring, too. But he doesn’t wanna be my Sentinel. What the heck am I going to do?” Rafe turned to glare at Steven. “This is all your fault.”

“Me? How is it my fault?”

Rafe punched him in the arm-hard. “You told me everything would be okay. Let my oh-so-painful death be on your conscience.”

“Ow! That hurt,” Steven said, rubbing his arm.

“It suppose to, Numbnuts,” Rafe replied, hitting him again.

“You got me a ring?” Lee asked, coming out of his coma.

Rafe looked over at him. “Yeah. As a promise to do right by you. But I guess you won’t want it now,” He said sadly.

“Why’s that?”

“Cause you hate me and don’t wanna be my Guide.”

Lee got up from the bed and made his way over to where Rafe sat. “I don’t hate you.” He said, kneeling in front of the Sentinel-to-be. “Can I see the ring?”

Rafe reached into his jacket pocket pulling out the tiny box. Offering it to Lee silently. He watched as Lee carefully opened the box.

“Oh, it’s a nice ring.”

“Yeah, huh?” Rafe said, proudly. “It took Michael and me all afternoon to find it.”
Lee looked up, meeting Rafe’s eyes nervously. “I don’t hate you,” He repeated.

“No?”

Lee shook his head. “No. I don’t think I’d mind being your Guide,” He said, shyly.

“Would you be willing to commit to me?”

“Hmm, I guess so.”

Rafe felt his heart sink all the way to his toes. “You don’t seem to sure.”

“It’s a big commitment,” Lee replied, moving the box back and forth in his hands. “I just turned twelve.”

“I know,” Rafe said sadly. “You probably wanna wait and chose a Sentinel when you’re older. I understand.” He felt his eyes fill with tears. He was turning into such a sissy.

“No, it’s not that,” Lee replied, reaching over to wiping away the tears with a hand that wasn’t quite steady.

Rafe moved his face into the touch with a soft moan. “T…then what is it? Am I too ugly? Or to dumb? What is it?”

Lee smiled at him. “You’re not ugly. I think you’re kinda cute actually.”

Rafe blinked at him. “Y…you think I’m cute?”

Lee nodded. “Yeah, I do.”
“A…are guys suppose to tell one another that they’re cute?”

Lee tilted his head to the side as he contemplated Rafe. “I think they can if it’s a Guide saying it to his Sentinel.”

Rafe suddenly felt as if someone had punched him in the stomach. “A…are you telling me you’ll be my Guide?”

Lee nodded. “Yeah, I think I am.” Gently caressing the side of Rafe’s face with his forefinger.

Rafe closed his eyes at the gentle touch. “Be sure. You’ve got to be sure. This is for all time. And I’m scared out of my wits as it is and if you take it back, I think I’ll die.” He whispered, unsteadily.

“I’m sure and I’m not taking it back. I will be your Guide for all time, if you’ll have me.”

Rafe reached out to Lee, suddenly stopping, unsure. “Is it okay to touch you? Jim is it okay to touch him? I don’t want to do anything wrong and scare my maybe Guide.”

Jim nodded, smiling brilliantly at his friend. “It’s okay to touch him. He’s not your maybe Guide, he is your Guide. Besides you’re going to be doing a lot of touching so you might as well get used to it now.”

“Is it okay?” Rafe asked Lee softly as if afraid he’d still be rejected.

Lee nodded. “Yeah, touch me if you want it’s okay.”

Rafe went to his knees in front of Lee taking the ring from the tiny box he slide it onto the left ring finger of his Guide’s hand and then ever so carefully gathered him close. As if he were the most precious treasure he’d ever been entrusted with. After a moment Lee’s arms went around Rafe as well.

Steven turned to look at Michael. “Looks like we got us another Sentinel/Guide pairing to protect.”
“Looks like.”

Steven looked over to see Jim’s reaction. He found the young Sentinel staring at Lee and Rafe thoughtfully. “What is it Jim?”

“Something’s happening. The sorta blocks are aligning faster. It started the minute Lee said he would be Rafe’s Guide. Rafe’s going online.”

Steven looked at his friends cuddling close. Rafe’s nose was buried against Lee’s neck and he was sniffing happily. That looked way too familiar. “I thought you said it wasn’t gonna happen for four or five years.”

“It wasn’t suppose to. I think it had to do with Lee accepting Rafe as his Sentinel. That’s when the changes started happening a lot faster.” Suddenly the doorbell rang. Jim titled his head to the side.

“Who is it?” Steven asked curiously.

Jim smiled. “It’s Jacob.” Suddenly the smile vanished.

“What is it? What’s wrong?”

“He’s not alone.”

Steven frowned. “Who’d he bring with him?”

“Naomi.”

“Damn. We need to get out of here. But we’ve been in the hospital so long I haven’t had the chance to talk to anyone.”

“No,” Jim told him firmly. “No more running.”
“But Jim…”

“No Stevie. I’m tired of running. This time I fight for what’s mine.”
Blair, can I talk to you for a minute?” Steven asked the little Guide.

The curly-haired toddler put down his book. “Yup.”

“Will you come over to my bed for some privacy?”

Blair nodded again. “Yuppers.” Offering his arms to Steven.

Steven looked over at Jim who was watching quietly. “No listening. This is between Blair and me, Watchman.”

Jim frowned at him. “Sentinel here. How do you expect me to not listen? We’re stuck in an isolation room. It’s not like I can just get up and move to another room.

“Turn your ears off. Listen to some music or something. Focus on it.”

“Want me to zone? Besides what could you wanna talk to Blair about that could be that private?”
Jim asked him, curiously.

Steven tilted his head to the side as he thought about it. “Hmm, you may be right about that. There really haven’t been any secrets between us. We shouldn’t start now. And maybe you can help.”

Jim gave Steven a shy smile, letting him know how pleased he was that Steven trusted him. “What’s up?” he asked, jumping onto the bed.

Steven turned a bright red. “It’s gotta do with my fiancé.”

“What?”

“What other fiancé could I be talking about, dweeb?”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Whatever. What about him?”

Steven looked at the little Guide. “I need to ask you something very important to my future, Blair.”

“Ask.”

“You remember when you turned Jim off so that he could wait for you?”

Blair nodded. “Yup.”

“Do you think you could do that with other people? Other people like Michael?” Steven chewed on his lip as he nervously waited for the little Guide’s answer.

“Yup. I can do. Piece of cake.”

Steven gave him a huge smile. “Cool. Will you do it when we get out of here? It’d mean a lot to Michael and me.”
“I do.”

Steven gave his little brother a hug. “Thank you, thank you. You’ll never know how much this mean to me.”

Blair returned the hug. “I knows.”

Steven looked at Jim. “Is that alright, Jim? Can Blair help us?”

Jim nodded. “Sure. I don’t see a problem with it. Besides, he says he can do it. His exact words were ‘piece of cake’. So go for it.”

“Thanks, Watchman.”

“No problem. Hey, dinner’s here. Let’s eat. I’m starving,” Jim said as a nurse came in pushing a cart loaded with food trays. Couldn’t see her face, being she was covered from head to foot in the spaceman suit they made them wear before they came in. It kinda looked liked she was smiling though, when she dropped off the trays.

Steven chuckled. “I thought that was my line.”

Jim handed him his tray. “I’m borrowing it this once.”

Steven took it. “Okay, just don’t make a habit of it.”

“Okay. Hmm, fried chicken. This looks pretty good considering it’s hospital food. Here Blair take a taste, what do you think?”

Blair took a delicate nibble of chicken. “Good. I like.”

“Do you want milk or soda?” Blair just looked at him. “Milk it is.”
Steven chuckled. “You should know by now.”

Jim opened the tiny box of chocolate milk. “Yeah, I should. Maybe it’s just wishful thinking that Blair will become a junk food junkie like the rest of us.”

Steven opened his own milk. “Not in a million years.”

“You. How’s your chicken?”

“Good,” Steven replied, taking a long swallow of his chocolate milk. Chocolate milk always tasted so much better when it came in little boxes, for some odd reason.

“Yours?”

“Okay.” Jim looked at Steven. “Do you think we’re getting bored stuck in here when we can’t even find something interesting to talk about?”

Steven sighed. “Yeah. How much longer do you think Simon’s gonna keep us in here?”

“He told Dad that they’ve isolated the cause of me getting sick.”

“Yeah.” Steven frowned. “Where was I when all this was happening?”

Jim took a bite of his roll. “Taking a nap with Blair.”

“Oh. What was it?”

“He thinks it was a severe food allergy,” Jim offered Blair a green bean. Blair took it, making the Sentinel chuckle when he began nibbling on it like it was corn on the cob. “Is that good, Baby?”
“Yup. ‘Nother.”

“You betcha,” Jim replied, giving him another bean. Watching in fascination as his little Guide did the same thing to it.

“Well?” Steven asked impatiently.

“Well, what?”

“What the fu…” Steven caught himself. “What the heck was it?”

“He thinks it was Urban Paprika,” Jim answered, absently. Getting the biggest kick out of the way Blair ate green beans. “Have you always eaten green beans like that, Baby?”

“Of course he has?” Steven told him, handing the little Guide his green beans since he’d already gone through his and Jim’s. Blair loved green beans.

“How come I never notice?”

“Cause you’re usually hanging out in the twilight zone.”

“Excuse me,” Jim said, offended.

“You are,” Steven told him, unrepentantly. “You spend too much time counting the fibers in socks and checking out the textures of flowers. And I must tell you, Watchman-it ain’t healthy or pretty, for that matter.”

“Oh, please. That was only a couple of times.” Steven raised an eyebrow. “Okay, it was twice. It was only two times.” The disbelieving eyebrow didn’t come down. “Okay, fine. It was three times,” Jim said in exasperation. “And what was so unhealthy about it?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe it was the way you ZONED on a rose. Big sissy.”
“It wasn’t that bad a zone. And it was a beautiful color of burgundy.”

“That just proves my point. What guy in their right mind knows that a rose is the color of burgundy. Sissy.”

Jim glared at his brother. “Shut up. Besides Dad’s the one that told me the rose was burgundy. Are you gonna call Dad a sissy? Go on, I dare ya.”

“Oh, please. Dad is Dad. He is on a higher plane than the rest of us mere mortals.”

“What?”

“Dad can never be a sissy. He can say a rose is burgundy all he wants.”

“But I can’t?”

“Yup.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because that would make you a sissy,” Steven told him, blue eyes twinkling. He loved the way his brother was such easy prey.

“Well, that’s just dumb.”

Steven smiled at him. “No, Watchman. That make’s you a sissy.”

“Oh, shut up,” Jim said, tossing his biscuit at Steven. Who caught it mid air and took a healthy bite out of it, before tossing it back.
Jim frowned as he looked at his biscuit, now half gone. Shrugging he bit into it. How many cooties could Steven have? And besides they were brothers. He thought to himself as he gave Steven the chicken leg on his plate he was eyeing hopefully. They shared everything else—might as well share a few cooties too.

***

HEALING A FRIENDSHIP

Later, much, much later Jim, Blair and Steven had found a way to occupy their time. Being bored, bored, bored. BORED.

“Okay, Blair-jump.”

Blair curls happily bouncing up and down on the bed dived trustingly right into Jim’s arms.

“Nice jump,” Jim told him, kissing his forehead.

“Again. Again,” Blair said, excitedly.

Jim placed Blair back on the bed carefully. “Okay. Hang on a second.” He turned toward Steven who was once again sketching in his pad. “Wanna join us?”

“Not right now. Let me finish this.”

“Okay,” Jim replied. That was when he noticed someone had entered the waiting room. Without having to look he knew who it was by the happy waves Blair was giving.

“Rafe’s here,” He said, unenthusiastically.

Jim scowled, but made no comment. He went to stand in front of the pane of glass separating them from the outside world. He looked at Rafe, but made no move to pick up the phone.

Rafe looked at him sadly. He really didn’t want to lose Jim as a friend. They’d been buddies since Pre-K. Jim had shown him how to tie his shoes. They’d shared comic books, lunches, secrets for as long as he could remember. And now for reasons he didn’t understand Jim hated him.

Rafe sighed unhappily, motioning for Jim to pick up the phone. The young Sentinel did it so reluctantly, Rafe felt his eyes fill with tears.

“H…Hi. How are you guys?” Rafe asked, blinking away the tears.

“Fine. You?”

“Okay.”

“Good. How’s school?” Jim asked, ignoring the fact that Rafe’s eyes were glittering with tears.

“I…it’s there. Why?” Rafe asked, trying to clear the lump in his throat.

“Why, what?”

“Why do hate me all of a sudden?”

“I don’t hate you.”

Rafe wiped at the tears impatiently. “You could have fooled me. Is it because of my friendship with Blair? I’ll stop being friends with him if it bothers you so much.”

Jim moved from one leg to the other nervously. “You can’t do that. Blair loves you.”
“And we’ve been friends since we were babies.”

“Yeah,” Jim replied, reluctantly.

“Tell me what it is,” Rafe urges. “Tell me what it is and I’ll stop doing it. So we can be friends again.”

“You can’t stop doing it,” Jim replied, turning to look at his little Guide and Steven playing on the bed. “What’s going to happen-is going to happen.”

Rafe frowned. “What are you talking about?” he asked, in confusion.

“You can’t change what’s about to happen any more than I can. And you are the only one on the planet who could take Blair away from me, if you wanted. Did you know that?”

“I’d never do that,” Rafe replied, stunned by what Jim had just told him. “Why the hell would I want to do that?”

“Blair loves you.”

“And I love him, but what has that got to do with anything?”

“You could take him from me.”


“If you wanted to, you could make Blair your Guide,” Jim told him, reluctantly.

Rafe couldn’t have heard right. “What? What did you just say?”
“I’m estimating you’re four to five years from coming online.”

Rafe blinked. “Huh?”

“You are a Sentinel.”

Rafe’s brown eyes widened in disbelief. “You’re fucking lying.”

Jim shook his head. “No.”

“Yes, you are. You got mad at me for something else and now you’re trying to punish me.”

Jim gave a small smile. “Is that what you think being a Sentinel is? Some sort of punishment?”

“Tell me you’re lying. Please, Jim, tell me you’re lying,” Rafe pleaded.

Jim shook his head. “I’m not lying.”

Rafe looked into the solemn blue eyes watching him. He sighed heavily. “How long did you say I have?”

Jim chuckled. “It’s not some sort of fatal disease. Four, five years. Blair could probably make it sooner, if you like.”

Rafe sighed again. “Yeah, then you’d kill me for sure. How are you so sure I’m going to be a Sentinel?”

“There’s something in you that’s starting to shift. Kinda like blocks that aren’t quite in place. I can see it. When it’s aligned, you’ll become a Sentinel.”
“I hate you,” Rafe hissed at him.

Jim gave him a tight smile. “Bearer of bad news?”

Rafe ran a trembling hand through his brown hair. “Not exactly the bearer of bad news. It’s just not that good a news.” He met Jim’s blue eyes. “I don’t want Blair that way. He’s my friend. And I want you to start being my friend again too. Please,” He pleaded, when Jim looked away. “Please, Jim.”

“I don’t know if that’s possible any more,” he was told quietly.

“But I don’t want Blair. I love him like one of my little brothers.”

“I don’t know.”

Suddenly something occurred to Rafe. “Jim, if you can see I’m going to be a Sentinel could you use your Spidey senses to figure out who my Guide will be?”

Jim frowned. “I don’t know. Maybe.”

“Will you try? I don’t know how else to show you I don’t want Blair that way. Will you try?” Rafe pleaded.

“Alright.”

Jim went through all the smells, tastes, touches and sights he had stored. Like he’d been taught by Simon. Feeling Blair join him, holding onto his hand as a touchstone to keep him from zoning.

Steven had joined them as well. They’d been playing on the bed when little Guide had gone still. Watching Jim, big blue eyes solemn.

After a moment Blair had demanded “Down.” And now they watched as Jim did his Sentinel thing. Not really sure what it was and not wanting to interfere. Only knowing they wanted to show support.
After what felt like forever to Rafe, but couldn’t have been more than a couple of minutes Jim’s blue eyes cleared and focused. “I did it?” he said with a huge smile. “I know who it is.”

“Well, don’t keep me in suspense, tell me.”

“Are you sure you wanna know?”

“Well-YEAH,” Rafe told him in exasperation.

“I don’t think I need to tell you. As long as it’s not Blair, then I’m happy. I feel LOTS better now,” Jim replied, looking down at his little Guide who was looking up at him, a huge smile on his cute little face.

“Well, I’m glad you’re feeling better. You’ve already told me I’m a Sentinel. That’s bad enough. You might as well tell me the rest of it. It’s going to be Matilda Higgins from our class, I just know it. Just my luck I’m going to have to spend the rest of my life with someone who looks like something the monster from the Black Lagoon ate, but spit out cause he couldn’t stand the taste. And then he up and died because someone that ugly was inside his tummy and the shock of it gave him a heart attack.”

Jim chuckled. Rafe was off on a rant. He hadn’t seen one in so long-he kinda missed it. Missed his friend. He was happy now that he didn’t have to worry about Rafe taking his little Guide. Rafe was the only one on the planet that could, because Blair loved him.

“No it’s not Matilda.”

“Who is it then?” Rafe asked, impatiently.

“Hey, wait a minute. I thought you said you were just jealous,” Steven asked, frowning at his brother. Able to put together what was happening by the bits and pieces Jim was saying.

“I am or rather I was. But there was more to it than I thought. It didn’t hit me till just now, when I was looking at Rafe.”
“Like a two by four across the forehead.”

“Yeah. I can see it.” Jim frowned. “Rafe is standing there, but I can see something in him shifting. Like blocks starting to align. Moving around inside of him.”

“You sure it’s not going to be a critter like in Aliens?” Steven asked worriedly, moving away from the window slightly. “I gotta happy future to look forward to. Got me a job, a fiancé and everything is looking up, I don’t need to end up as snack food.”

“No. No, alien critters.”

Steven looked at Rafe then at Jim. “Maybe it’s the chicken you ate at lunch. Gave you food poisoning. Making you see things.”

“Nope, not the chicken,” Jim replied, reaching down to pick up Blair.


Rafe’s face softened from impatience to something that almost made his face glow. Jim understood now what it was and wasn’t threatened by it. Rafe loved Blair, truly loved him, but not in a way that threatened Jim’s bond with the little Guide.

“It’s shaking fine, Blair. How are you?” Rafe asked, placing his hand against Blair’s wishing there wasn’t glass between them.

“I is cool. I miss you,” Blair said sorrowfully.

“I miss you too,” Rafe replied. Looking over at Jim to make sure the Sentinel wasn’t taking it wrong. He wasn’t, he was smiling. Rafe sighed in relief. “When do you get out of here?” he asked the young Sentinel.
“Tomorrow. Simon says we can probably go home tomorrow. He’ll tell us what happened to me and how we’re going to prevent it from happening again.”

Steven frowned. “Where was I when this happened?”

“Asleep with Blair. AGAIN. Which is about all you’ve been doing since we’ve been here. Well, that and sketching.”

“It’s not like there’s a whole lot to do in here,” Steven replied, unapologetically, “Nothing other than HOMEWORK.” He crinkled his nose distastefully.

“Yeah, that’s true.”

Jim watched Rafe and Blair play itsy bitsy spider up and down the pane of glass for a while.

“Blair?” His Guide looked at him. “Did you know that Rafe was a going to be a Sentinel?”

Blair nodded. “Yup.”

“And you didn’t say anything?”

Blair tiled his head as he contemplated his Sentinel. “No ask,” He said, simply.

Jim rolled his eyes. “Dang. That would have saved me months of worry.”

“That’ll teach you,” Steven told him.

“Teach me what?” Jim asked, knowing better, but deciding to bite the bullet and ask anyway.

“Little Guide is all knowing, all seeing. Kinda like Dad. They’re way above us mere mortals and especially way, way, way WAY above you, Watchman.”
“Shut up. I hate you. You know that, right?”

Steven smiled at him. “Oh, yeah.” Not in the least bit hurt by his brother’s comment.

“Okay, just so you know.” Saying that, Jim turned to his little Guide. “Blair, do you know who Rafe’s Guide is gonna be?”

