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Author's Quick Note: Sorry this is late in coming. I'm actually posting this out in the middle of the ocean on a boat. I'm on a Mexican Riviera cruise (woo hoo!), but wanted to make sure I got this chapter out to everyone.

Chapter 5

Liam was brought out of his slumber bright and early by a little foot nudging his nose. Opening his eyes and lifting his head, he could see that Cassie had somehow managed to turn completely around, hence, the foot in his face.

He rolled out of bed, trying not to wake Cassie and then headed downstairs, the smell of fresh brewed coffee permeating his senses as he reached the bottom of the stairs.

Jack was sitting at the dining room table, reading the newspaper and working on his coffee. He glanced up as Liam walked in.

“Good morning. Why don't you grab a cup of coffee and then we can talk.” He said.

Liam, not really ready to start the conversation that he knew was coming, continued on into the kitchen.

When he came back, coffee cup in hand, and sat down across from Jack, Jack folded up his paper and placed it on the table in front of him.

“So, is this something I should come to expect? Are we not going to be able to even be alone in our own bed anymore?” He asked.

“No, Jack, it won't always be like this. The kids are scared right now. They are in a new place, their mommy and daddy are gone. They're confused and feel alone. We are the only ones right now that can provide them with some stability, some security, even at night if they need it.” He said, before taking a deep breath and continuing.

“They do pretty well during the day. I think mostly because they are distracted, but night-time becomes more difficult, because they don't have any distractions. I think it will get better once they feel safer. Once they feel at home.”

“Liam, I just got back. I was really looking forward to spending some time with you. I’ve missed you. Can’t you send them to your mom and dad’s for a night or two?” Jack asked.

“Jack, I can’t do that to them right now. I don’t think it would be good for them. Like I said, they need stability. Sending them to my parent’s house could cause more problems. I can’t do that to them. Things will settle down, you just need to be patient. I need you to be patient.” Liam responded.

Jack sat there for some time, thinking intently before he responded.

“Okay, I guess I understand, or at least I’m trying to. I want to, anyway. This has just caught me by surprise.” He said, and then added as an afterthought. “How did the kids get out of the house, when Julie and Adam didn’t?”

“They weren’t home with Julie and Adam. It was Julie and Adam’s anniversary, so they were spending the night at my parents. I’m just so glad I didn’t lose them too.” Liam said, and then remembered the funeral tomorrow. “Oh yeah, the funeral is tomorrow and my mom asked me to talk to you about being a pallbearer. Would that be okay?” Liam added.

“Sure, I can do that. I’ll let the office know that I won’t be in tomorrow. Speaking of the office.” He said, looking at his watch. “I’ve got to head out.” Standing up, Jack left the dining room and took his cup to the kitchen.

When he came back from the kitchen, Liam stood up, walked over to him and wrapped his arms around his neck. Jack responded automatically, by wrapping his arms around Liam’s waist and pulling him in for a kiss.

“Mmmm, I love you, and we’re okay, right?” Liam asked, still feeling a little unsure about the outcome of their conversation.

“Yeah, we’re good. It’s just you’ll have to be patient with me too. I’m very set in my ways, a creature of habit. It’s going to take me some time to adjust to everything. But, I love you too.” He said, as he leaned in for one more kiss.

Pulling back, Liam asked. “What time are you going to be home tonight?”

“Well, I’ve been gone all week and Michelle was on vacation last week, so with both of us being out, I’m sure we’ll have a lot of catching up to do. I’ll call you at lunchtime and let you know. What’s on your agenda today?”

Actually, I think the kids and I will take it easy today. I have some work I need to get done. My reports for this client are due on Friday, so I’ll be working on that. I think it will be good for the kids to have some downtime.” Liam said.

Okay, well, I'll call you at lunch." Jack said, before giving Liam a quick kiss on the lips and heading out the door.

The morning was actually pretty laid back. Liam was able to get a lot of work done while Chris and Cassie played with a couple of the board games that came in the stuff that Rick had brought over.