Blair nodded. “Yup.”

“Then will you tell me?” Rafe pleaded, from the other side of the glass. Hearing everything from where Jim held the phone. “Jim won’t tell me.”

Blair looked at Jim who nodded. “Go ahead and tell him.”

The little Guide turned to the window. “Hang on.” Steven broke in. “This could be blackmail material for years to come. Don’t tell him.”

Rafe moaned, banging his head against the glass in frustration. After a few minutes he looked up and glared at Steven.

“I am going to kill you,” he threatened, menacingly. “slowly.”

Steven crossed his arms. “Ooh, I’m scared. I’m in here. You’re out there. How are you gonna get to me?”

“You’re not always gonna be in there. You’re coming out tomorrow.” Rafe smiled at Steven showing his very even, very, white teeth, in such a way that did not mean good health and a long life.

“Oops, I did forget about that,” Steven said, weakly. “Okay, go ahead and tell him, Blair.”
Everyone looked at Blair expectantly. “Da boy we meet at mall.”

Rafe frowned. “What boy?”

“Da boy at mall. Da one Michael buy clothes for.”

Steven rolled his eyes at the confusion on Rafe’s face. “Must be a genetic flaw in all Sentinels, making them dumb as doorknobs. The whole lot of them,” He mumbled, in disgust. “Lee Brackett, you twit,” He said louder, when Rafe continued to look confused.

Rafe looked at Jim for confirmation. The young Sentinel nodded. “Yup.”

“Okay, okay at least it’s not Matilda. I can live with Lee. Does he know?”

Jim shook his head. “He doesn’t even know he’s a Guide. He was tested like everyone else, but the test was negative when they took it. Just like your tests were negative. Didn’t mean anything, you’re still gonna be a Sentinel before too long. Just like he’ll be a Guide.”

Steven looked at Jim blue eyes dancing merrily. “Does that mean they’re freaks like the rest of you?”

Jim glared at him. “Shut up. And who’s the one that has a fiancé at eleven years old?”

Rafe looked at Steven curiously. “You got a fiancé?”

Steven nodded. “Yup.” He frowned. “Wanna make something of it?”

Rafe shook his head. “Heck no. I think it’s cool. Did you get a ring?”

“Not yet.”

“What is it with you guys and rings anyway?” Jim asked, curiously.
“Can’t get promised without a ring,” Rafe told him. “Read that somewhere.”

Steven slapped his arm with the back of his hand. “Yeah, where you been. Hiding under a rock?”

“Ow! I’m sorry I asked,” Jim replied, ruefully, rubbing his arm.

“You should be. So who’s gonna tell Lee that his life’s plans have now drastically altered for all times?”

“Isn’t that a bit melodramatic?” Jim replied, still rubbing his arm.

“Not really. Cause whatever he had planned for his future ain’t happening now. It veered hard left.”

“OH MY GOD!” Rafe exclaimed in horror.

“What? What is it?” Steven yelled, blue eyes wide in alarm. “You’re not turning Sentinelie now are you?” Jim held Blair close when the little Guide startled at Rafe’s yell.

The Sentinel-to-be ran a trembling hand through his hair nervously before looking up to meet Jim’s eyes. “What the hell am I gonna do?” he whimpered pitifully into the phone.

“About what?” Jim asked, curiously.

“About Lee,” Rafe replied as if that answered everything. “You at least got lots of money. I got nothing to offer a Guide. What if he doesn’t want me? Oh, man—he’s not gonna wanna be my Guide. I just know it. I’m going to die before my time. Zoning on a bread crumb. I am so dead.”

Steven bit his lip as he watched the extremely agitated Rafe work himself into a fit. He hadn’t seen anything so funny since H hid Rafe’s GQ magazine. Threatening them, their children, grandchildren, even future pets with dire consequences if his magazine wasn’t returned IMMEDIATELY. He turned to Jim and Blair, who were looking at Rafe in utter fascination.
“I…is that how I act?” Jim asked him, blue eyes widening in understanding and embarrassment.

“Oh, yeah. Only worse. Must be a Sentinelie type of thing. You guys are all bonkers.”

Rafe glared at him. “I heard that, asshole. Sorry, Blair. My life is over and you mock me. Some friend you are. Friends do NOT mock.”

“I’m not mocking you,” Steven replied, biting back a chuckle.

“Yeah? Laugh it up, furball. Let’s see who’s laughing when I’m twitching on the ground dying ‘cause I zoned on those floating things you see in sunlight.”

“Dust motes?” Steven asked, chuckling.

“Yeah, that’s it. Dust motes.”

“Sentinels don’t twitch on the ground,” Jim told him haughtily. “We are a dignified class of people.”

Steven broke out in laughter, unable to hold it back any more. “Oh, man, you guys are just too much. Dignified, my buns. Is the same person who’ll spend hours color coding Sally’s yarn box? Is this the same person who zones on the different colors of Blackie’s BLACK fur? Is the same person who…”

“SHUT UP,” Jim told him in annoyance with just a tad bit of embarrassment mixed in. “Can’t you see Rafe’s having a crisis?”

Steven wiped at his eyes, fighting to hold the laughter back. “Okay. Okay. I’ll stop. But, oh-God you guys are hysterical,” He replied, not in the least bothered by the glares one Sentinel and one Sentinel-to-be were giving him.

Jim decided to ignore his crazy brother and turned to look at Rafe. “He’ll accept you.”

“But what if he doesn’t. I got nothing to offer a Guide. Nothing, nada, zip, zero, not happening,” Rafe replied, shaking his head sadly. “I am so dead.”
“You could always offer him a ring.”

Both Rafe and Jim turned to look at Steven who had finally stopped laughing, sort of. Now he was just snickering. “What?” Rafe asked, into the phone.

“Yeah, offer him a ring. A promise to do right by him when you get older. You’ll probably have to get a three or four jobs, though. His Step-Dad’s really rich.”

Rafe whimpered. “I am so dead.”

“No, you’re not. It’ll be okay. We’ll help,” Steven promised.

“You promise?” Rafe asked, hopeful for the first time since Jim had told him he was going to be a Sentinel.

“You betcha,” Steven replied, smiling at him confidently.

“You and Michael will be our Protectors too?”

“You want Michael and me to be your Protectors?” Steven asked, in surprise.

“Yes, please.”

That’s when Steven realized how overwhelmed Rafe was about everything he’d been told.

“I’d be honored. It’s going to be okay. You’ll see,” He promised him, again.

“Are you sure?”
“Yup.” Steven turned to Blair. “Right, Blair?”

Blair nodded. “Yups,” He replied, placing his hand on the glass offering Rafe all the comfort he could-considering there was a pane of glass between them.

Rafe placed his hand against Blair’s, taking a deep steadying breath. “Okay. I feel better now. Except for one thing?”

“What?” Jim asked softly.

“What am I going to do about Lee?”

Steven tsked at him. “I told you, get him a ring. Are you deaf, moron?”

Rafe ignored the insult. He needed help more than he needed to beat the snot out of Steven. “Are you sure that’ll work?” He asked, uncertainly.


Rafe took another steadying breath. “Yeah, I can do that. Where’s Michael now?”

Steven looked at Jim whose eyes became unfocused as he searched Cascade for the curly-haired body builder, using scent and sound. “He’s at the mall. Upper level. He’s just walking into Kay’s Jewelers.”

“That is just SO cool,” Steven said, proudly.

Jim gave his brother a smile, pleased by his brother’s praise. “He’s talking to the Jeweler right now.”

“Okay. The mall is only three blocks from here. If I hurry I can catch him.”
“Hey, Rafe?” Steven called out. Not surprised when Rafe turned, considering they weren’t using the phone to communicate any more. “It’s going to be okay. You’ll see.”

Rafe looked at him searchingly before giving them a short nod and walked out the door.

***

RINGS AND THINGS

“Did Rafe catch up to you?”

“Yeah, he did,” Michael replied into the phone. “He was kinda hysterical there for awhile, though. Had to buy him a banana split from Hagan Daz to make him feel better.”

“Being told you’re a Sentinel and who your Guide is all in one day can be a bit of a shock to the system.”

“I’d say. He was whiter than Casper the Ghost. But we talked awhile—while he ate his ice cream. By the time he finished it he was feeling a lot better. Then we went shopping.” Michael looked at Steven, blue-green eyes thoughtful. “Steven, how the hell are we going to protect two Sentinel/Guide pairings? We’re having trouble with just one.”

“We’ll manage,” Steven told him confidently.

“Yeah, how?” Michael asked, not so confidently.

“We’re Protectors. It’s instinctual. It’ll come to us.”

“Are you sure?”

Steven smiled at him. “Positive. So did you find what you were looking for?” he asked hopefully.
“Oh, yeah. Even found something for Lee.”

“Was Rafe going to go talk to Lee today?”

Michael shook his head. “No, he wants you to break the news to Lee.”

Steven frowned. “Me? Why me?”

“You’re the Great Protector. He wants you to protect him from committing suicide if Lee says no.”

“I told him Lee wasn’t gonna say no,” Steven said, in exasperation.

Michael reached into the pocket of his jeans. “He’s still afraid. So he’s gonna wait for you to tell Lee.”

“Damn, what a chicken shit. Whatcha got there?”

“Your ring,” Michael told him shyly.

Jim and Blair just having woken from their nap came up to the window just as Michael opened the tiny box. They all oh’d and ah’d when the bodybuilder opened the box. Nestled inside was a gold band encircled with Celtic rings.

“That’s one nifty ring, Michael,” Jim told him, smiling.

Michael returned the smile. “Yeah, huh? The Jeweler promised me that I’d be able to get it resized as Steven’s finger grows. Jim?” Michael bit his lip nervously.

“Yeah?”

“Is it okay with you? You know, about Steven and me?”
“Sure is. I think it’s great.”

Michael looked at him hopefully. “Really?”

“Yup. Blair has even agreed to help. Huh, Baby?” Jim asked his little Guide.

“Yups. I ‘elp.” Blair replied, from the comfort of his Sentinel’s arms.

Michael smiled at them brilliantly. “Cool.”

Steven turned to look at his brothers never prouder of them than he was at this moment. “Yeah, I think it is too,” He told them both, softly.

***

All the Ellison’s including Sally and Michael were gathered around a conference room Simon had reserved once Jim, Blair and Steven had been released from isolation.

After a jubilant reunion between father and sons. Sally and Michael receiving their fair share of hugs and kisses as well. Even if things were a bit awkward between Michael and Steven.

“Okay. I confirmed what made you sick, Jim. Took a fair amount of research I must tell you,” Simon said, sighing heavily. And it had been to. He’d checked with everyone about everything the young Sentinel ate, drank, touched or even remotely came into close contact with for weeks before Jim got sick.

“What was it?” William asked, hugging his littlest son close.

“Urban Paprika.”

“So it was that?” Jim said, thoughtfully.
“Yes. You remember when we all ate at the Indian place awhile back?” Simon asked, looking through his charts.

“Yeah,” Steven answered, “but that was at least a week before Jim started acting twitty. And then he didn’t even wanna eat it-trading with Sally cause what he was gonna eat, burnt his nose. Oh…,” Steven said, blue eyes lit in understanding. “that’s how it got it.”

Simon nodded. “From the research I’ve done and talking to an allergist, an allergen can sometimes make it’s way in to the system and you may not get a reaction for weeks after. That’s what happened to Jim. Symptoms most times are mild, but due to Jim’s heightened sensitivity the reaction was far worse after having built up in his system. We’re really lucky that all the food served at the hospital is spiceless and sometimes quite tasteless. And we’re really lucky Jim didn’t eat any on the Indian food or we wouldn’t be here talking.”

“Thank God for that,” William replied gratefully. Thankful someone somewhere was looking out for his son. “What go we do now?”

“I’ve scheduled Jim an appointment with an allergist. We will test him for any possible food allergies and a few other things that may cause problems.” Jim groaned softly. “I know, Jim. But it needs to be done. And we need to move slowly considering how sensitive you are. The test will be at a far lower dosage than those given to others. We don’t want what happened before to happen to you again.”

“And if he shows sensitivity?” Steven asked, playing with a pad of paper.

“Then he’ll start receiving shots to slowly build his immunity. It’s going to take some time, but it needs to be done.”

William nodded. “I agree. We’ll do whatever it takes. What do we do in the meantime?”

“Jim will have to follow a special diet.” Simon turned to the young Sentinel. “You’re going to be eating plain for awhile.” Smiling when Jim groaned again. “It won’t be too bad. It’s about the same stuff you got while you were here in the hospital. You’ll be able to eat Wonder Burger before you know it.”

“We’ll all eat the same things so you won’t be tempted to cheat,” Steven told his brother, offering
“You don’t have to do that,” Jim replied softly, touched by how thoughtful his brother could be. Rare as it was. “I’ll keep to the diet. I won’t cheat.”

“I know, we don’t have to. We want to. Right, guys?” Steven looked around the room at his family. Smiling when everyone nodded in agreement.

“Good,” Simon replied, “Sally, let’s go talk to the dietician. Come up with a plan that will meet Jim’s requirements. Okay, boys you’re finally free to go home,” Simon told the three Ellison boys. Chuckling when they let out whoops of joy at finally being released from the hospital.

***

Home. Finally home. Jim thought happily as he sat on the couch resting as close to his Father as he dared. He wasn’t a baby anymore, but he still needed his Dad. He wasn’t that grown up that he didn’t realize that.

Steven was along their Father’s other side, practically in his lap. Not caring that he was pretty close to sharing said lap with Blair. The little Guide in the meantime was giving William sloppy kiss after sloppy kiss.

The eldest Ellison chuckled happily as he returned Blair’s kisses. Hugging his youngest close. The house had been to quiet with his sons gone. He’d missed them with a depth that hurt to think about. He had Sally, Simon, Daryl and Michael. And they’d taken good care of him. Making sure he ate and rested. Doing the above and beyond in keeping him sane. Especially Michael.

The body builder had even taken to sleeping in a chair in William’s room to make sure he rested. Catching him one to many times roaming the hallways of the house that seemed so empty. And no matter what William tried, be it threats, promises of sleep nothing had worked to get Michael to sleep in his own room.

The bodybuilder had stuck to his guns telling him he was more afraid of Steven than him. Oddly enough it had worked. Just having Michael there in the room seemed to bring William’s sons closer. Even if it couldn’t have been that comfortable for Michael. Perhaps being with William had brought the boys closer to Michael as well.
Now his family was together once again and William couldn’t be happier, he thought to himself as he returned more of Blair’s kisses. And Michael, Michael had earned a special place in William’s heart with his deep sensitivity.

“So Simon-did Musclehead tell you about Rafe?” Steven asked, looking up from drawing Blackie as he played with Daryl.

Simon sitting on the loveseat, looked up from the medical magazine he was reading. “What about Rafe?”

Steven frowned at Michael. “You didn’t tell him?”

“I didn’t have time. He was busy letting you guys out of the hospital and talking with the dietician. And don’t call me musclehead.”

“What about Rafe?” Simon asked, impatiently.

“Rafe is a or rather will be a Sentinel,” Steven told him. “What did you say Jim. Four or five years?”

“Yup.”

“And how do you know this?” Simon asked, curiously. No longer surprised by anything the Ellisons told him or did for that matter.

“The same way I know that Lee Brackett will be his Guide,” Jim answered, rubbing his face against his Dad’s arm.

“Oh. And do Rafe and Lee know this?”

“Rafe does. We haven’t told Lee yet,” Steven responded. “He’s coming over later with H.”

“Wasn’t Lee tested when he turned two?” William asked, kissing the top of Blair’s curly head as the toddler now rested against him, playing with his fingers.
“The tests were negative. If he’s tested again, the results will be different this time. They’d be positive,” Jim told him.

“And Rafe?” Simon questioned, digging out a pad and pencil to write down the new and startling information Jim and Steven were readily giving him. That it itself was extremely rare.

“The same. He’s starting the changes that will make him a full-fledged Sentinel. I can see it happening,” Jim answered.

“How?”

“There’s something in him that’s shifting. Lining up, kinda like bricks that are out of place, but starting to straighten.”

“And you can see this?” Simon asked, writing as fast as he could.

“Yup.”

“And how do you know that Lee will be his Guide?”

“There’s something drawing him toward Rafe and Rafe to him, connecting them. Right now it’s kinda hard to see cause it’s not that strong, but it’s there.”

“Do you have this same connection with Blair?”

“Yes. It’s a lot stronger than Lee and Rafe’s though.”

Before Simon could ask any more questions the doorbell rang. Michael answered it letting in a very nervous Rafe.

“Are they here yet?” he asked, moving into the living room. Waving a greeting to everyone.
Michael shook his head. “Nope. Any time now.”

Rafe ran a trembling hand through his hair. “Oh, God. Kill me now. Put me out of my misery.”

Steven went up to him. “It’s gonna be okay.” He told him. Placing his hands on Rafe’s shoulders feeling the fine tremors coursing through the Sentinel-to-be. “God, you really are afraid aren’t you?” he asked, in surprise.

“No shit, Sherlock. Sorry, Blair.”

“Do you need for Michael to give you a hug?” Steven asked, offering the watching body-builder.

Rafe shook his head. “Thanks. But that won’t help. I’m way too nervous.”

The doorbell rang again causing Rafe to startle and pale at the same time, making Steven think Rafe was about to pass out.

“Relax. It’s gonna be okay,” Steven told him as Michael went to answer the door again. Letting Lee and H in.

“I…I’m going to be s…sick,” Rafe told him, swallowing heavily.

“No you’re not. Take a deep breath. Fight back the butterflies and let’s do this.” Rafe took a deep breath. “Good. Another.” When Rafe got back a little color, Steven turned to Lee and H. Still close enough to offer Rafe moral support or to catch him if he keeled over. “Hey, Guys.”

“Hey,” Lee answered first. “I’m glad you guys are out of the hospital.” He said, waving to Jim and Blair. Smiling shyly at William and Simon.

“So am I.” Steven frowned, moving closer to Rafe as the Sentinel-to-be started swaying unsteadily. “Rafe and I need to talk to you. Will you come upstairs with us for a while?”
Lee looked at Steven then at Rafe, dark blue eyes curious. “Sure,” he said readily enough.

“Rafe, do you want Jim and Blair to go with us?”

“Yes,” Rafe replied, paling even more.

“How about Michael?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Let’s go. H there’s some just-made cookies in the kitchen if you want. I think Daryl went in there for some a while ago. We’ll be back in a bit.”

H nodded heading to the kitchen. “Cool.” He said, heading to the kitchen. Already knowing about Rafe and frankly he didn’t want any part of it. Especially if Rafe threw up all over everything. His odd friend was not handling this well at all.

Steven looked over at his Dad and Simon. “We’ll be back. We need to take care of a few things.”

Both adults nodded. “Alright,” William said, answering for both of them.

Watching the youngsters heading up the stairs. “Steven sure is a take charge kind of guy, isn’t he?” he said, not really meaning it as a question.

“Yes. He is. And what I wouldn’t give to be a fly on their wall right now.”

Simon chuckled. “Me too. Life certainly isn’t dull around here. And I think I’ve added another chapter to my book.”

William smiled. “Maybe two. Let’s get some cookies while we wait, this could take awhile. Bring the crossword. It may be a LONG while.”
Steven led an almost comatose Rafe toward his bed. Carefully sitting him on it before turning to Lee-who’d been led by Jim and Blair to their bed. Michael sat next to Rafe.

“Lee, what do you know about Sentinel?” Steven asked, sitting on the other side of Rafe.

“Hmm, just what H and Carl have told me?”

“What’s that?”

Lee’s blue eyes became thoughtful. “Hmm, Sentinel’s have heightened senses and they need Guides to keep them from going completely bonkers.”

Rafe gave a tiny whimper. Which Steven ignored. “That’s true. But from what I’ve seen Sentinels are already bonkers. Take my brother Jim. Prime example there.”

“Oh, shut up. Don’t listen to him. I’m not that bad. I just have a few glitches to work out because of Sentinel sensitivities,” Jim told Lee, glaring at his brother as he raised Blair higher into his lap.


Lee shrugged his slight shoulder. “Don’t care either way.”

“I am so dead,” Rafe murmured softly. “Kill me. Kill me now.”

“Shh! It’s going to be okay,” Steven reassured him, yet again.

“What’s the matter with Rafe? Is he getting sick or something?” Lee asked, eyeing the boy sitting next to Steven who was paling more by the minute.
Steven smiled. “Or something. He’s got a slight problem.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, it came to his attention yesterday that he was a Sentinel and he’s afraid that his Guide won’t accept him.”

“Why wouldn’t he?”

Rafe perked up a little.

“You don’t think there’s anything wrong with being a Guide or a Sentinel for that matter?” Steven asked, softly. Now they were getting somewhere.

“Heck, no. I’ve seen how Blair and Jim are together. I think it’s really cool,” Lee said, turning to smile at the Sentinel/Guide pair quietly watching.

Rafe perked up a little more.

“And what if you were a Guide?”

Lee shook his head. Making Rafe’s perkiness fade a little. “No go there, I was tested. I’m no Guide and no Sentinel.”

“But if it suddenly came to your attention that you could be a Guide? You know, hypothetically speaking”

Lee scratched the side of his face thoughtfully. “Well…” he seemed to be at such a loss for words. Michael had to pat Rafe’s thigh comfortingly to try and keep him steady. The Sentinel-to-be was two shades from passing out. “I guess it would be okay. I won’t mind it. Why all the Sentinel/Guide questions anyway?”

“You’re a Guide,” Steven told him, bluntly.
“No, I’m not. I told you I’ve already been tested.”

“The tests were wrong. Jim says you’re a Guide and he’s been classified as the best Watchman the world has ever known. So I’d trust his word.”

Lee turned to look at Jim who nodded. “Okay. And?” he asked, eyeing Steven and a very, very pale Rafe, suspiciously.

“And-what?”

Lee gave him a rueful smile. “When’s the other shoe gonna drop?”

Steven frowned at him. “Huh?”

“Well, when are you going to tell me the rest of it?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m in a room with a Sentinel/Guide pair and their two protectors. And then there’s Rafe who looks like he’s about to pass out. I’d say there’s a story involving me in there somewhere.”

“You’re Rafe’s Guide.”

Lee suddenly went totally and completely still. No facial expression whatsoever. If it wasn’t for him blinking now and then, Steven would have thought he’d turned into a statue.

“I think he took that rather well, don’t you?” he told Rafe, who’d begun whimpering softly.

Michael put his arms around Rafe, rocking him softly. “Shh, it’s okay. He’s just in shock. He’ll come out of it in a second.” Looking over to where Jim and Blair were trying to reach Lee. The little Guide patting Lee’s face gently, while Jim talked to him softly.
“He hates me. He thinks I’m the ugliest Sentinel on the planet. I am so dead. And I went and got the coolest ring, too. But he doesn’t wanna be my Sentinel. What the heck am I going to do?” Rafe turned to glare at Steven. “This is all your fault.”

“Me? How is it my fault?”

Rafe punched him in the arm-hard. “You told me everything would be okay. Let my oh-so-painful death be on your conscience.”

“Ow! That hurt,” Steven said, rubbing his arm.

“It suppose to, Numbnuts,” Rafe replied, hitting him again.

“You got me a ring?” Lee asked, coming out of his coma.

Rafe looked over at him. “Yeah. As a promise to do right by you. But I guess you won’t want it now,” He said sadly.

“Why’s that?”

“Cause you hate me and don’t wanna be my Guide.”

Lee got up from the bed and made his way over to where Rafe sat. “I don’t hate you.” He said, kneeling in front of the Sentinel-to-be. “Can I see the ring?”

Rafe reached into his jacket pocket pulling out the tiny box. Offering it to Lee silently. He watched as Lee carefully opened the box.

“Oh, it’s a nice ring.”

“Yeah, huh?” Rafe said, proudly. “It took Michael and me all afternoon to find it.”
Lee looked up, meeting Rafe’s eyes nervously. “I don’t hate you,” He repeated.

“No?”

Lee shook his head. “No. I don’t think I’d mind being your Guide,” He said, shyly.

“Would you be willing to commit to me?”

“Hmm, I guess so.”

Rafe felt his heart sink all the way to his toes. “You don’t seem to sure.”

“It’s a big commitment,” Lee replied, moving the box back and forth in his hands. “I just turned twelve.”

“I know,” Rafe said sadly. “You probably wanna wait and chose a Sentinel when you’re older. I understand.” He felt his eyes fill with tears. He was turning into such a sissy.

“No, it’s not that,” Lee replied, reaching over to wiping away the tears with a hand that wasn’t quite steady.

Rafe moved his face into the touch with a soft moan. “T…then what is it? Am I too ugly? Or to dumb? What is it?”

Lee smiled at him. “You’re not ugly. I think you’re kinda cute actually.”

Rafe blinked at him. “Y…you think I’m cute?”

Lee nodded. “Yeah, I do.”
“A…are guys suppose to tell one another that they’re cute?”

Lee tilted his head to the side as he contemplated Rafe. “I think they can if it’s a Guide saying it to his Sentinel.”

Rafe suddenly felt as if someone had punched him in the stomach. “A…are you telling me you’ll be my Guide?”

Lee nodded. “Yeah, I think I am.” Gently caressing the side of Rafe’s face with his forefinger.

Rafe closed his eyes at the gentle touch. “Be sure. You’ve got to be sure. This is for all time. And I’m scared out of my wits as it is and if you take it back, I think I’ll die.” He whispered, unsteadily.

“I’m sure and I’m not taking it back. I will be your Guide for all time, if you’ll have me.”

Rafe reached out to Lee, suddenly stopping, unsure. “Is it okay to touch you? Jim is it okay to touch him? I don’t want to do anything wrong and scare my maybe Guide.”

Jim nodded, smiling brilliantly at his friend. “It’s okay to touch him. He’s not your maybe Guide, he IS your Guide. Besides you’re going to be doing a lot of touching so you might as well get use to it now.”

“Is it okay?” Rafe asked Lee softly as if afraid he’d still be rejected.

Lee nodded. “Yeah, touch me if you want it’s okay.”

Rafe went to his knees in front of Lee taking the ring from the tiny box he slide it onto the left ring finger of his Guide’s hand and then ever so carefully gathered him close. As if he were the most precious treasure he’d ever been entrusted with. After a moment Lee’s arms went around Rafe as well.

Steven turned to look at Michael. “Looks like we got us another Sentinel/Guide pairing to protect.”
“Looks like.”

Steven looked over to see Jim’s reaction. He found the young Sentinel staring at Lee and Rafe thoughtfully. “What is it Jim?”

“Something’s happening. The sorta blocks are aligning faster. It started the minute Lee said he would be Rafe’s Guide. Rafe’s going online.”

Steven looked at his friends cuddling close. Rafe’s nose was buried against Lee’s neck and he was sniffing happily. That looked way too familiar. “I thought you said it wasn’t gonna happen for four or five years.”

“It wasn’t suppose to. I think it had to do with Lee accepting Rafe as his Sentinel. That’s when the changes started happening a lot faster.” Suddenly the doorbell rang. Jim titled his head to the side.

“Who is it?” Steven asked curiously.

Jim smiled. “It’s Jacob.” Suddenly the smile vanished.

“What is it? What’s wrong?”

“He’s not alone.”

Steven frowned. “Who’d he bring with him?”

“Naomi.”

“Damn. We need to get out of here. But we’ve been in the hospital so long I haven’t had the chance to talk to anyone.”

“No,” Jim told him firmly. “No more running.”
“But Jim…”

“No Stevie. I’m tired of running. This time I fight for what’s mine.”
Football, Holidays and Birthdays 4-Part One

Steven turned to looked at Michael. The bodybuilder was watching quietly, a frown on his face.

“Protect Rafe. He’s at his most vulnerable right now and could easily be hurt,” Steven told him softly. “Don’t let anything or anyone near them until you see Rafe pull away from Lee. It’s important, Michael.”

The bodybuilder nodded. “Alright.”

“I don’t know how we’re going to keep the yelling from hurting Rafe,” Steven said, biting his lips anxiously.

“The white noise generators,” Jim told him from the door, hugging Blair close. “You know the ones that Simon got to keeping me from going bonkers when Starsky and Hutch are on their wheels all night.”

“That’ll work,” Steven replied, running out of the bedroom. He came back quickly carrying three of them. “Where do we set them up?” he asked Jim.

“On either side of the door and the third one on your nightstand. That should give them enough protection.”
Steven looked at Rafe and Lee. Rafe still had his head buried against Lee’s neck. Sniffing away happily, hands buried in Lee’s light brown hair, angling the Guide’s head slightly for better access.

Lee’s blue eyes were closed tightly. Arms wrapped around Rafe holding him close. It kinda sounded like Lee was humming a little.

“Is that good enough?” Steven asked, joining Jim and Blair by the door.

“Yeah. It’s good. It won’t be much longer. The blocks look like they’re almost aligned. We could skip the whole confrontational thing. I don’t want to hurt Rafe.”

Steven shook his head. “No. Rafe will be okay. Michael will see to it. We need to deal with this now. We can’t have Naomi hanging over our heads like a dark cloud for the rest of our lives.”

“I don’t wanna run any more,” Jim told Steven, blue eyes pleading for understanding.

“I know you don’t. We’ll deal with this once and for all. Did Jacob bring anyone else we need to be aware of?”

Jim tilted his head to the side. “Daniel Peterson? The Shaman guy.”

“Damn. Sorry, Blair,” Steven replied, noticing that the little Guide’s blue eyes were wide in fear. “Baby brother, do you wanna stay here with Michael, Rafe and Lee? You don’t have to go with us and you might be able to help Rafe if he runs into trouble.”

Blair looked at his Sentinel. “Whatever you wanna do is okay with me, Baby. I just want you safe,” Jim narrowed his eyes. “Rafe’s almost online. He might need your help. What do you wanna do?”

Blair bit his tiny lip as he solemnly contemplated both his Sentinel and Rafe. “I stay. Help, Rafe.”

Jim nodded, carefully placing his little Guide on the floor. He cupped Blair’s pale face. “Listen to me, Baby. Nothing will ever separate us. Not even your Mommy. I’m still hoping that she’ll understand, but if not we’ll still be together no matter what.”
Blair nodded. “Yup. I knows.”

Jim took the little Guide into his arms hugging him close, before releasing him. “Take good care of Lee and Rafe for me until we get back.”

Blair nodded again. “I do.”

The last look Jim had of his Guide was of Blair climbing into Michael’s lap.

***

CONFRONTATIONS

“Jacob what have you done?” William asked as he looked over at Naomi and Daniel Peterson. The Shaman, Naomi had brought with her so many month ago in an effort to steal his son.

Jacob a slender man in his early fifty, with Blair’s big blue eyes and curly hair. “I haven’t done anything, Will. Naomi has a right to see her son.”

“Naomi has no rights. She lost those when she tried to steal MY son. MINE. She lost all rights to Blair months ago.

“She is still his mother.”

“No. I ask you politely to leave my house, all of you and not come back.”

Jacob held out a hand. “Please, William, there has to be a way to work this out?”

“No. Take Naomi and Mr. Peterson with you when you leave. You are no longer welcome in my home. Leave.”
“Please, William lets talk about this reasonably,” Jacob urged.

William looked over at Blair’s mother, who was contemplating the floor. “Why? So that while we talk you try and steal my son out the back door. I think not.”

“Will, please…” Jacob started.

“Hello, Jacob.”

Jim stood at the top of the stairs, Steven just behind him. Both looking down at the adults gathered in the living room.

Jacob had found Jim to be a respectful, quiet boy. Always polite, at times extremely so. This time as he stared up the stairs something seemed different. Jim’s blue eyes seemed cold, almost glacier.

It was then Jacob noticed something odd happening. The air around the young Sentinel seemed to blur and shift, when it solidified it left in its wake what Jim was destined to become and it left Jacob stunned speechless.

A man-tall, muscular with unfathomable cold eyes stood staring down at them. He oozed power, confidence and strength of character Jacob had never seen before, in anyone.

“You will not be allowed to take what is mine,” the Sentinel told them, softly.

“W…were not here to take Blair away from you, Jim,” Jacob stuttered.

“Then why are you here,” The Sentinel asked curiously, tilting his head to the side.

“I brought Naomi back from Tibet.”

Those cold eyes turned to the slight redhead staring up at him in fear. “I noticed,” Jim said, with a
slight smile. “Why?”

“S…she’s better and would like very much to see her son.”

“No.”

Jacob blanched at the finality in that tone. “B…but why?”

“She tried to take what is mine.”

Jacob moved up the stairs slowly, cautiously. “She wasn’t in her right mind. She’s better now and would very much like to be a part of Blair’s life as I would.”

Cold, blue eyes followed him as he climbed the stairs. Not in the least bit afraid. Standing above him was no twelve year old boy.

“And why should I allow that, after what she tried?”

“We love Blair.”

Jim left eyebrow went up. “And that is the reason she tried to steal him from me? That is the reason for your deceit?”

“There was no deceit,” Jacob replied, stopping two stairs below the Sentinel.

“And what would you call it? You have not been around Blair in at least a month. You come here bringing Naomi and Daniel Peterson with you. With no prior warning. I would consider it deceit on you part.”

“Y…you ran the last time.”
“I was young then. Not fully into my power. I won’t run again and you still will not see Blair, ever.”

Jacob looked at Steven, who stood just in back of Jim. A steadying hand on the small of the Sentinel back. He blinked as the air around Steven started shifting and blurring the same way it had for the young Sentinel.

In the place of the young boy stood a figure just as imposing as Jim. With hair a shade darker than Jim’s and the same cold, blue eyes. No mercy or sympathy in their cold regard. They would find no solace there.

“You will not be allowed to separate the Guide from his Sentinel,” Steven told Jacob, with total and complete finality.

Jacob ran a shaky hand through his hair. “I don’t want to separate the Guide from the Sentinel. I only want to be a part of his life as does Naomi.” This was something he had not expected, not in his wildest dreams.

Steven murmured something to the Sentinel, to soft for Jacob to hear. Jim nodded. His eyes never leaving Jacob’s face. Studying him closely for many minutes before turning those same cold eyes toward Naomi and finally Daniel Peterson.

“It will be allowed. You are his Grandfather. As Naomi is his Mother. But know this, I am no longer a helpless child at the whim of adults. Try and take him and there won’t be any place safe on this or any other planet for you to hide. And then I will loosen the Protectors, to finish the job. Do we understand each other?”

Jacob had been threatened before, but never with such deadly intent. “Y…yes.”

Those cold eyes turned toward Naomi. “Do we understand each other, Naomi?”

Naomi shivered at the glacier regard of those eyes. “Y…yes.” All she wanted was a chance to prove she’d changed. She wasn’t the same person. She’d gotten better thanks to Daniel and her father now she just had to prove it to Jim and her son. And she fervently hoped it wasn’t too late.

Eyes turned toward Daniel Peterson. “Daniel Peterson. Do we understand each other?”
Daniel looked up meet Jim’s regard steadily. “Understood, Sentinel.”

“Go. We will contact you when you will be allowed your first meeting with Blair.”

“Sentinel, I need to talk to you about teaching Blair the ways of the Shaman,” Daniel said.

“Later. The time is not right. Go.”

As soon as the door closed Steven let out a whoop, dancing around the upper landing happily. “That was so fucking cool,” He said, very much the eleven year old child again.

Jim turned toward him with a tiny smile. “Yeah, huh?” he said, before his eyes rolled into the back of his head and he slid to the floor.

***

The bodybuilder held the tiny Guide close as they watched Rafe nuzzle Lee’s neck.

“So do you think they’re almost done?” he asked Blair.

Blair nodded. “Yup.”

A few minutes later Rafe pulled away from his Guide slowly, reluctantly. “Well, that was intense.”

Lee caressed the side of his Sentinel’s face. “Feel better?”

Rafe moved into the touch, brown eyes closing slightly in pleasure. “Hmm, yes.” Suddenly those brown eyes filled with tear.
“What? What is it?” Lee asked, in alarm.

“You told me I’m cute, but you didn’t say anything about me being dumb.” Rafe’s lower lip started trembling. “You think I’m going to be the dumbest Sentinel on the planet, don’t you,” He started crying in heart-wrenching sobs.

“No. No. I don’t,” Lee said hurriedly. “I don’t think that at all.”

“Yes. You do. I’m too stupid to be your Sentinel. First chance you get you’re going to trade me in for the first nerdy Sentinel you can get you hands on,” Rafe replied, wiping at the tears with the back of his hand.

“No. I’m not.”

“Yes you are.” Rafe continued to cry. Throwing himself on the floor, he curled into a tiny, miserable ball.

Lee turned toward Blair and Michael, the oddest look on his face. “I swear, I’m not.”

“It’s not you. It’s all those now online Sentinelie senses. It’s going to get worse. He’s going to be a royal crybaby,” Michael told him, with a tiny smile.

Lee looked at Blair who nodded his curly head vigorously. “Lots badder. Rafe be BIG, BIG crybaby.”

The new Guide sighed heavily as he contemplated his miserable Sentinel. Shaking his head, he curled himself around Rafe.

“Shh, don’t cry. I’m not going to replace you with a nerd. I’m happy with my cute, but rather dweebie Sentinel. Don’t cry anymore, please. You’re going to get me crying and we’ll drown Michael and Blair. Don’t cry. I like you. You’re my Sentinel. I’m not going to trade you. Not ever.”

Rafe sniffed. “Really?”
“Really,” Lee told his Sentinel, kissing the top of his head.

“You don’t think I’ll make the dumbest Sentinel on the planet?”

“No I don’t. I think you’ll make a mighty, fine Sentinel,” Lee replied, trying to uncurl his Sentinel from the tight ball he was in before he froze that way and they’d have to use a hair dryer to defrost him.

Rafe let his Guide uncurl. “Really?” Sniff. He laid his head trustingly against Lee’s shoulders. “I’m okay?”

“You’re okay,” Lee told him, reaching into the back pocket of his jeans. Pulling out a Kleenex, he gently wiped his Sentinel’s eyes.

Rafe sighed deeply. “This is nice,” He said, wrapping arms around Lee happily.

“Yes it is,” Lee replied, gently rocking his no longer miserable Sentinel.

“I’m a dweeb?” Rafe asked, looking up at his Guide, eyes threatening to fill with tears-again.

“Yes, but you’re not a Sentinelie type of dweeb. You’re just a regular kind of dweeb.”

“Oh.” Rafe thought about it a moment. “Regular type of dweeb is okay, I guess.”

Lee rolled his eyes. “Dork. Lay your head back down.”

“Yes, sir.”

Lee kept rocking Rafe until he almost had his Sentinel asleep when suddenly…
They all quickly rushed out of the bedroom to find Steven gently cradling Jim in his arms.

“What happened?” Michael asked, rushing over to help Steven with Jim.

“He went into Super Sentinel mode. It was the coolest thing you every saw. And then once Jacob and group left, he keeled over.”

William and Simon joined them on the landing. “Is he alright?” Simon asked, kneeling by Steven and the unconscious Sentinel. “Do we need to get him back to the hospital?”

Blair tilted his head as he contemplated Jim. “Nope. I fix.”

The little Guide placed his left hand in the middle of his Sentinel’s chest and gently pressed in. Jim’s eyes snapped open so fast everyone jumped back slightly.

“Wow! What happened? What am I doing on the floor?” Jim frowned. “And why is everyone staring at me?”

“Do you remember what happened?” William asked, helping him into a sitting position.

“Hmm. I remember coming out of the bedroom. And then…” Jim’s eyes widened. “Oh.”

Steven smiled at him happily. “That’s putting it mildly. My brother the Super Sentinel.”

Jim smiled, shaking his head slightly. “Me? What about you?”

“Cool, huh?”

“I’d say.” Jim looked at his Dad and Simon. “I didn’t mean to freak everyone out.”
“You didn’t, son. It was an interesting experience,” William replied, smiling. “And Jacob, Naomi and Daniel Peterson wouldn’t dare try anything with Super Sentinel on duty.”

“Dad.”

William’s chuckled. “I’m teasing, Son. You did just fine. Are you okay?”

Jim looked at his little Guide. “I need Blair for a little bit.”

“Okay. Once you’re feeling better, how about we all go out for dinner?” William looked at Rafe and Lee. “And we need to talk to your parents about the special needs of a Sentinel and his Guide.”

Jim pulled Blair into his arms holding him close as his little Guide began releasing scent. He moaned softly as it gently healed the raw nerves exposed by a new power. Not seeing Lee watching them intently.

“Dad, how are Michael and me suppose to take care of Rafe and Lee if they’re half a city away,” Steven asked, moving away slightly to give Jim and Blair room and privacy.

“We’ll work something out,” William replied, moving with Steven. Motioning for the others to follow. “After dinner we’ll talk to Rafe’s parents and Lee’s step-dad.”

“My parents know,” Rafe said, pulling Lee into his arms.

“What’d they say?” Steven asked, curiously. Seeing Lee go into his Sentinel’s arms, unresisting, but he’d never taken his eyes off Jim and Blair as the little Guide healed his Sentinel. A frown creased the new Guide’s forehead as Blair began releasing the bonding scent, causing Jim to keen softly as it always did.

Rafe hadn’t notice that Lee’s attention wasn’t really on him. “She cried. It was a happy sort of crying, I think. I’m not to sure what Dad thinks. I think he’s happy.” The new Sentinel finally noticed new Guide’s distraction. “Are you okay, Lee?”
Lee blinked looking away from Blair and Jim. He cleared his throat uncomfortably. “Yeah, I think so. I’m just trying to get some pointers on being a Guide. I didn’t mean to be snoopy.”

“You’re not being snoopy. But from what I’ve been able to tell being a Guide comes natural,” Jim said, pulling away from Blair slowly, reluctantly.

Lee blanched. “I…it does?”

“Yes. I think so. It does with Blair. Why?”

“I…don’t feel very much like a Guide,” Lee admitted softly. “I don’t think I can even scent like Blair can.”

“You can scent, Lee. It’s very faint. Kinda like strawberries and cream,” Rafe reassured pulling, Lee closer. “it’s really nice.”

“But what if I can’t get it stronger and help you the way Blair does Jim?” Lee looked at the little Guide sitting in Jim’s lap. “Blair, will you help me? I don’t want anything to happen to my Sentinel.”

“Aw! That’s sweet,” Rafe said, smiling broadly.” You really do care about me.”

Lee smiled at him shyly. “Yeah, I care, but you’re still a dweeb.”

Rafe’s smile broadened. “Yeah, huh?” he said, hugging his Guide happily.

Steven rolled his eyes. “Oh, brother. Stop with the mushy stuff and lets go eat.”

They all rose to their feet. “Will you help me, Blair?” Lee asked again, blue eyes hopeful.

Blair nodded his head vigorously. “I help. You be berry good Guide,” He answered as Jim carried him down the stairs.
“You think so?”

“Yuppers. I berry sure.”

The door closed softly in back of them.

***

TROUBLES AND ADJUSTMENTS

Dinner was a pleasant affair as everyone ate and happily talked. William had called Sally from his cell phone and she met them at the restaurant.

William smiled as he looked over the table at his family and their friends. They had decided on Fisherman’s Wharf. A celebration of Jim, Blair and Steven getting out of the hospital and of Rafe going on line and having Lee as his Guide.

He hid a smile as Lee inspected Rafe’s food. He was acting so much like Blair. Rafe watched his Guide exam his food with an odd little smile on his face. He was truly enjoying the attention he was getting from Lee. Relishing it even.

“Do you all Guides act this way?” William asked Simon, who was reaching for a roll.

“Hmm?” Simon looked over to where William indicated, seeing Lee frowning at a small tomato, before he tossing it on the table. Apparently there was something wrong with it. “Yes, it’s normal.”

“Rafe’s enjoying the attention he’s getting from Lee,” William said, smiling as the new Guide hurriedly took a roll Rafe had just picked up, inspected it closely before giving it back. Rafe taking it with a goofy smile on his face.

Simon chuckled. “Yes, he is. Sentinels are an extremely emotional lot. Not to mention sensitive, overly so at times. They need, crave the attention of their Guides. Not really needing anyone else’s.”
“Is that why Jim seems to be aloof at times?”

“I’m thinking snotty, myself.” Steven said, reaching into his father’s salad plate snagging a tiny shrimp.

William smiled at him. “I suppose,” Handing him another shrimp. “that’s another word for it.”

“Yes. Their Guides meet all their emotion requirements and then some. Don’t even think about it young man,” Simon warned Steven off his shrimp with his fork.

Steven smiled at him sheepishly. “Sorry.”

“Hmm,” Simon replied, not in the least bit convinced. Giving Steven a shrimp anyway. Smiling at the grin he was given before Steven popped it in his mouth. “It a unique relationship and it becomes even more so as they get older.”

“Do you mean they’re going to be getting even mushier and snottier?” Steven asked in horror.

Simon chuckled at the look in Steven’s eyes. “That’s exactly what I’m saying.”

Steven dropped his head on the table. “Kill me now.”

William rubbed his son’s back soothingly. “You’ll live through it, Son.”

Steven looked up. “But am I going to want to?” he replied as he watched the Rafe pull Lee in to his arms. Uncaring of who saw him and began humming happily and very, very loudly. “Am I really going to want to.” He said again, letting his head hit the table with a dull thud.

***

Sally had gone on home with Daryl as the rest of the clan went to Lee’s house first to talk to his Step dad about Lee becoming a Guide.
William had known that it wasn’t going to be pleasant. Garrett Kincaid was known to be brash, opinionate and ruthless when it came to getting what he wanted. But he hadn’t expected it to escalate out of control so quickly.

Kincaid had not take the news about Lee becoming a Guide at all well. Threatening to sue the Sentinel Guild and William. After which he’d gone to where Lee watched, blue eyes wide and frightened, slapping him. Sending Lee sailing across the room.

Kincaid stalked menacingly toward where Lee had landed, meaning to do more violence. He never made it as Michael quickly stepped in blocking him.

“You will not get another chance to hurt the Guide. That was the one and only time you will EVER hit Lee,” Michael told him, holding tightly to the arm raised to deal another blow to the trembling, young Guide. “You will not get another chance.”

Jim, Blair in his arms, Steven and Rafe quickly raced toward Lee. Helping him to his feet. Rafe carefully gathering Lee into his arms.

“Are you alright?”

Lee swallowed heavily. “I think so.”

Steven turned to look at Jim. “Check him. Make sure we don’t have to take him to the hospital.”

Jim nodded. “No broken bones. He’s going to have a hell of a shiner on that right eye, though.”

William turned toward Kincaid. “What the hell’s the matter with you?”

“No son of mine will ever be a Guide?”

“Then it’s a good thing I’m not your son. Isn’t it?” Lee asked as Rafe gently touched the spreading bruise on the right side of his Guide’s face, making him flinch.
“Shut the hell up,” Kincaid snarled at the trembling boy.

“Don’t you dare talk to my Guide that way,” Rafe said angrily, when Lee flinched again.

“Get out of my house all of you,” Kincaid told them, still trying to break free of the hold Michael still had on his arm. “Before I call the cops.”

“Call them. We will have you arrested for abuse,” Simon told him. “As it is you’ve lost all right to Lee. He now belongs to the Sentinel Guild and Rafe.”

“The hell you say.”

“Yes, the hell I say. No one is allowed to touch one of our most precious resources without paying a heavy penalty. I run the Guild. I saw you strike a Guide. We all did. I could have you arrested. Lee is now a ward of the Guild. Rafe, Jim, help Lee gather whatever belongings he wants to take with him.”

“No. He takes only what he has on him,” Kincaid hissed.

“As you wish,” William said, angrily. “There’s nothing here I can’t buy for Lee myself. You’ve always been a bastard. Seems things haven’t changed at all. Let’s go.” He told his family.

“The Sentinel Guild lawyers will be in contact with you. From this point on you’re to have no contact with Lee in any way, sharp or form,” Simon told Kincaid.

“Like I’d want to. The boy’s been nothing but trouble since the day I married his mother. Get out.”

Rafe held his trembling Guide in the van as he cried. Blair rubbing Lee’s back soothingly, cooing soft words of comfort.

“Shh, no cry. It be okay. You gots us. We you family now.”
Lee rubbed his eyes with the back of a violently trembling hand. “Really?”

“Yups. We gots lots of room. Share wiff you. Right Jim?”

Jim nodded. “Yup. Right, Dad?”

William turned to look at all the hopeful young faces looking at him. “Yes. We’ve got plenty of room. You can stay with us, Lee.”

“Dad?” Steven frowned slightly. “What about Rafe? He can’t be away from Lee. And we can’t protect them if they’re in a different part of the city,” He said again. Bring up something that was really being to irk him something fierce.

William turned to look at Simon. “Well, Doctor?”

Simon bit down hard on his cigar. “Hmm, we’re going to have to talk to Rafe’s parents see what we can work out.”

“And hope we don’t have another scene like the one we just witnessed,” William replied, starting the van.

“Yes.”

***

Rafe’s parents were nothing like Lee’s step-dad. They quickly ushered the Ellison clan into their modest, but very warm and welcoming home.

Rafe’s mother Sarina, a small woman with a warm, quick smile. The smile vanished when she saw the vivid bruise on Lee’s face.

She gathered the still trembling Guide to her, telling her husband Manny to get her an ice pack. Having three, very active boys it was best to be prepared.
“What happened?” she asked, placing the ice pack gently against Lee’s face. Wincing right along with Lee when the cold came into contact with his hot skin.

“Lee’s step-dad didn’t take to well to Lee being a Guide,” Rafe told her, hovering. Watching his Guide lose himself in his mother’s comforting warmth with a small smile. His mom always made it all better.

“So he hit a little boy?” Rafe’s dad asked, angrily.

“Yes. He didn’t like it that Lee’s my Guide.”

“I think it’s more like ‘a Guide’,” Steven replied.

Lee looked up at Sarina, meeting her dark brown eyes. “Do you hate me, too?” he asked, in a small voice, blue eyes, red-rimmed and very sad.

“You’re going to be a part of my son’s life from now on. I could never hate you,” Sarina replied, kissing Lee’s forehead gently, gathering him close into her arms.

Rafe gave me a ring,” Lee said, showing them his left hand. “Promised to do right by me,” He said, sleepily. Worn out by the trauma he’d just undergone and the warm caring of Sarina’s gentle touch.

“He better,” Manny said, looking at the very nice gold band around the young Guide’s finger. So that’s what Rafe did with the allowance he’d been saving for almost a year. “Or he’ll answer to me.”

“Oh, Dad.”

“The boy’s been through enough. You treat him right. Or I’ll tan your hide,” Manny growled.

Rafe smiled. His Dad had never tanned his hide his entire life. Disciple being a major talking to and sent to your room to think about the evil of your ways. “Yes, Dad.”
“I mean it,” Manny told him, gathering his Sentinel son into his arms for a warm, loving hug.

“I know,” Rafe replied softly, into his Dad’s shirt. “I’ll do my best for him. I promise.”

“That’s one of the reasons we’re here,” William said watching as Sarina covered Lee with a colorful quilt from the back of the couch. “We need to figure a way to keep the boys together and with in eyesight of their Protectors.”

“Protectors?” Manny asked, frowning slightly.

“Michael and Steven.”

“I made a promise to Rafe that we’d help protect them. The same way we’ll protect Jim and Blair,” Steven told them softly. “We didn’t do that good a job today, otherwise Lee wouldn’t have gotten smacked,” He added sadly, looking at the bruise starting to spread across Lee’s face, guiltily.

“You couldn’t have known,” Jim told him, holding Blair close in his arms.

“The possibility was there, I should have realized that.” Steven looked up at Rafe. “I swear to you it’ll never happen again. On my life, I swear.”

Rafe blinked when he saw Steven’s figure blur. It was quick to quick to be caught by the normal eye, but then Rafe was no longer exactly normal. It showed Rafe exactly who was making the solemn vow. He’d gotten a glimpse of the Protector and it was enough.

“I know, Steven. I trust you. Not only with my life, but with the life of my Guide.”

Steven gave him a brilliant smile. The trust of the Sentinel when it concerned their Guide was not lightly given or taken. “Thank you.”

Rafe smiled at him. Showing his deep dimples. “Welcome.”

William turned back to Sarina and Manny. “We need to keep them together, all of them.”
Rafe’s parents nodded.

***

Two hours later they were back at home. The two newest members of the Ellison household tangled together, sleeping soundly on Michael’s bed.

Tomorrow they’d go shopping for a bed and for the things Lee would need to start his new life.

Rafe’s parents had been surprisingly understanding. Rafe would live in the Ellison household. Surround by those that could protect him while he was at his most vulnerable. With Rafe’s parents coming to visit as often as they could or Rafe would visit them.

Sarina had cried as she’d helped her eldest son pack. Yet in her heart she knew it was for the best. It didn’t help as she felt her heart breaking as she watched the van pull away from the curb carrying her son to his new life.

“Your family has grown by two more,” Simon told William as they looked over the sleeping boys.

William smiled. He had wanted a big family, he’d just never in his wildest imagination thought it growing to this size and it didn’t bother him one bit.

“Yes, it has. And I couldn’t be happier,” He replied, closing the door.

***

FAMILY FUN

“Aren’t you done yet?” Michael asked Steven as they moved Rafe and Lee’s bed AGAIN for what felt like the twentieth time.
“Not yet, it’s gotta be just right,” Steven replied, distractedly.

“Why? They’re set up between us. Nothing will get through.”

Steven looked at him as he rearranged the bed again. “There’s too much air coming in from the window.”

Michael sighed. “Come on already. There’s not too much air coming in from the window and if there is they can always close the freaking window.”

“Shut the hell up and help me move the bed.”

Michael sighed, but did as he was ordered. Rafe and Lee’s bed was right next to Jim and Blair’s. Michael and Steven’s beds taking the outside positions. Nothing was getting through if Steven could help it. Apparently not even air.

“Don’t you think you’re getting anal like Jim?” Michael asked as he watched Steven arranging the pillows.

Steven glared at him. “I’m doing my job, so shut the fuck up.”

Michael gasped, a hand to his chest dramatically. “You cussed. I’m so telling.”

Steven smiled at him. “Blair’s outside with Jim. So you have no fucking prove.”

“Blair will believe me.”

“Ha.”

“He will,” Michael insisted. “You know what I think?”
Steven patted the comforter down, finally satisfied. “Nope, but I’m sure your gonna tell me.”

“I think you need an adjustment hug.” With that Michael snagged Steven. Pulling him into his arms.

“Let me go, you freak. I’ve got a lot to do.”

Michael rested his face on top of Steven’s head. Nuzzling the soft hair there. “Nope. You need a hug. Maybe it’ll help with your bad attitude.”

“I don’t have a bad attitude.”

Michael tightened his arms around Steven as he started struggling. “Yes, you do.”

“No I don’t. Let me go, asshole.”

“You’re not going anywhere until that bad attitude of yours changes it ugly ways.”

Steven quit fighting. “Fuck.”

“What’s that?”

“Nothing.” No other words were spoken as Michael tried to fix Steven, who knew he didn’t need fixing, ‘cause he was positive he wasn’t broken. “Hey?”

“What?” Michael asked, tightening his arms around Steven.

“Ow! Watch it, musclehead, or you’ll break me for reals. When am I getting my ring? Or did you think I’d forgotten?”

Michael loosened his hold slightly. “Sorry. Tonight. There’s something I need to do first.”
Steven tried pulling away to look up at Michael. It wasn’t allowed. So this time Steven gave in gracefully. “What?”

“Oh. Have I been fixed enough now, so that you’ll let me go?” Steven asked, hopefully.

“Not yet.”

Silence. “Know what I think?”

“What?”

“I think you just like hugging little boys, you perv,” Steven told him, hoping that it would make Michael let him go. It didn’t. The steel bands around him tightened.

“No. Not all little boys, just my little boy.”

“Aw! You say the sweetest thing, perv. Wanna let me go now? I think that there’s cookies in the kitchen with my name on them.”

“Nope, not a thing.”
Michael smiled. “That’s what I thought.” He replied, resting his face once again on Steven’s head. He really liked how soft Steven’s hair was. Like velvet. He sighed happily when Steven gave in gracefully. Even returning the hug with one of his own. Just like he knew he would.

***

After dinner everyone sat around the living room. Not really doing anything, just being a family. Sally sat in her favorite chair crocheting an afghan for Lee and Rafe’s bed. She’d done one for all her boys and now she had two more.

She smiled over at the newest members of the family. Lee and Rafe were cuddling on the couch, right next to Blair and Jim, who were doing the same.

Simon was helping Daryl with his homework. With William reading the newspaper. Steven was drawing in his ever present pad with Michael sitting across from him watching curiously.

“Whatcha drawing, Steven?”

“Blair and Jim,” Came the calm reply. Steven not bothering to look up.

“Can I see?”

“Sure.”

Just then the phone rang and Michael got up to answer it. Never seeing the mischievously look in Steven’s blue eyes or when Steven quickly turned the page drawing something hastily on his pad.

“Telemarketer,” Michael said as he turned back. “Okay let me see your drawings,” He told Steven, reaching for the pad.

“Well, what do you think? Did I capture them or what?” Steven asked, showing Michael a sketch of two stick figures. One with a wild mop of curly hair, the other with a deep scowl on his face.
“Hmm.”

“Hmm, what? Don’t you like them?”

Michael scratched the side of his face, uncomfortably. “Huh, yes. I think their very nice.”

Steven smiled at him brilliantly. “Thanks. I kinda like the way Blair came out. I think I did a very good job on his hair, don’t you?”

Michael was saved from answering when Jim looked up. “Since you’re showing Michael your drawings, I wanna seen them, too. You haven’t let us see what you’ve been sketching.”

Michael moved away again, never seeing the look Steven was giving him or that he’d changed the page again.

“Oh, man, Steven. It’s beautiful. You did-do a great job on Blair’s hair. Can I have it?”

Steven smiled at his brother. “Sure.”

“Thanks. I know exactly where I’m going to hang it,” Jim replied, carefully taking the page Steven gave him.

“Let me see,” William requested. “Oh, Jim’s right. You did a great job on this drawing, son. Can I see your sketch pad?”

“You really like it?” Michael asked William, hesitantly. Confusion clear in his blue-green eyes.

“I sure do. Steven is very talented. What do you think, Simon?” William asked, holding up the sketch pad.

“Oh, yeah. Very nice. What else you got in that sketchpad of yours? Got anything I could hang up in my office?”
“Maybe. Have a look,” Steven offered.

“Thanks,” Simon replied, looking over William’s shoulder. “Oh, this portrait of Jim and Blair is beautiful. Can I have that it?”

“Sure.”

Michael was eyeing Steven suspiciously. “Can I look at the first portrait again?” What he saw took his breath away and wasn’t the picture Steven had first shown him.

It was a portrait of Blair and Jim. The love they held for each other clearly visible as they cuddled together. The young Sentinel smiling affectionately at his tiny Guide as Blair played with his fingers. Steven had captured them as no one else even could.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” Jim asked, reaching for it.

Michael released it. “It sure is.” He looked over at Steven, blue-green eyes promising retribution.

Steven being Steven and not intimidated in the least, blew him a kiss.

***

“Mr. Ellison?”

William looked up from the newspaper he was reading. Everyone had either gone to bed or were busy doing other things. So he was by himself in the living room.

“Yes, Michael, is there something I can do for you?” he asked, eyeing the very nervous bodybuilder.

“Can I talk to you for a minute?”
“Of course,” William replied, putting down the paper. “What can I do for you?”

“I need to ask you something every important.”

“Alright.”

Michael went to his knees in front of William, startling him. “I would very much like to ask for Steven’s hand.”

“W…what?”

“I would very much like to ask for Steven’s hand,” Michael repeated.

William narrowed his eyes as he tried to figure out what the hell Michael was talking about. He gasped when realization hit.

“You want to marry my son?”

Michael nodded his head vigorously, sending curls cascading onto his forehead. “Yes, Sir.”

“Hmm, you do realize that Steven is eleven. Right?”

Michael nodded again, not as vigorously this time. “Yes, Sir. Steven is constantly reminding me about that.”

William smiled. “He would.”

“Yes, Sir,” Michael replied, smiling shyly at William. “I would most humbly ask for his hand. I promise to do right by him and love him with my whole heart, for all times.”
William blinked. “Hmm, Michael, I say again, Steven is eleven.”

“Yes, Sir. I would never do anything unseemly toward your son,” Michael told him sincerely. “And if I tried, Steven would skin me alive.”

William smiled. “Unseemly? And yes he would.”

“Yes, Sir. No, I mean- no, Sir. Never.”

“And what does my son say about this?”

“He had agreed to be my mate,” Michael answered, smiling softly. “But I needed to ask for his hand from the most important person in his life.”

“Me?”

Michael nodded. “Yes, Sir.”

“That’s very nice of you, Michael. And when would this wedding take place.”

Michael thought about it for a moment. “When Steven turns sixteen.”

“And what are you going to do in the meantime?”

Michael looked at him blankly. “Sir?”

“You’re eighteen, Michael.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“If you don’t mind me asking. What are you going to do until Steven turns sixteen?”
Michael rubbed his nose nervously. “I don’t mind, Sir. You have a right to know. Blair has agreed to help me, the same way he helped Jim.”

“So, that’s what happened?” William said, softly. “I had noticed that Jim had become a lot calmer.”

“Yes, Sir. Blair has agreed to help me, so I can wait for Steven.”

“You’re sure you want to wait?”

Michael nodded. “Yes, Sir. With all my heart.”

“And what if I say no?”

By the look on Michael’s face, he clearly had not planned for that. His already pale face lost even more color. “I…I…”

William patted Michael’s arm. “I’m not saying no, Michael. Don’t go and faint.”

“I love your son, Mr. Ellison.”

“Do you?”

Michael met William’s eyes. “Yes, Sir. He may drive me batty most times, but I love him with all my heart and soul.”

William smiled. “That’s all a parent can ask of a prospective partner for one of his children.”

“Sir, are you saying yes?”
“I’m saying yes. I think you’ll make a very, fine partner for my son. Just don’t let him drive you to crazy,” William told, the beaming bodybuilder.

“Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir. You’ll never know how much this means to me,” Michael told him, rising to his feet.

“Oh, I think I do,” William said softly as he watched Michael take the stairs two at a time. In a rush to get to Steven.

Jim smiled as he helped Blair on with his pajamas.

“Why are you smiling?” Steven asked, curiously.

“Michael’s coming up the stairs and he’s got something for you.”

Steven put down the towel he was holding. “My ring?”

Jim didn’t answer. He just continued to smile mysteriously. Steven gave him an odd look, before running into the bedroom.

“Where’s my ring?” he asked, launching himself at Michael.


Steven straddled the bodybuilder. Leaning back as Michael raised his legs to support him. “Like you’re gonna be needing it any time soon. My ring, please.”

“Steven?”

“Yeah?”
Michael looked up at Steven. “Blair hasn’t fixed me yet,” He said, walking his forefinger and middle finger up Steven’s left leg. Smiling as Steven’s blue eyes got bigger and bigger, the higher the fingers went. “You could be giving me ideas you might not want to carry through at your tender age.”

“Perv,” Steven said, watching in fascination as Michael’s fingers played with the inseam of his jeans. “This is revenge for the stick figure sketch isn’t it?”

“Yup,” Michael replied, smiling brilliantly up at Steven.

“BLAIR.”

The little Guide came bouncing into the bedroom. “Yup?”

“Fix him, please. Before I’m forced to maim him,” Steven requested, yet he didn’t move from on top of the bodybuilder.

“Hokey dokey.”

Michael watched the little Guide walk toward him. “Steven, wanna get off, so Blair can get to me?”

“Nope. He’s only gotta get to you belly. He can reach and besides you’re my fiancé. I can touch you or sit on you whenever I feel like it.”

“Oh,” Michael said weakly.

“Are you sure you wanna do this?” Steven asked, worriedly as Blair knelt by them.

“Yes. I wanna wait for you. And your Dad already said I could marry you.”

“You asked Dad?”
Michael nodded. “Yeah,” he said, softly. “I couldn’t become part of your life without knowing I had your Dad’s blessing. It wouldn’t be right.”

“And if he had said no?” Michael shrugged, sheepishly. “You are such a dork. Didn’t even think of that did you?” Steven asked, in disgust. “What would you have done? Talk me into running away with you?”

“Would you?” Michael asked, running his finger down Steven’s nose affectionately.

“Yeah, but only long enough for you to marry me. We would’ve had to come back right away. We’ve got a job to do.”

“I know.” Michael turned his head to look at the quietly waiting little Guide. “I’m ready, Blair.”

The little Guide gently placing his hand on Michael’s tummy, very carefully pressing in.

Michael’s eyes widened in astonishment at the odd sense of well-being. “Oh. Wow!” he said, blinking dazedly up at Steven.

“What does it feel like?”

“It’s like being on really, really good drugs.” When Steven narrowed his eyes at him. “Not that I’d know anything about that,” he added, hastily.

“Hmm. You better not know anything about that.”

“I don’t. I heard it somewhere. Truly.”

“Hmm,” Steven replied, not at all convinced.

“Really. My body is my temple. I would never give it anything to hurt or damage it.”
Steven turned to Blair. “Is he telling the truth or are we gonna have to send him to rehab?” Ignoring the small sound of hurt from Michael.

“He tell truth. No need rehab.”

Michael glared up at Steven. “See. And you didn’t believe me. Get off. I don’t think I want to marry you anymore.”

“Sorry. I just wanted to make sure I wasn’t spending the rest of my life with someone that was gonna need more help than the Sentinels and Guides under my protection.”

Michael felt his heart skip. “Does that mean if I was on drugs…”

“I’d help you kick it. You think I’d just abandon you after committing? What the hell do you take me for? Some sort of wimp? Sorry, Blair.”

“Oh, Steven-that’s the nicest thing anyone’s ever said to me,” Michael said watching Steven turn a bright red. “I think I will marry you after all.”

Steven smiled at him. “As if there was any question, Musclehead. Plus you already got Dad’s permission to marry me. That was real, real nice of you asking him. One thing though, you better start saving your pennies. I don’t come cheap. And I wanna a BIG wedding. Just so you know.”

Michael sat up, careful not to dislodge Steven. “You’re such a jerk.”

“Yup. Now that you’ve been turned off, can I have my ring?”

“Okay, but can I have a hug first.”

Steven gave a long suffering sigh. “I suppose. If you absolutely MUST have one.”

“Yes, please,” Michael told him, carefully wrapping his arms around Steven. “Does this mean I can hug you whenever I want?”
“Yeah, I guess. Just don’t get too carried away by the hugging thing or I might have to hurt you.”

“Okay,” Michael replied, resting his face against the top of Steven’s head with a soft, happy sigh.

They stayed that way for awhile, enjoying the comfort the other gave. Jim had come into the room just as Blair had placed his hand against Michael’s tummy. Now the Sentinel/Guide pair sat next to them, calmly waiting.

Lee and Rafe came in carrying trays with glasses of milk and a huge plate filled with cookies.

“What’s going on?” Rafe asked, laying his tray on the table in the middle of their room.

“Steven and Michael dey bonding,” Blair answered.

“Kinda like a Sentinel/Guide bond?” Rafe asked, offering Jim and Blair a cookie each, before he sat down next to Jim.

“Yup,” Jim said, nibbling on his oatmeal cookie.

“Can you see it like you did with Rafe and me?” Lee asked, sitting next to them.

Jim frowned as he looked at his brother and Michael. “Yeah. Only it’s different. It’s like a rainbow swirling around them. Going through one and into the other. Kinda misty too. It’s really pretty. You should be able to see it too, Rafe.”

Rafe looked at his two friends. “Hmm, I’m not sure. It’s kinda blurry. Like when Steven went Super Protector.”

Jim offered his hand. Rafe took it unquestioningly. “How about now?”

“Oh, yeah,” Rafe replied in awe. “Rainbow colors swirling all around them. It’s beautiful.”
Silently they waited for the bonding to finish taking place. Jim thinking to himself why should Guides and Sentinels be the only ones to bond? Come to think of it, there should be some sort or bonding between Protectors and the Sentinel/Guides they were sworn to protect. He’d have to ask Steven about that later.

Steven opened his eyes. “Why is everybody staring at us?”

“You bonding. Very, very purdy,” Blair told him, crawling into Jim’s lap.

“Yeah. It felt really nice, too,” Steven replied, looking at Michael. “Ring, musclehead.”

Michael sighed unhappily. “Even now, I don’t get any respect,” He said, reaching into his pocket.

Steven snorted. “Oh, please. I wouldn’t want you to get an even more swollen head than you’ve already got. Oh!” Whatever else he’d been about to say was quickly forgotten when he final saw his ring up close. “It’s beautiful,” he whispered, softly.

The bonding had already taken place, the swirling colors Jim and Rafe had seen solidifying into what was to be a life-long bond and just as unbreakable a Sentinel/Guide bonding. Yet receiving tangible proof of that bond meant a great deal to Steven.

“Do you like it?” Michael asked, shyly.

“Oh, yeah. Will you put it on me?”

Michael took the ring out of its little box and very carefully placed it on Steven’s left ring finger. They were mated now. For life and beyond and nothing could change that, not even death.

He watched Steven’s blue eyes fill with tears. His own filling as well. “I love you, Steven,” he said softly. “Very, very much.”

Steven wiped at the tears coursing down his face with the back of his hands. “I know. I love you,
too. And if it leaves this room I will hunt down the blabber mouth and kill him, slowly,” He threatened, his smiling brothers and friends.

“Okay. Hug?”

Steven went willingly. “Oh, yeah.” Pulling away slowly after a few minutes. “Do I smell cookies?”

Rafe smiled. “Yup. Right out of the oven, even.”

“Cool.”

***

The days went quickly filled with school, homework, football and the goings on of a happy family.

Lee fit right in as did Rafe. Rafe not having time to miss his family because they were always visiting, brings Rafe’s little brothers to play with Blair. Who didn’t mind one little bit, now that he didn’t have to put up with Megan and Cassie.

It was another lazy afternoon. Steven sat on the couch next to his Dad drawing in his sketchbook. This time it he was drawing Lee, Blair and Wofie. Both Guides on their stomachs coloring in one of Blair’s coloring books.

Wofie lay on Lee’s back, cleaning himself. His front paw spread wide as he delicately nibbled between his nails. Steven couldn’t have asked for better drawing material. Not that he needed to go hunting for subjects. He had a houseful.

He looked up to see Rafe coming down the stairs a determined look on his face chanting something. As the newly online Sentinel got closer Steven heard what Rafe was saying.

“Heartbeat, heartbeat, heartbeat.”

Going over to where his Guide lay he very, very carefully picked up Wofie. “Sorry, Kitty. I need
him more than you do,” He said, carefully placing the cat on the carpeted floor.

Steven chuckled at the annoyed look Wofie gave Rafe before stalking over to Jim. Who was doing his homework at the coffee table. The Sentinel didn’t even look down as he began absently scratching the top of Wofie’s head, when the cat climbed into his lap.

William looked at Steven curiously to see why he was chuckling. Steven pointed to Rafe, who’d unceremoniously flipped Lee onto his back.

“Ow!” Lee said, giving his Sentinel an annoyed look.

“Heartbeat,” Rafe told him as if that explained it all and very carefully went between Lee’s legs to better rest his head against his Guide’s chest. “Ah,” He said, contently, finally getting what he needed.

Lee lay there arms outstretched, stunned. Blinking at the ceiling in blue-eyed incredulity at the liberty his Sentinel’s took with HIS body.

Rafe moved around slightly making himself more comfortable. “Ah,” He said, yet again and with more contentment than before.

Lee looked down at his Sentinel’s head. “What do you think you’re doing?”

Rafe looked up. “Heartbeat.”

“And you had to flip me like a pancake just to hear my heartbeat. Couldn’t you have listened to it from my back? You are a Sentinel and I was doing something.”

Rafe’s frowned. “That would have looked funny.”

Lee rolled his eyes. “And this doesn’t?”

“No as funny as if I’d laid on you back to hear your heartbeat.”
Lee rolled his eyes again. “Dork.”

Rafe gave Lee a sweet smile. “Love you.”

Steven watched as the annoyance left Lee’s face. “I love you-too, you silly Sentinel.” The new Guide said, softly.

“Gag,” Steven replied, from where he sat. “If I have to put up with all this mushiness for the rest of my life I’m gonna get diabetes before I’m fifteen.”

Lee wrapped his arms around his very, content Sentinel, now purring away happily. “Oh, please. Who was the one cuddling for a good half hour with his intended just this morning?”

Steven moved uncomfortably on the couch. “No idea.”

“Hmm, I’m sure,” Lee replied gathering his Sentinel close.

Just then the doorbell rang. Michael rose from where he sat at Steven’s feet reading a bodybuilding magazine. “I got it.”

Jim tilted his head to the side. “It’s Daniel Peterson.”

“Do we let him in?” Michael asked.

“Yeah, let him in.” Jim replied.

Michael opened the door letting the Shaman in.

***
Daniel Peterson had been allowed into the Ellison household two weeks ago. And it had been a learning experience to be sure.

It was a happy household filled with love and laughter. A lot of love. Freely given and shared. A perfect place for two Sentinel/Guide pairings to grow and thrive.

Daniel thought it a privilege to be allowed into the home after what Naomi and Jacob had tried. He still didn’t know how he’d allowed himself to get got up in their machinations. He was truly lucky he’d been forgiven and was now allowed to take part.

Steven still watched him warily. Not as warily as he had two weeks ago, but the young Protector still didn’t quite trust him. Not that Daniel blamed him.

Daniel sat on the couch across from William Ellison as the children of the household got ready to go swimming.

He watched in fascination as the youngsters jousted and teased one another as they raced back and forth. Wondering what the hell he was doing here? They didn’t need him. They pretty much had it all figured out. Blair was one of the best Guides he’d even seen, even at the tender age of three. Jim gaining confidence in his Sentinel abilities as time went by.

Rafe and Lee were still slightly awkward with one another, but it was getting better as they watched and learned from Jim and Blair.

Then there was Steven and Michael. Especially Steven. He was a force unto himself. Very rarely holding his tongue when it came to the verbal lashings he gave his Sentinel/Guide pairings. His acid tongue tapered by the deep love he held for them and they knew it.

Michael just as much a Protector as Steven calmer about it, yet never thinking twice about using brute strength when it came to protecting his charges.

Daniel blue-green eyes thoughtful as he watched the youngsters racing downing the stairs followed by a calmer Simon. Daniel frowned slightly as he contemplated the Doctor. Simon knew his place in this household and was quite content with it. Daniel wished he knew what that place was. Especially
when it came to William.

Daniel looked at William as he promised the Doctor that he’d be out shortly to start the barbeque that was to be their dinner.

When everyone left the room, Daniel cleared his throat. “William?”

“Yes?”

“Can I ask you a question?”

“Of course,” William replied, giving Daniel a beautiful smile that brought out two gorgeous dimples. “I can’t guarantee I’ll answer, though.”

“Is there something between you and Simon?” The smile vanished. “I don’t mean offense. I was curious.”

“Do you mean as in a relationship?”

Daniel nodded. “Yes.”

“I suppose we do,” Daniel’s heart sank. “We’re in charge of seven children. Even though Michael is eighteen. In many ways he’s still very much a child. You do tend to get close.”

“A…are you romantically involved?”

William looked at the Shaman. “That’s a bit personal, don’t you think?” he said, frowning.

“I need to know.”

“Why?”
Daniel didn’t answer, didn’t really have to. William’s felt his eyes widen in surprise as he met Daniel’s steady glaze. He gave a tiny gasp as he realized what the Shaman was telling him, without saying a word. What surprised him the most was his response to what he was seeing in Daniel’s beautiful blue-green eyes.

William had always though himself heterosexual. It was a true shock to find out that wasn’t necessarily the case. He watched as Daniel rose, carefully making his way to where he sat.


“Simon is involved with a nurse at the Sentinel Center. He’s been dating her for two months now.”

Daniel gave him a brilliant smile. “I’m glad.”

“Why is that?”

Daniel ran his thumb gently over William’s mustache and mouth. Finally cupping the side of his face. “Then, I can do this with no guilt,” He whispered, closing his eyes he met William’s mouth, tenderly coaxing it open with his tongue.

William moaned softly. Pulling the unresisting man to him tightly as he sought Daniel’s mouth hungrily, desperately. Tangling his fingers in Daniel’s hair he deepened the kiss. Never hearing the door to the outside patio open.
Football, Birthdays and Holidays 4-Part 2

“Dad?”

William desperately wanted another kiss from Daniel. Eyeing the lips inches from him hungrily. He couldn’t take it. He just couldn’t. Not with Steven in the room with them.

“Son?” William whispered, hoarsely.

“I just came in to tell you that Simon says the grill is ready.”

William was afraid to look at his middle son. Afraid what he would see in his eyes. Steven had always seen more than was clear to the naked eye. Now would be no different.

William steadied himself and looked up. Acknowledging the fact it was taking more courage to do than he’d had to use in a long time.

Blue eyes were looking at him curiously. That’s when William realized he was still holding on to Daniel. Slowly and with great reluctance, he let the Shaman go.
“Steven, I was just…”

Steven gave him a huge smile. “I know what you were doing, Dad. You gave me that talk a long time ago, remember?”

William cleared his throat. “Yes. I just…” He ran his hand through his hair. “This is just so embarrassing.”

“Why?”

“Son…” William could feel his face flame.

“Dad.” Steven gave Daniel a heavy glare. “Move. I wanna talk to my Dad.”

“Sorry,” Daniel replied contritely, moving away from William. “Maybe I should just go.”

Steven looked at him. “No. Sit over on the couch. This concerns you, too. Being as Dad was kissin’ you and all.”

“Steven,” William groaned, fighting to keep from burying his head in his hands.

Steven smiled. “Oh, Dad. You should see your face. I’m gonna remember this for years.”

William smiled ruefully at his son. “Me too and not in a good way.”

Steven touched William’s face gently. “I love you, Dad.”

William moved his face into the gentle touch. “I love you too, Son.”
“Nothing will ever change that.”

William met his son’s eyes. “Are you sure?” he asked, worriedly.

Steven nodded. “Yup. I already knew you were human, Dad. I’ve known that for a long time.”

“Steven…”

“Mom’s been gone for awhile now.”

William sighed heavily. “Yes.”

“You deserve to be happy, Dad.”

William met his son’s eyes. “Steven…”

“Be happy, Dad.”

“That’s all you have to say?” William asked, in surprise. Not really expecting this kind of response from his very vocal son.

Steven smiled at him mischievously. “I could have a temper tantrum if you like.”

“No. No,” William replied, hastily. “This kind of response is good.”

“And besides I got something to say to Daniel.”

William moaned. “Oh, God.”
“I love you, Dad.” Steven told his father, kissing him on the forehead. William pulled his son toward him, resting his head against Steven’s tummy.

“I love you too, Steven. Thank you.”

“One thing though.”

William looked up meeting Steven twinkling blue eyes. “What?” He asked, warily.

“Nothing besides kissin’ till he gives you a ring. That’s really important.”

William chuckled. “Alright,” He replied, releasing his son. “Will you tell Simon I’ll be right out?”

“Yup.”

Daniel froze when Steven turned to glare at him. “Steven. I…” What the hell do you say to an eleven year old who caught you kissing his father?

“Hurt him and you die. Slowly and very, very painfully. That’s all I gotta say.”

“I won’t hurt him. I swear it.”

“Better not,” Steven said making his way to the patio door. “Tomorrow I’ll help you pick a ring, if you want.”

“Alright.”

Steven smiled at him in approval. “Cool. See you in a bit.”

“Yes.” When the door closed Daniel turned to look at William. “Are you alright?”
“I’m fine. Mortified beyond belief, but other than that I feel surprisingly well.”

Daniel knelt in front of William, pulling the trembling man into his arms. “Are you sure you’re alright?”

“Fine,” William replied against Daniel’s lips. He pulled back slightly. “Remember nothing heavier than kissing till you get me a ring.”


***

THE TEACHING GUIDE

“Are you sure that’s all I gotta do?” Lee asked Blair, skeptically.

Blair nodded. “Yups.”

They were sitting on Blair and Jim’s bed as the little Guide gave Lee pointers on how to be the best Guide possible.

“But what if it doesn’t work?”

“It work.”

Steven sat on his bed reading a comic and watching Blair teach Lee. Enjoying the whole thing immensely, but not interfering. Michael was on the other side of the bedroom working with twenty pound barbells. Jim had gone to the kitchen to get cookies and milk with Rafe helping him. Daryl was off with his current girlfriend, Michele.

“So all I gotta do is think bonding and it’ll start the scent?”
Blair nodded. “Yup. Try, it work.”

Lee pushed his hair out of his face. “I hope so, Rafe is starting to get a little antsy cause I can’t do the bonding scent to good.”

“He’s been crying over the stupidest things, too,” Steven said, not looking up.

“The leaf layin’ on the sidewalk all by itself did look a little pitiful.”

“It was a freaking leaf.”

Lee looked over at said leaf, now resting comfortably on a bed made out of a soft washcloth. “Hmm, yeah, but it did look all sad.”

“It was a freaking leaf,” Steven repeated. “He cried for an hour over a freaking leaf.”

Lee shrugged. “What can I say? Maybe, if I was able to do the bonding scent better he wouldn’t act like such a sissy.”

Steven groaned. “Oh, man-do you know what you just did?”

Lee flinched, eyes widening in horror. “Oh. MY. GOD.”

“LEE,” Jim bellowed from downstairs.

“Sorry, sorry. You’re not a sissy. Well, no, that’s not actually true. You are a sissy, but you’re my sissy.”

“LEE,” Jim bellowed again. “NOT HELPING.”
The new Guide gave Steven a sheepish grin. “Oops.”

Steven rolled his eyes. “Sentinels,” he said in disgust. “Biggest babies in the whole world.”

“I love you, Rafe. You are the only Sentinel for me. Sissy or not,” Lee whispered softly, knowing his Sentinel would hear. “Bring me a sandwich when you come back up, please.” He turned back to Blair. “Now you’re sure it’ll work. If it doesn’t work Rafe is going to make us…” Lee rolled his forefinger around his ear.

“I FELT THAT.”

Lee chuckled softly. “You were suppose to, dork.”

“BUT I’M YOU DORK, RIGHT?”

Steven rolled his eyes. “Gag. That’s just so gross.”

Lee smiled at him as he answered his Sentinel. “Yes, my dork.” He turned back to Blair once again. “Okay, so all I gotta do is think bonding scent and it’ll release it?”

“Yup.”

“Okay. Let’s give it a try.” Lee closed his eyes, crinkling his nose he thought. *Bonding scent, bonding scent, bonding scent.* After a moment he opened his eyes and looked at Blair. “It’s not working.”

“It work. Try ’gain.”

“Okay.” Lee closed his eyes. *Bonding scent, bonding scent, bonding scent.*

With his eyes closed he never saw a Sentinel missile come barreling into the room. Steven did, barely saving Blair from being squished as Rafe tackled his Guide, sending them both tumbling over the side of the bed.
Steven looked over at them. Rafe was sniffing happily at Lee’s neck. With Lee’s fingers tangled in Rafe’s hair encouraging the ecstatic snuffling. He looked at the little Guide safe in his arms. “Guess it worked.”

Blair stretched over to look at the Sentinel/Guide pair on the floor. “Yupper, it work.” He gave Steven a huge smile. “I good teacher or what?”

Steven chuckled. “You’re a very good teacher, little brother. Wanna go help Jim with the cookies and milk.”

“Yups.”

“Okay let’s go.”

***

Rafe seemed calmer after that. Though begging Lee to bond him with a frequency that had the new Guide fearing for the skin of his neck. It was already super-sensitive from having a nose digging into it constantly.

He’d taken to hiding from his Sentinel just to get a little peace and get his homework done. Blair had showed him how to hide from his Sentinel. A Guide secret not to be shared with many people. Steven knew because he was asked to hide the little boxes that held the locks of hair that would lead the Sentinel’s to their Guides.

Blair and Lee would hide in another part of the house. Known to them as the Sentinel-free zone. Going there when then needed time alone and to regroup. The two Guides would share secrets, play games and Blair would help Lee with his homework. If Lee thought it was strange that a three year old was helping him with seventh grade homework he never said.

Steven would get the biggest kick out of watching the Sentinels go completely bonkers as they searched in vain for their Guides. Charging around the house, nose high in the air trying to pick up their scent. It never worked. Steven of course knew where the Guides were, but he wasn’t about to tell.
No amount of bribes, threats or whining could get Steven to tell them where Lee and Blair were or where the little boxes were. Jim had even tried the ‘glacier look’ on Steven. Steven had rolled his eyes and told him that look hadn’t worked in months and if he didn’t quit he was going to make him one very sorry Sentinel.

Jim had quickly backed off, knowing better than to test Steven. He had taken to stalking Steven though. Knowing the young Protector would eventually take the Guides a snack. Funny thing that—Lee and Blair weren’t the only ones that could hide their whereabouts. Steven could do it just as easily, much to Jim and Rafe’s extreme annoyance.

“Well, is it my fucking fault you guys are so needy?” Steven asked, the two glaring Sentinel. Waving around a chocolate chip cookie as he sat on the couch enjoying his tenth snack of the day.

“We’re not needy, we’re just emotionally challenged,” Rafe told him.

“That explains why poor Lee’s been needing to put first aid cream on his neck? You sissies are just clingers and don’t want to admit it. Can’t last a day without needing to get bonded and scented.”

“Can to,” Jim told him, angrily.

“Right. Let me take up this oh-so-easy challenge. I’ll bet you a hundred bucks you can’t go twenty-four hours without bugging your Guides,” Steven told them, biting into his cookie.

“A hundred bucks? That could buy me that suit I’ve been eyeing in GQ.” Rafe replied, seriously thinking about it.

“Rafe, you’re in seventh grade. What the hell do you want with a suit?”

“I gotta look good for my Guide.”

Steven shook his head. “Like Lee’s gonna care. You could go around in your underwear all freaking day long, with your hair sticking straight up and no bath for a week and Lee would still think you’re the greatest thing since they invented banana splits.”
Steven watched Rafe get a goofy look on his face. “You think so?”

“Yeah, he’s all goo-goo eyed over you.” Steven stuffed the rest his cookie in his mouth. “Go figure.”

Rafe shook his head. “No. No can do. I want to make my Guide proud of me and that means looking good at all times.”

Steven smiled at him. “Willing then to take up my challenge?”

Rafe’s brown eyes held a sad glint. “Don’t have that kind of money. I really need to get me a job. I can’t even afford to take my Guide to the movies or get him a Wonder Burger.”

“You could always ask Simon or Dad if they know of any jobs for a newly online Sentinel,” Jim suggested. “I could use an extra cash flow as well. The holidays are coming up and like a zillion birthdays I’ve got to buy presents for.”

“Yeah, me, too.”

Jim nodded resolutely. “Okay, then-tomorrow we go looking for a job. Wanna go with us, Steven?”

Steven shook his head. “Hell, no. I got me a job.”

Jim narrowed his eyes at him. “That doesn’t pay anything yet, you twit. How are you going to buy presents with no money? I don’t think the stores take air as currency.”

Steven thought about it. “That’s true. I do have my allowance, but my Christmas and birthday list has doubled. All right I go with you and don’t call me twit. Hey, we should make Dad a birthday party this year. He’s going to be thirty-six after all. He’s got something to celebrate this year him, having a boyfriend and all.”

“How the heck did that happen anyway?” Jim asked, in confusion. One minute his Dad had been alone and the next he had a boyfriend.
Steven shrugged. “Don’t know. As far as I could tell all it took was Daniel kissing him.”

Jim frowned. “I’m not sure I like the sound of that.”

“Oh, please—it’s not as if he goes around letting all the guys that look at him funny, kiss him. He’s not that easy.”

Jim gasped. “You’re talking about our Dad.”

Steven smiled. “Yeah, I think it’s so cool.”

Jim returned the smile. “Yeah, it is. Dad’s got a boyfriend. One that really, really likes him. It really is cool.”

“Did you see the look on his face when Daniel gave him the ring?” Steven asked him, smiling. “I thought Dad was gonna pass out. It was as if no one’s ever given him a ring before.”

Jim thought about it. “I don’t think anyone has. Daniel’s the first. Hey?”

“What?” Steven asked, mouth full of another cookie.

“Did you warn Daniel about not hurting Dad?”

“Yup. If he does, I get him first then you can have what’s left. We’ll bury the body in the backyard. Nobody will ever find him back there.”

“Okay. Hey, gimme a cookie and don’t eat them all.”

Rafe looked up from his magazine. “You guys do know you’re talking about committing homicide, right?”
Steven gave Jim a cookie. “And? Wanna cookie?”

“Yeah, thanks. I just thought I’d remind you. If Daniel does hurt your Dad, the best place to bury the body would be over by the back shed. That way the smell won’t come into the house.”

Steven gave him a cookie. “That’s an idea.”

***

HOLIDAY’S AND SUCH

A week before Halloween and all was well in his world, William thought to himself. His boys were all doing well and were very healthy. Their grades in school were good and they were caught up from when Jim had been sick and in the hospital.

Now they were at the Autumn Carnival at school. The house was so quiet, eerily quiet with all his boys gone.

“So, alone at last,” he told Daniel, who was currently nibbling on his neck. Having been pinned by the Shaman against the front door the minute William had let him in.

“Hmm.”

William gasped as a hand came down and cupped him through his pants, gentle stroking him. “Oh.”

“I want you,” Daniel whispered, licking the sensitive skin of his neck.

William moaned when that same hand nimbly opened his zipper. No one had touched him this way in so long. He’d almost forgotten what the touch felt like.

He pulled Daniel closer, seeking his mouth hungrily. He’d been starving for this kind of attention. This kind of heat, this kind of passion for so very long. It felt so good.
“Daniel.”


William began panting as he struggled to get himself under control, desperate to let go. Unsure which he wanted more. “I…” The hand began a rhythm he couldn’t fight against. He bit Daniel’s shoulder trying to get his shattered breath back, when it was all over.

“I…”

“Did you like it?” Daniel asked softly, nibbling on his face.

“Yes. Oh, yes.”

Daniel smiled at him. “Want to do it again?”

William smiled at him shakily. “I…yes. I do believe, I would like that very much.”

“Your bedroom?”

“Yes. Yes.”

Daniel took his hand tugging him toward the stair. “Let’s go.”

***

“Didn’t you have that same costume last year?” Rafe asked Jim.
“Yeah, so?”

Rafe frowned at him. “Shows that you don’t have much of an imagination.”

“Yes, I do. I want to be a cop. Right now it’s a costume, later it’ll be for real.”

“Well, I wanna be a cop too, but you don’t see me dressing like that.”

Jim snickered. “No, I see you dressed as Darth Vader.”

“Got a problem with that, Obi Wan?” Rafe wheezed, dramatically.

“No problem. You just don’t sound like Darth Vader,” Jim chuckled.


“Quit trying, you’ll never make a good Darth Vader,” Steven replied, pushing Rafe out of the way. “Move it, Wheezie. Better do something about that bad asthma problem before you keel over and die. What would your poor Guide do?” Steven asked, dressed as Batman. Carrying Blair, the cutest Robin the world had ever seen.

“Oh, probably find me another Sentinel in the yellow pages,” Lee replied, dressed as a cowboy, right down to the shiny boots.

Rafe took off his mask. “You would?”

Lee nodded. “Yup, after the proper fifteen minute grieving period.”

Rafe looked down at the ground, before looking up at his Guide. “You’re kidding, right?”

“Nope.”
“You're not kidding?”

“Nope.”

Carl dressed as a Sumo wrestler and H as a pirate looked on. Actually all of them looked on, waiting for the explosion of tears the newly online Sentinel was so very prone to.

It didn’t happen. Rafe went to his Guide carefully gathering him in his arms. “You’re going to bond me after this, right?” he asked, nuzzling his nose gently with his.

“Yup,” Lee replied, nuzzling his Sentinel right back.

Rafe gave him a brilliant smile. “Cool. Let’s go get us some candy.”

***

Three hours later saw them sitting in front of the TV watching a British show Lee had gotten them hooked on.

“So, what’d you say his name was?”

“Dr. Who.”

Carl glared at Steven. “I know that you, twit. His real name.”

“From what I understand it’s unpronounceable to us mere humans,” Steven, replied, opening another Tootsie roll.

They’d made a killing in candy again this year. Steven still thought it was cause Blair was the cutest kid on the planet. Everyone always wanted to pinch his cheeks and give him things. It didn’t bother Steven any, it’s gotten them lots of candy too, just by being around him.
Dad had checked it as usual before going into the kitchen with Daniel for coffee and some leftover chocolate cake from dinner.

Steven smiled to himself. He’d never seen his Dad happier. He smiled a lot more and the sad look in his eyes was gone. Dad was truly happy, for the first time since Steven could remember.

“I’m going to get some soda and make popcorn. Does anyone want anything?” Jim asked, getting to his feet.

Everyone gave him their order and Jim left taking H with him to help. While they started watching the second episode of the new season called The End of the World.

When Jim came back his eyes widened in surprise. Blair was sitting in Rafe’s lap crying hysterically. “What happened?”

“We were watching Dr. Who and the Doctor was all upset. We kept watching and then the Doctor told Rose that he was the last Time Lord. There were no more and that even his planet had been destroyed,” Rafe, replied, pulling Blair higher in his arms.

The little Guide turned Jim, bottom lip quivering uncontrollably. “He all alone. No one to take care him.”

“But Blair, he’s got Rose.” Jim told him, softly.

Blair wiped the tears coursing down his face with the back of his hand. “Not same. He just meet Rose. Doctor all alone and berry, berry sad. He…” A wet sniff. “Cry…” Another wet sniff. “and every ‘ting.” The tears started coming faster.

Jim turned to Steven. “Do something.”

Steven looked at him in surprise. “Me? What the hell do you expect me to do?”
“You’re the Protector. Protect.”

“But, Blair it’s just a show. It’s not real.” H told him, softly. It didn’t help as Blair started crying louder.

Jim ran a trembling hand through his hair. “Oh, God. What are we going to do? He’s crying. Blair’s crying.”

“Shh, I know. Don’t panic. Blair, little brother. I know what to do. What if we write a letter and invite him to stay with us?” Jim, Rafe, H, Carl and even Michael turned to look at him as if he’d lost his last remaining marble. Steven looked back. “WHAT? You wanted me to do something. I’m doing it.”

“What’s the matter with you? Where the hell are we going to put him?” Jim hissed.

Carl raised a finger. “Hum, guys?”

“We’ll put him on the outside of Daryl. He’s hardly ever here any way cause of his new girlfriend. Only comes home to sleep and change his clothes.”

“Guys?”

Jim nibbled on his bottom lip as he thought about it. “That would work. And the Tardis?”

“Hum, guys?”

“Backyard, other side of the pool. Right next to where we’re going to put Daniel if he hurts Dad.”

During this time Blair had quit crying and was quietly watching Jim and Steven, big blue eyes hopeful.

“GUYS?”
“WHAT?” Steven and Jim yelled back.

“It’s a TV show. Not Real.”

Blair buried his curly head against Rafe’s chest and began sobbing again.

“God-damn it, Carl. I’m going to fucking kill you, slowly,” Steven hissed, angrily. Blair was crying again and Jim was about to start pulling his hair out.

“Well, it is?” Carl said, defensively.

“If you’re not going to help, shut the fuck up. Blair, baby brother-wanna write a letter to The Doctor? We can ask him to come here and stay with us? We’ll take care of him and love him. And then he won’t be alone,” Steven said, softly, rubbing Blair’s tiny back soothingly. After giving Carl another heat-melting glare. “We don’t care what Carl thinks.”

“Really?” Blair asked softly, blue eyes, red-rimmed and still full of tears ready to fall. The saddest sight any of them had ever seen. They all turned to look at Carl accusingly.

“Sorry,” Carl said, remorsefully.

“You should be. Go find some paper and a pen,” Steven told him. Turning to Blair he carefully wiped the tears from his little face with his thumbs. “We’ll, try and make it better, little brother. I promise.”

Blair smiled at him, offering his arms. Steven picked him up and cuddled him close. “I luv you, Stevie.”

Steven patted his back, affectionately. “I love you too, little brother.” He looked over to meet Jim’s eyes.

“Thank you, Steven,” he was told, gratefully.
“No problem. Here’s Carl with the paper and pen. Let’s write the letter so we can mail it tonight. What do you say?” Steven asked Blair, who nodded happily.

Letter mailed and on its way they were now in their room getting ready for bed. “Stevie?” Jim called softly from his bed cuddling his sleeping Guide close.

“Yeah?”

“Thank you, again. I hate it when Blair cries. I froze. I didn’t know what to do.”

“No problem. Just doing my job."

Silence for a little while. “Stevie?”

“Hmm?”

“Can I ask you something? You’re not too tired?”

Steven punched his pillow into a more comfortable shape. “No. Ask?”

“Know how you and Michael are the Protectors and all?”

“What about it?”

“Well, I was kinda wondering, is there a bonding ritual for Sentinel/Guides pairings and the Protectors that take care of them?”

Steven thought about it for a while. “Yeah, there is,” he finally answered.
“Is it as binding as the one for Sentinel and Guides?”

“Yeah, just as unbreakable, too.”

Jim pulled Blair closer. Checking on him with his senses to make sure everything was okay. “Why haven’t we done it?”

“Not time.”

“What do you mean?”

Steven pulled his covers up higher. “It’s not time. It’ll be soon though.”

“How can you tell?”

“I just can.”

Jim made himself more comfortable on the bed. “Oh, okay. Stevie?”

“Hmm?”

“Goodnight.”

“‘night, Watchman.”

***

Thanksgiving was an experience William would treasure always. His house rang with the laughter of his children and friends. Even Naomi and Jacob had been allowed to take part. Currently sitting on the loveseat listening as Blair read to them.
Jim closely watching as was Steven and Michael, but Blair’s family had been allowed back in. Which was a start.

Michael and his father were sitting on the couch watching the football game with Steven sitting at Michael’s feet. Malcolm Bean had given the boys jobs in his barber shop. Jim cashiered, while Steven and Rafe sweep and mopped the floors.

William had never seen the barber shop look so good. It shone, it was so clean. Lee and Blair had jobs as well, theirs was to look cute and draw in the customers. Which William had to admit, they did really well. According to Malcolm, business was booming. He was so proud of his sons, all of them.

Mattie was here as well, helping Sally in the kitchen. Taggart along with his wife Gladys. Rafe’s mother Sarina and father Manny and Rafe’s two brothers Sammy and Julian were here too. Rafe was sitting on the living room floor playing with them. Simon’s and Daryl’s girlfriends Jennifer and Michele had joined them as well.

The only ones that didn’t make it this holiday were Sally’s children much to her disappointment. But William was hoping they’d be able to make it for Christmas.

He turned to smile at Daniel who was quietly watching, a beer in his left hand. “You’ve got a great turn out, Will.”

“Yes, I have. I’m so blessed to have such a great family and group of friends,” William said, fighting back the tears.

Daniel went to stand close to him. “You sure are. And I thank you with all my heart for letting me be a part of this. I love you, William Ellison.”

William blinked in surprise. “Well, I do believe that’s the first time you’ve said that.”

Daniel gave him a small smile. “It is the first time I’ve voiced it, but I hope that I’ve shown you in a million different ways.”

William touched the ring on his left hand. “You have. I love you, too, Daniel Peterson.” Sally came
in carrying a huge turkey. William looked out over his family and friends. Raising his voice slightly. “The turkey’s here. Let’s eat.” Laughing softly when Michael and Steven fought to get to the table the fastest.

***

Christmas was fast approaching. The outside of the house lit by so many lights William would swear it could be seen from outer space. He was enjoying himself immensely as he watched his boys, throwing themselves into the holidays with such abandoned joy.

William sat on the couch drinking hot chocolate as he watched them decorating the huge tree they’d chosen. Daniel sitting close to his side. Close enough to be felt, but not so close as to be inappropriate with a house full of children.

He smiled when he saw Jim and Rafe staring intently at one of the Christmas ornaments. A colorful crystal ball.

“See, look there. You can see all the way to the molecules,” Jim told Rafe, pointing.

“Yeah, you can. That’s so cool. How far do you think we can see in?”

Steven walked into the room the tip of a candy cane hanging haphazardly in his mouth, going over to where they were standing grabbing the ornament out of their hands. “Sissies. Gimme that, before you zone yourselves into the next century,” he said, taking the candy cane out of his mouth. Not even hesitating he kept walking through the living room and up the stairs. Candy cane back in his mouth.

William bit back a chuckle at the stunned look on Jim and Rafe’s faces as they followed Steven’s progress.

“Steven’s something else isn’t he?” Daniel said, taking a sip of his own cocoa.

“That he is. One of a kind. One of a kind.”

***
Christmas Day dawned bright and early at the Ellison household. The happy gleeful yells of his children waking him from a sound sleep.

He came down the stairs followed by Simon who’d been woken the same way. To find a blizzard of wrapping paper flying all over the living room

“We’re going to be digging out for months,” Simon told him, putting on his glasses to better see the children’s excitement.

William chuckled as he made his way down the stairs. “Yes.” Sitting on the couch to watch.

Steven frowned looking at everything Blair had as then back at his take. “Hey, how come Blair has more stuff?”

Jim looked at him. “Because Blair’s three and he’s suppose to get more stuff.” He replied, going back to helping his little Guide open his presents.

“Does that mean when he’s say-fifteen, he won’t be getting as many presents?”

“Nope.”

“Nope?”

Jim didn’t even look up. “He’ll be getting just as many or more. I’m saying more, for the simple fact, he’s Blair.”

“Oh. That makes sense. I guess.” Steven looked over at his father. “Hey, Dad-did we wake you?”

William smiled at him. “Yes, but that’s alright I wouldn’t have missed this for the world. Did everyone get what the wanted?” Every youngster in the room nodded their heads happily. “I’m glad.”
“Dad, do you want your presents now? Simon?” Jim asked, holding up a pile of colorfully, if crookedly wrapped presents.

“Yes, I believe I’d like that very much.” William turned to the Doctor. “Simon?”

Simon nodded. “Oh, yeah. I love presents.”

Steven went to sit next to William to watch his Dad open his gifts. Actually all the boys stopped doing what they were doing to watch. Waiting for the special surprise planned just for Lee.

“Whose present should I open first?”

Lee held up his hand shyly. “Mine, please.”

William smiled at him. “Okay. Oh, Lee this is beautiful. How did you know I needed another scarf?” Holding it up for everyone to see.

Lee blushed. “I saw that yours was starting to unravel and I thought you might like a new one.”

“Dragged us through ten stores to find just the right one,” Steven told his Dad. “I thought we’d be hunting for scarves till next Christmas.”

William wrapped it around his neck. “Well, I think it’s perfect. Thank you, Lee.”

Lee gave him a brilliant smile. “You’re welcome, Dad.” Suddenly all color left the young Guide’s face when he realized what he’d just said. “Oh, God. I think I’m going to be sick.”

“No, don’t get sick. Come here, Lee.” William said, softly. Steven moved over to give the Guide room. “I’ve got something extra special for you. Well, I hope you’ll think it’s special anyway.”

Lee looked up at him. “Really?”
“Yes,” William reached into the oversized pocket of his terry cloth robe, pulling out an envelope.

Lee looked at it. “What is it?”

William tucked Lee’s hair behind his ears. “You are now officially my son.”

“W…what?”

Steven sat on the coffee table so he could talk to his friend. “Dad’s been working on this for awhile, now. You’re my brother and Blair’s and even dweebie Jim’s. Why you would want him as your brother is beyond me. I’ve been trying to give him away for years, but no one wants to take him,” he said, sadly.

“Hey,” Jim protested from his spot on the floor.

Steven ignored him. “Your Mom’s not coming out of rehab any time soon. Since she’s got other problems besides the drinking one. Kincaid was never officially your step-dad. Your Mom wanted what was best for you and what is best for you is to be an Ellison.”

Lee touched the envelope as if held the most precious thing imaginable inside it. “I’m an Ellison?” It was something he’d wanted with his whole heart, but had been to afraid to ask in case he got told no.

William nodded. “You’re an Ellison now. Lee Brackett Ellison to be exact.” William was treated to one on the most brilliant smiles he’s ever seen in his life.

“Truly?”

“Truly.”

Lee’s blue eyes became hazy with tears. “I can call you Dad whenever I want? I’ve never had a real Dad before.”

William pulled the trembling young Guide into his arms. “I’d be honored if you called me Dad.”
There wasn’t a dry eye in the room as William hugged his newest son as Lee cried on his official Dad’s shoulder.

After a long moment Steven gently touched Lee. “So how does it feel to be an Ellison?”

Lee turned, but not so that he was that far from his Father. “It feels great,” he said, wiping the tears with the back of his hands.

Suddenly they all rushed toward Lee. “Let’s see,” Rafe said, holding out his hands for the envelope.

Lee looked up at William, eyes shimmering with tears. “Thank you, Dad. This is the best Christmas ever.”

William cupped Lee’s face gently, kissing his forehead. “You’re very welcome, Son.”

After a huge breakfast everyone scattered to play with their gifts or helping clean up before company arrived. William sat at the dining room table enjoying another cup of coffee, looking at the wrecked living room in amusement. When Lee came up to him.

“Dad?”

William looked up. “Yes, Son?”

Lee blushed a bright pink. “I…I…just w…want to …say that I love you,” saying that he gave William a quick kiss to the cheek before taking off for parts unknown. Not giving the stunned William a chance to respond.

“Oh,” He replied, quietly, after a moment. Looking toward the general direction Lee had disappeared to.

Daniel came in caring a coffee cup and a donut. “Gotcha’ didn’t he?” he asked, chuckling softly.
“He certainly did.”

Daniel sat next to William. “That was a nice thing you did for Lee.”

“Lee is as much my son as Blair is. They may not be my blood, but I love them as if they were.”

Daniel patted William’s hand. “You’ve got a very caring heart, Will.”

William met Daniel’s eyes, his own filling with tears. “My sons complete my life, Daniel. They are my heart and soul. All of them.”

Daniel pulled him into his arms. “I know.”

***

ANOTHER YEAR OLDER

Blair’s fourth birthday came and went with a great deal of fanfare. Not that you could tell by looking at him. Blair took all the attention leveled at him with his usual grace and bemused look in his big blue eyes.

It had been a great party, with family and friend all gathered around. Even Naomi and Jacob had been allowed to attend. Both Rafe and Jim watched them like hawks as did Steven and Michael.

The suspicion it seemed would never quite leave, but at least they were allowed to be a part of Blair’s life. Jacob had approached Jim once again with a request to be allowed to teach Blair about his heritage. The young Sentinel had listened quietly, but had not given a yay or nay. And probably wouldn’t for sometime to come.

Everything had gone smoothly for awhile now. Jim had turned thirteen with out a hitch as well. Steven had complained at his own birthday that everything had been going to smoothly. Turning twelve wasn’t suppose to be so boring.
William came down the stairs as he contemplated his life and how happy he was. He hadn’t been this happy since Grace had been alive. He’d missed her and probably would for the rest of his life. Now for the first time since Grace had died he was happy. Truly happy.

Stopping near the kitchen door, he tilted his head to the side as he listened to the voices of his sons coming from the kitchen.

“I really don’t think it’s suppose to be so crooked,” Steven whispered.

“It’s not that crooked,” Jim whispered back. “What do you think Blair?”

“It berry crooked.”

“Maybe we could add some more frosting to make it a little straighter,” Lee whispered.

“I don’t think anything is going to help this cake,” Rafe said, loudly. “I think its dead. I wish Sally hadn’t gone on vacation with her daughter right now, we could really use her help.”

“Shh, Dad’ll hear you,” Steven hissed at him.

“Sorry. What about Mattie? Maybe we could get her to help with the cake,” Rafe said, a little quieter.

“What are you doing?” Daniel asked as he came up to where William was listening.

William gathered the Shaman close. “Shh, my sons are making me a birthday cake and there seems to be some sort of problem with it.”

“Mattie’s visiting her sister in Seattle. Won’t be back till tomorrow. How about toothpicks? Toothpicks might be strong enough to straighten it out.” Michael suggested.

“No. All we need is for Dad to swallow a toothpick on his birthday and spend the rest of in the emergency room,” Steven replied.
“I don’t think it came out that bad,” Jim said.

“It’s leaning real bad, do you need glasses, Watchman? We need help to fix it. RAFe.”

“Yikes. No need to yell, I’m right here and a Sentinel. I think you just deafed me.”

“Sorry,” Steven replied, not in the least bit sorry. “Do you think your Mom could help us with this sorry excuse of a cake?”

William was chuckling softly against Daniel’s shoulders as he listened. The Shaman taking advantage of the situation by gently stroking William’s hair. “Enjoying you birthday?”

“Yes, breakfast in bed. Cornflakes with bananas, toast, juice and coffee. With all my sons joining me. You should have seen, my bed was covered in cornflake. Blair fed me and managed to wear more than half of it.” William’s eyes were twinkling merrily. “Then lunch at Wonder Burger paid for by my sons. Followed by a trip to the zoo, also paid for by my sons. Where Blair somehow managed to explode the cotton candy bags in the snack bar again. Only this time he managed to get it all over everyone.” By this time William was quietly giggling. “We all came home covered in pink and blue cotton candy. This has been the best birthday I’ve ever had in my life. Now my sons are in the kitchen trying to make me a cake. Could this day get any better?”

“Did you hear something?” Steven asked.

“Dad, talking with Daniel?” Jim replied. “we should just leave the cake the way it is. Dad’ll like it, ’cause we make it for him.”

Quiet for a little bit as they thought about it. Finally… “Your right. Dad’ll love us no matter what,” Steven said, softly. Bring tears to William’s eyes.

“And I will too,” William whispered back.

“Okay,” Rafe replied. “Do we have everything we need for making his birthday dinner of meatloaf, mash potatoes and corn. And how the heck do you make meatloaf?”
William slid to the floor, carrying Daniel with him, both chuckling softly.

***

“I think everything went really well, don’t you?” Steven asked Jim as he wiped the counter.

“Not to bad. Considering we didn’t know what the heck we were doing.”

Steven smiled at Jim. “Told you Dad would love us even if the cake was way crooked.”

“Way crooked? It slide off it’s platter onto the table.”

“Yeah, but Dad ate it anyway. Even if he was laughing so hard he could barely eat.” Suddenly Steven went still.

Jim looked at him worriedly. “Steven. Stevie. What is it?”

Steven blinked his eyes. “It’s time.”

“Time. Time for what?”

“Are Simon and Daryl out of the house?”

“Yeah, right after dinner they went to meet their girlfriends. Stevie, what is it? You’re starting to scare me.”

“Dad and Daniel?”

“They went walking. They should be back soon. Stevie, please-tell me what’s wrong?”
Steven turned to look at his brother. “It’s time for the Sentinel/Guide pairings to bond to the Protectors.”

Jim’s eyes widened in surprise. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“The others are in the living room. Let’s go.”

Jim went hurriedly into the living room. Making sure everyone was there. Michael took one look at the young Sentinel’s face. “Jim, what’s the matter? Do you need me to call Simon?”

Jim shook his head. “No. Steven says it’s time for the Sentinel/Guides to bond to their Protectors.”

Michael paled. “Are you sure?”

Steven frowned. “Yes. What’s the matter?”

“Am I a Protector? Truly?” Michael asked, paling even further.

“This is a hell of a time to get cold feet?”

“I’m not getting cold feet. I’m questioning my place with you guys. All of you have known each other forever. Do I even belong here?” Michael asked, blue/green eyes darkening to midnight blue in worry.

“You don’t want to marry me any more?” Steven asked, hurt beyond belief by Michael’s words. “Do you want your ring back?”

Michael rose to his feet, tossing the magazine he’s been reading on the coffee table. Going to where Steven stood. “I’ve never wanted anything more in my life than to marry you. I love you, Stevie.”
Steven met his eyes. “Then what’s the problem?”

“My place in this house. Do I even belong here? Am a true Protector?” Michael whispered, finally voicing something that had been bothering him for some time.

Steven moved closer to Michael, placing his head on his muscled chest. Sighing when strong arms came around him. “Have you ever heard of Karma?”

“Yes. Why?” Michael asked, placing his face on top of Steven’s soft hair. Afraid it was going to be the last time he was going to be able to do it.

“You were destined to be with us, otherwise you wouldn’t be here. You are a Protector.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Anyone that is to be a part of the bonding will be in this room when it takes place. You would not be here if you weren’t meant to be a part of it. See?” Steven motioned toward the lights, appearing out of thin air. “Fate.”

“Oh. It’s beautiful,” Michael, said in awe.

“Stevie what are we suppose to do?” Jim asked, gathering Blair into his arms quickly.

“Sentinels go to your Guides and wait.”

“Wait. Wait for what?” Rafe asked, pulling Lee into his arms.

“Not everyone who is to be a part of this is here. Ouch. Michael, not so tight. I’m flesh and blood, musclehead.” Steven glared at the body builder when Michael tightened his arms around him.

“Sorry. Who are we waiting for?”
Just then the door opened and William walked in. “Hi, guys. Oh!”

Steven gave him a brilliant smile. “Hey, Dad. We’ve been waiting for you.”

William looked at the swirling colors of lights in astonishment. “You have?” Not really surprised by the lights, nothing to do with his boys surprised him any more. Awed perhaps, but not surprised.

“Yup,” Steven replied, softly.

“Well, this is odd?” he said, running his hands through the lights as they coiled around him. They seemed to really like him.

“Pretty, huh?” Steven asked, softly.

“Very.” It truly was beautiful. “What does this mean?” William asked as he gathered some of the lights in his hands, allowing it to slip through his fingers.

“It means that your special, Dad. We already knew that ‘cause your Dad. But you’re more special than we thought. Go inward. You’ll find all the answers you need.”

William looked over at his sons. No sign of fear in any of their eyes and all of them smiling happily at him. As if they’d just received the best gift of their lives.

William closed his eyes. Steven was right, all the answers were there. He took a deep, steadying breath before he opened his eyes.

He stretched out his left hand, allowing the lights to reach toward his sons, knowing deep in his soul they wouldn’t be harmed. Blair giggled happily as they twirled around him, caressing him gently before moving to Jim. From Jim, they went to Lee, then to Rafe, finally reaching toward Steven and Michael.

“This is our destiny. It’s been our destiny since before we were born. If you weren’t meant to be a
part of it. You wouldn’t be here now. It was fated,” Steven told Michael, running his hands through the lights.

“Your Dad?” Michael asked, softly.

Steven looked over at his Father. “Is a part of this. As he has been from the very beginning.”
Destiny's Heart and Soul

“What’s going to happen now?” Rafe asked, pulling Lee closer.

Steven looked around the room, frowning. “We bond, but I think someone’s…”

Suddenly the front door opened and Daniel walked in, stopping short. “Holy sh…” He looked at the swirling colors in awe. “Oh, now-that’s really pretty.”

“Come in, Daniel. It seems that you’re a part of the bonding,” Steven told him with a huge smile. “It kinda felt like someone was missing.”

They all watched in silence as the colorful lights went toward Daniel almost joyfully. “Wow! What do I do?” The Shaman asked as he watched them twirled around him.

“Close your eyes and go inward,” Steven suggested. “You’ll find your answers there. You are a Shaman, so they should come to you a lot quicker.”

“Hey, how do you know all this stuff?” Jim whispered to him softly.

“I just do, Watchman. Now shut up. We’re bonding.”
Daniel closed his eyes. After a second he reopened them, giving the gathered group a brilliant smile. “I thought I didn’t fit in here,” he said, eyes filling with tears. “I really thought, I didn’t fit in.”

“You do, otherwise you wouldn’t be here now,” Steven told him. “Do know what you have to do now?”

“Yes.”

Steven smiled at him affectionately. “Then get to work.”

Daniel reached out and gathered all the lights to him, bathing him in every color of the rainbow. “We begin the bonding.” He turned first to William. “They are your heart and soul. You are their anchor. Your love will keep them steady for what lays ahead. With your guidance they will grow strong and true.” The lights reached toward William. “Do you acknowledge and accept your place?”

“Yes,” William replied, smiling as the lights curled around him lovingly.

“Your place in recognized and accepted.”

Daniel turned toward Jim and Blair. “Jim. You have been called a Sentinel of a kind the world has never seen and never will again. Do you acknowledge your place and accept you responsibilities as Watchman and to your Guide?”

Jim swallowed heavily. “Yes.” Smiling as the lights twirled around him happily.

“Your place is acknowledged and accepted. Blair?”

The little Guide’s head popped up. “Yup?”

“You are the world’s littlest Guide. There are no others before you or that will come after. It is your responsibility to watch over your Sentinel. Protect and guide him to the best of you abilities. You are also a Shaman. Growing in power and strength with the passing of each day. Do you acknowledge
“Your place at you Sentinel’s side and in the world?”

“Yes,” Blair replied solemnly, giggling softly when the lights gently tweaked his nose.

“Yes, sir.”

“Your place is acknowledged and accepted.”

Daniel turned toward Rafe and Lee. “Oh, God, The lights are going to hate me I know it,” Lee said in a panic. “They’re going to think I’m the worst Guide the planet has ever known. They’re going to think I suck.”

Rafe pulled Lee toward him tighter. “They’re not going to think you suck. They’re going to think you’re great, just like I do.”

Lee looked at Rafe. “You think I’m great?”

“Hmm-hmm, the best thing that ever happened to me in my life.”

Lee smiled at him. “That’s the nicest thing anyone has ever told me. I love you, Rafe.”

Rafe kissed his Guide’s forehead. “I love you too.”

“Rafe, you are a Sentinel of the first order. Your powers are unique onto yourself and will become clear as you gain strength and confidence. By combining your powers with those of the Watchman, those strengths will double. Both of you will become more than you are singularly. Do you acknowledge your place in the world and accept your responsibilities to those around you and to your Guide?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Your place is acknowledged and accepted. Lee?”

“S…sir?” Lee stuttered nervously.
“You are a Guide of the first order, it is you responsibility to watch over your Sentinel. Protect and guide him to the best of your abilities. As with Blair you are also a Shaman, growing in power and strength with the passing of each day. Do you acknowledge your place in the world and accept your responsibilities?”

“Yes, Sir.” The lights twirled around them, offering love and warmth.

“Your place is acknowledged and accepted.”

Daniel turned toward Steven and Michael. “You are the protectors of the youngest Sentinel/Guide pairings the world will ever know. Your responsibilities carry more burdens than those of the pairings you protect. There may be a time when you will be asked to lay down your life for your pairings. Knowing this do you acknowledge and accept your place?”

“No.”

Steven looked over at Jim. “We already talked about this, Watchman.”

“I won’t be responsible for your death. I couldn’t live with myself if you or Michael died because me.”

Steven smiled at his brother. “The choice has never been yours to make, brother. I’ve already told you that. It is mine and Michael’s. I love you, all of you and will do what I must to make sure you’re safe. So will Michael.”

Jim shook his head, blue eyes filling with tears. “No, Steven, no.” He turned toward the bodybuilder. “Michael, please you can’t do this. Don’t do this,” He pleaded. “Don’t.”

“I am a Protector. I know my place, Jim as does Steven.”

“W...what makes my life more important than yours?”
“You are the Watchman.”

“No, Michael. Please, don’t do this. Don’t,” Jim begged. “Please, please, don’t.”

“I have to. My destiny is set as well as yours. I can’t and won’t fight against it.”

Both Steven and Michael turned to Daniel, trying as best they could to ignore the quiet sobs coming from Jim.

“We accept,” They said together. The lights curling around them had a different tone, darkening as if in understanding of what was being asked of the young Protectors. Yet just as loving.

“Your place is acknowledged and accepted.”

Steven looked at the Shaman. “Daniel, it is my place to ask for your acknowledgement. Do you understand?’

“Yes.”

“Daniel, your place is as teacher. It is your responsibility to teach the ways of the Shaman to Blair and Lee. So they may best do their duties. As well as teaching the Sentinels how to care for the Guides they are bonded to. One can not be without the other. Your duty is to teach the two to become one. Do you acknowledge your place and accept your responsibilities?”

“I do.”

“Your place is acknowledged and accepted.”

By this time the lights had encircled all eight of them. Moving from one to the other, before shooting up into the air and disappearing.

Steven looked up to where the lights had vanished before turning toward the assembled group.
“Well, that was intense. Anyone for lopsided cake?”

***

They all sat around the dining room table eating cake and drinking milk. Steven suddenly got a mischievous look in his eyes.

“Hey, Dad?”

William unaware of the look as he concentrated on the piece of birthday cake in front of him. “Yes, son?”

“You know how Daniel is part of the group and all…”

William took a bite of cake. “Yes?”

“When are you going to ask him to move in?”

“S…Steven.” William stuttered.

Steven’s eyes began twinkling merrily. “If you’re worried about the Sentinels delicate hearing we can get Simon to pick up some more white noise generators.”

William felt his face flame. “Steven!”

“It’s just an idea.”

William covered his face with his hands. “Oh, my God.”
Jim offering Blair a piece of cake. “Leave Dad alone, Steven. But twerp does have a point, Dad. Why don’t you ask Daniel to move in with us? It’s not like we don’t know what you do when we’re not here. We appreciate the consideration, but it’s not necessary.”

William didn’t think his face could burn any more. He looked at his sons from between his fingers all of them were looking at him with an earnest expression on their young faces. He looked over at Daniel who was quietly chuckling.

“Kill me now,” he whispered softly.

Steven looked at him as he took a huge bite of cake. “Can’t do that. Who’s going to teach us how to become strong and brave? And some of us need lots of help in that department, like Jim and Rafe.”

“Hey!” Both Sentinel’s protested together.

“They need lots and lots of help,” Steven continued, ignoring them. “cause of them being such big sissies and all.”

“Steven?”

“Yes, Rafe?” Steven asked, taking a drink of his milk. “What can I do for you?”

“You are our Protector right?”

“That’s the word on the street.”

Rafe scratched his forehead with his forefinger. “Who protects us from you?”

Steven gave him a brilliant smile. “Well, buddy-I’d say you’re way out of luck there. I’ve got free reign when it comes to you two sissies.”
“What about Blair and Lee?”

“What about them?”

“You don’t give them as much grief as you do Jim and me.”

Jim looked over at Rafe. “He doesn’t give them any grief at all. Why is that?” he added, glaring at his brother.

Steven smiled at them. “I like Blair and Lee better than you two sissies.”

Both Rafe and Jim looked at him in astonishment. “You like them better than us?” Rafe asked after a second of stunned silence.

“Yup.”

“Aren’t you suppose to like us all the same being you’re our Protector and all?” Jim asked, in confusion.

Steven took another bite of cake. “Nope.”

“How does that work?” Rafe asked.

“Says so in the Great Protectors Manual. ‘Thy Great Protector shall like thy Guides better than thy sissy Sentinels’.”


Michael shrugged his massive shoulders. “Beats me.”

Jim’s frown deepened. “You’re making that up. There’s no Great Protectors Manual.”
“Yes, there is,’ Steven insisted.

“Oh, yeah? Then show it to me?”

“Can’t?”

“Why?”

Steven rolled his eyes. “Well, duh, it’s a manual for Protectors. You’re just a sissy Sentinel.”

“Then why doesn’t Michael know anything about it?”

“Haven’t shown it to him yet.”

“You’re, lying,” Jim told him, confidently.

Steven shrugged nonchalantly. “Okay. I’m lying.” He turned toward his father. “So, Dad when you gonna ask Daniel to move in?”

***

SILENT CONVERSATIONS

“Do you know we haven’t tried that telepathic stuff we did when you guys were in the hospital?” Michael told Steven as they sat watching TV. Blair between them reading.

“That’s true. Wanna try. It should’ve gotten stronger, with the bonding and all,” Steven replied.
*Testing, one, two, three.*

Steven rolled his eyes. *I’m not a freaking microphone, asshole.*

Michael smiled at him sheepishly. *Sorry.*

*Hmm. Well, it seems to be working okay. Am I coming in loud and clear for you.*

*Yeah. This is so cool.*

*Isn’t it?*

*Hmm-hmm. So what do you wanna talk about?*

Steven shrugged. *Don’t know. What do you wanna talk about?*

*Don’t know. Hey, is there really a book for Great Protectors?*

Steven smiled at Michael. *Na. I was just messing with Jim and Rafe.*

*I figured as much. Do you really like Guides better than Sentinels or were you still messing with them?*

Steven frowned as he thought about it. *I like them the same. Just don’t go tellin’ Jim and Rafe that. It’s just that Guides need more protecting than Sentinels do. They’re more vulnerable than Sentinels. Have you notice that wide-eyed innocent look they’ve got?*

Michael nodded. *Yeah, I have.*

*I though that was just the way Blair was. Until Lee joined the family. He’s got it too. They need extra protecting. Especially from their Sentinels.*
*But, I thought that Sentinels lived for their Guides.*

Steven nodded. *They do, but they have a tendency of overwhelming their Guides with their needs. Remember Rafe nosing Lee’s neck raw with the whole bonding thing?*

*Yup. So we have to take extra care with the Guides?*

‘Yeah. Make sure that the Sentinel they’ve bonded don’t run over them.*

*I don’t see Blair or Lee letting them do that,* Michael said, looking at Blair sitting between them. The little Guide smiled up at him when he noticed.

*Hum-hmm, that’s why we needed to put first aid cream on Lee’s neck?*

*I see your point.*

*It takes someone very special to bond to a Sentinel. Sentinels don’t really get a choice because they just... well-need. Guides have a choice. Either they want to bond or they don’t.*

*Does that mean they can leave a Sentinel if they suddenly don’t like him or her?*

*Simon says that it’s possible. Especially for someone as young as Blair and Lee.*

*Hmm. I wonder what happens when a Guide decides he can’t stand his Sentinel or the Sentinel piss him off so much he doesn’t wanna be their Guide?*

Steven shrugged. *Don’t know. I hope that never happens, though. At least not with our pairings.*

*Me, too.*
“Why is it so quiet in here?”

Jim’s voice startled all three of them. He stood in front of the coffee table holding a plate of cookies, looking at them curiously.

“Jim, you just scare the crap out of us,” Steven told him, jumping about a foot off the couch.

“Sorry, but you’re never that quiet. What’s going on?”

“Michael and I were testing out the telepathic stuff. See if it still works.”

Jim sat on the coffee table, offering them cookies. “Does it?”

“Yeah, it does. Thanks,” Steven replied, helping himself to a cookie.

“What’s the range on it?”

“Hmm?” Steven asked, nibbling on the cookie.

“How far does the telepath thingie work?”

“I don’t know. We probably should test it out. Cause what good is it if it only works for a couple of blocks?” Steven asked Michael.

The body builder nibbling on his own cookie, nodded. “Yeah, that’s true. We’re not doing anything right now. Wanna test it? Blair wanna go for a ride?”

Blair now in Jim’s lap sharing lazy kisses and cookies, looked over at him. “Yuppers.”

Michael smiled at him as he took the little Guide from Jim’s arms. “Cool. On the way back wanna stop for ice cream?”
Blair gave him a brilliant smile. “Ice cream,” he said, nodding his head so enthusiastically it sent his curls all over his face.

“Hey, I want ice cream,” Steven demanded.

“You gotta stay here so that we can test the telepathy thingie. Hey, Jim wanna go?”

“Sure.” Jim smiled at Steven. “Maybe we’ll bring you back an ice cream cone.”

“Ice cream cone? I don’t want no freaking ice cream cone. I want a banana split.”

Turned out the telepathy thingie had unlimited range. Michael, Blair and Jim had gone all the way to the edge of town. With Steven still able to hear the bodybuilder loud and clear.

Now Steven sat on the couch eating the banana split he’d asked for. “I think that we’ll be able to talk no matter where either of us is. Being as we’re taking care of two Sentinel/Guide pairing that might not always be together. Hey, Lee wanna share a banana split with me?” he asked as the Guide walked into the living room.

Lee sat next to Steven eyeing the ice cream. “Hmm, okay.”

Steven offered him a generous helping from his own spoon. “If I’d known you’d be back from studying Shaman ways with Daniel, I’d have had Michael and Jim bring you back something.”

“Sharing with you is just fine.” Lee reached over and took the ice cream from the spoon. “Hmm, good.”

Steven smiled at him. “Don’t mind sharing cooties with me?”

Lee smiled shyly at him. “Heck, no. I kinda like your cooties.”
Blair sitting on Jim lap sipping soda from his plastic cup. “No share Steven cooties, share mine,” he demanded, offering his drink. “My cooties bedder.”

“Okay,” Lee replied, taking a sip from the straw. “Hmm, good soda. Thank you, Blair.”

“My cooties better dan Steven cooties, huh?”

Lee nodded. “Hmm-hmm, much better than Steven’s cooties?” he replied, tucking a stray lock of curly hair behind the little Guide’s ear.

“Hey,” Steven protested smiling.

Lee shrugged. “What can I say, Blair’s cooties are younger. They’re tastier.”

“Okay, I’ll take your word for it. Want some more ice cream?”

“Yes, please.”

They talked and shared ice cream with alternate drinks of soda from Blair. The little Guide making sure Lee got a good healthy dose of his cooties.

Since Lee had joined the household Blair had become extremely protective of the new Guide. Going so far as putting himself, time and time again, between Rafe and Lee. When he thought Rafe was bothering Lee too much.

Rafe didn’t fight it knowing better than to try arguing. He couldn’t win in any case. If Blair said ‘No’ Steven and Michael would back him up.

Steven eyed his friend critically. “You look tired Lee.”

Lee rubbed his eyes with the back of his hands. “I am. I haven’t been sleeping to well.”
“Why?” Jim asked, pulling Blair back into his arms.

“Don’t know. I’ve been getting these weird dreams.”

Michael rubbed Lee’s back soothingly. “Wanna talk about it?”

“Na. They don’t stick around long enough for me to remember them.”

Blair looked up at his Sentinel. Jim nodded at the unspoken question in the wide blue eyes. “Go ahead,” he told him softly, kissing him on the forehead before placing him gently on the floor.

Blair went to Lee and offered his little hand. “Come.”

Lee took it. “Where we going?”

“Take nap.”

“Okay.”

Three pairs of eyes watched Blair lead Lee up the stairs. “Something’s wrong?” Jim told Steven and Michael worriedly. “I can feel it.”

“Is there another Sentinel in Cascade?” Steven asked, watching the two Guides turn the corner. Knowing instinctively they were going into the Sentinel-free zone.

Jim bit his lip as he thought about it. Sending his senses wide. “No.”

Michael looked at him. “What is it then?”

Jim frowned. “I’m not sure. It’s something that’s got me feeling very uneasy.”
Steven looked at him, his brows furrowing deeply. “Something like that time with Alex?”

Jim thought about it. “Yeah,” he finally, reluctantly admitted. “But it’s not me this time.”

“Can you tell who it’s aimed at?” Steven questioned softly, banana split forgotten.

“Lee. It has to do with Lee.”

Michael sat next to Jim. “How?”

Jim closed his eyes in concentration. “I…I’m not sure. I can’t get anything passed vague images.”

Steven sighed heavily. “Okay. Try concentrating on those images. How is it going to affect Lee?”

Jim opened his eyes. They were filled with tears. “It’s going to hurt him-a lot.”

“Oh, shit,” Steven hissed. “Is there some way to stop it?”

Jim shook his head reluctantly. “No. Everything is already in motion. It can’t be stopped.”

“Is there anyway to soften the impact?” Michael asked, pulling the distraught Sentinel into his arms.

“No.”

“Shit,” Steven swore again.

“Blair is so going to kick your ass,” Michael told him with a rueful smile.
“He hasn’t yet.”

“That’s cause he’s been distracted by Lee,” Jim told him, burying his face in Michael’s chest.

Steven sighed heavily again. “What the hell are we going to do?”

“There’s nothing we can do. We’re going to have let it play out.” Jim closed his eyes tightly.

“Then all we can do is keep our eyes open and be there for him. Anyone want ice cream? I’ve lost my appetite,” Steven told them, softly. Jim and Michael shook their heads. “Jim, does Blair know? Could he help us figure out how to stop it?”

Jim tilted his head. “He knows, but there’s nothing he can do about it? Like I told you it’s already in play. It has to work itself out. The best we can do is be there for Lee when it happens.”

“How long have we got?” Michael asked, softly.

“I don’t know. A week, two tops.”

“Shit, shit, shit,” Steven cursed heavily. “Okay, we know it’s coming. How long we got. We can’t stop it. So we try and lessen the impact on Lee. Help him through whatever it is. Are we together on this?”

Jim and Michael nodded “Yeah,” they both answered together.

“Do we tell Rafe?” the bodybuilder asked.

Jim closed his eyes lowering his head until it rested against his chest. When he reopened his eyes they were glimmering with tears. “We can’t. He’s going to be the cause of Lee’s pain.”

***
William watched his boys, frowning deeply. Something was going on with them. They were hovering protectively over Lee. Especially Blair who it seemed hadn’t left Lee’s lap in a week.

Now they were all sitting next to Lee, practically glued to him. Everyone except Rafe who was watching them with an odd look on his face. Not commenting, just watching them quietly.

“What’s going on?” William whispered to Simon who was also watching the odd behavior with a heavy frown on his face.

“I don’t know. I’ve tried to get them to talk to me, but they’re being extremely closed mouth about whatever it is. It’s got to do with Lee that’s the only thing that’s coming through loud and clear.”

“Yes. So loud and clear, it’s screaming,” William replied, worriedly, watching Blair giving Lee another hug.

“Yeah. I’m taking them all to the center tomorrow see if we can figure out what’s going on. Have you noticed that they’re not even eating cookies as much as they usually do?”

“Hum?”

Simon gave him a tight smile. “The happier they are the more cookies they eat. Something’s making waves so they’re not eating as many as they normally do. Odd thing to notice, but it’s a true gauge as to what’s going on with them.”

“Sally was commenting on that yesterday. Telling me she went from child to child offering their favorites, but they all refused cookies, except for Rafe.”

“Something’s going to happen and it’s not going to be good.”

“No, not good at all,” William agreed, worriedly.

***
Next day Simon noticed that the children were more agitated that before, becoming more and more frustrated when they refused to talk to him.

Now they all sat in the waiting room, except for Rafe who’d gone to the bathroom.

Simon was determined to get the truth out of them by the end of the day or die trying. He bit down on his cigar viciously as he went into his office.

“Jim, do you feel it?” Steven whispered to his brother.

The Sentinel nodded. “Yeah.”

“Michael?” Steven asked the bodybuilder. “Do you feel it?”

“Yeah, like ants crawling up and down your spine.”

Steven nodded. “Yeah, whatever’s going to happen it’s going to be today.” He looked over at Blair and Lee who were cuddling on the couch, reading from a magazine. “Shit, I wish Lee didn’t have to through whatever it is.”

“Me neither, but there’s nothing we can do to stop it,” Jim replied, remorsefully. “It’s some kind of lesson. I’m not sure if it’s for Rafe or for Lee, though.”

Suddenly there was a soft sound of pain.

“Lee?” Steven got to his feet and hurried over to where the Guide sat. Joined just as quickly by Jim and Michael.

“Are you alright?” Michael asked, reaching out a hand, resting it on the pale Guide’s arm.

“I… I don’t know.”
“Do you know what it is?” Steven asked the Guide who had suddenly gone ghost white.

“Rafe.”

Lee got to his feet and shot out of the room.

“Damn it. It’s happening,” Steven replied, getting to his feet. “Let’s go.”

They found Lee standing at one of the waiting room door’s swaying unsteadily as he looked in.

“Lee?” Steven called softly. “What is it?” Looking into the room. “Shit.”

What they saw was Rafe moving around another Guide. Nose high into the air. “I don’t think I can do it,” he was telling the tall blond male. “I think I’m not even suppose to try.”

“Of course you can,” The blond Guide urged, smiling at him. “It’s not going to hurt anything.”

“I’m already bonded.”

“I know, I heard. But see if you can catch a wiff of my bonding scent. That’s all I’m asking.”

Rafe moved closer, but before his nose could bury itself into the Guide’s neck.

“Rafe! How could you?”

Rafe’s head snapped toward the door. “Lee! I wasn’t doing anything,” he said defensively, almost angrily.

“Weren’t doing anything? It looks like you were doing plenty.”
“I…”

“I saw what you were doing. You know you can’t do what you were trying to do. It’ll affect our bond in not a good way.”

Rafe moved toward his Guide. “Lee…”

“Does our bonding mean so little to you?” Lee asked softly, hurt beyond belief by what he’d witnessed.

“I…”

Lee walked up to him. “Well, does it?”

“I don’t know how to answer you,” Rafe replied, unable to meet his Guide’s eyes.

Lee wiped the tears coursing down his face. “That’s answer enough. I’m not enough of a Guide for you that you need to go looking else where?”

“No, Lee, that’s not true,” Rafe replied, trying to reach for his Guide. Lee easily sidestepped him.

“It is t…true. You were trying to bond another Guide. I saw you with my own two eyes. If the bond I have with you isn’t enough. It’s now broken. Find another Guide more to your liking,” he whispered hoarsely to his Sentinel before turning and running from the room.

Rafe’s anguished cry filled the room, falling to his knees as pain tore at him. It was as if someone had taken his insides out with him still alive.

“Michael, you and Jim see to Rafe. Blair and I will take care of Lee,” Steven told them, quickly picking Blair up and running out the door with him.

“Rafe? Rafe, are you alright?” Jim asked, worriedly.
“N…no,” Rafe replied, tears of pain streaming down his face.

Michael pulled him into his arms. “What the hell were you thinking?”

Rafe looked up at him, his dark brown eyes glistening with tears. “I…just wanted to see if I could sense another Guide’s scent. I wasn’t gonna bond him. I swear it.”

Jim placed a gentle hand on Rafe’s forehead. “You know how insecure Lee is about being a Guide. He thinks he doesn’t deserve you. And if you wanted to try something like that you should have tried it with Blair. Lee wouldn’t have reacted the way he did and broken the bond.”

“Shit, it hurts.”

“I can help. Bond me.”

All three looked at the blond Guide, now kneeling next to them. “What?” Rafe asked, shakily.

“Bond me. Your Guide broke the bond. Bond me. I’m available and I want you.”

Rafe sat up unsteadily. “No. I don’t want you. I want Lee. I’ve only ever wanted Lee.” He looked at Jim. “What the hell am I going to do?” he asked, tearfully.

Jim looked toward where Lee had gone. “I don’t know, Rafe. I have no idea how you’re gonna fix this. Or even if it can be fixed.”

“It can,” the bodybuilder said softly. A faraway look in his blue/green eyes.

Rafe looked up at Michael. “I can fix it? Make Lee take me back?” he asked, hopefully.

“Yes.”
Rafe moved closer to Michael. “How?”

The bodybuilder carefully gathered the hurting Sentinel back into his arms. “You’re gonna woo you a cute little Guide.”

Rafe rubbed his face against Michael’s very warm muscular chest. “I am?”

“Yeah. Steven and I can keep you from zoning until you get Lee to take you back.”

Rafe pulled away slightly. “Is that part of the Protector’s job?”

Michael gently moved the Sentinel’s sweat-soaked hair off his face. “Yeah. We won’t be able to keep you stable for too long, though,” he warned.

Rafe moved his face into the gentle touch, it made the pain not so bad. “How long do I have?”

“One week to get Lee back or bond another Guide, before your senses go completely wacky.”

“I don’t want another Guide. Sorry, man,” Rafe told the still hovering Guide. “I want Lee.”

“No problem. But if it doesn’t work out. I’m available.”

“Thanks.” Rafe struggled to his feet shakily. “Okay, let’s go. I got one hurt and very angry Guide to woo back.”

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!