At lunch time, they were all seated around the table eating lunch and going through all the sympathy cards that Chris's schoolmates had made. Liam was a little hesitant to give them to Chris, but in the end, both Chris and Cassie enjoyed reading the cards. Chris told Liam who each card was from. It was obvious that he was very proud of how many good friends he had. Liam was glad that the cards had actually made Chris happy.

Just about the time that they had finished eating lunch, the phone rang. Liam, glancing at the caller ID, cheerfully answered. "Hey handsome, how's your day going?"

The response he got back was definitely not what he was expecting.

"Liam, god, I don't know how to tell you this, but Michelle and her husband were in an accident on their way up to the resort. I just got a call from Michelle's mom. She got worried when they didn't come home Sunday night. They found the car this morning. It went off the road and into a ravine. None of them survived. Abby was with them too." Jack said.

Liam's mind was spinning. How could this happen. He had grown up with Michelle. Well, actually Julie had grown up with Michelle. They had been best friends forever. In fact, they had been trying to get pregnant at the same time. Julie was trying for her second child and Michelle her first. Unfortunately, Michelle had a little more trouble, so Abigail came along about a year after Cassie. It was Michelle that recommended Liam to Jack when he was looking for an analyst.

Liam was shaken out of his thoughts by Jack. "Liam, are you still there? Please answer me. Liam?"

"Yeah, I'm still here. I just don't know what to say." And he really didn't. He was still trying to wrap his mind around the fact that he was going to have to deal with another loss.

"Are you okay?" Jack asked.

"Yeah, I'm okay. I think I'm just a little numb right now. I need to call my mom. She'll want to know. She'll want to call Michelle's mom. God, I bet Laura isn't handling this well at all. Not only did she just lose her husband a few months back, but now she just lost her daughter, granddaughter and son-in-law all in one fell swoop."

"I'm sorry Liam. I had a hard time actually making the call to tell you. I probably won't be home until late tonight. I've been trying to get things settled over here. One of my associates

secretaries is here and working with me to get Michelle's work in order. I'm buried in work over here. I don't know how I'll survive without her. She pretty much ran this place." Jack said.

"Well, I understand. Don't worry about me, just take care of what you need to on your end. I'm going to call mom. I'm sorry Jack, I know this is tough on you too. I know you and Michelle were good friends too. I love you and I'll be here for you when you get home tonight.

"I love you too, Liam. I'll talk to you later tonight." Jack said, before hanging up.

Once Liam hung up the phone, he picked it up again and called his mom.

"Hello?" His dad answered.

"Hi dad, is mom there?"

"Oh, hey Liam, no she's not here. She went over to Laura's." He said, somewhat hesitant.

"It's okay dad, I already know. Jack called me from work today and filled me in. How's mom doing?" Liam asked.

"As well as can be expected, considering. You know that Michelle was like one of our own kids. Your mom's going to bring Laura over here to spend the night, so she won't be alone. I think they both need each other right now." Frank said.

"Yeah, I know. I'm glad that Laura will be with you guys. I was worried about her, since she really doesn't have anyone else now, at least not locally. I know that she was considering moving back to the east coast to live with her sister, but didn't want to leave Michelle and Abby. Now, she'll probably go ahead and move. Mom will really miss her if she does." Liam said.

"You know Dad, we haven't really had a chance to talk. How are you doing? Are you holding up okay?" Liam asked, a tight lump forming in his throat and tears shining in his eyes.

"I'm doing okay Liam. I still can't believe that my baby girl is gone. I haven't had enough time to miss her yet and it just doesn't seem real. I keep expecting to get a call from her asking me to come over and fix a leaky faucet or unclog the garbage disposal." He laughed, but it was a pained and tired laugh, infused with sadness. "She was always clogging up that damn disposal." He said.

"I know. Adam would get so mad at her. That's why she finally started calling you to fix it. That way Adam wouldn't know." Liam replied, the memory causing the tears to finally start falling.

"Liam, it sounds like your mom and Laura just got back. Do you want to talk to your mom?" Frank asked.

“No, that’s okay dad, just tell her that I called, that I’ll call her tomorrow morning and that I love her. I love you too, dad.”

“I know, we both know, Liam, but I’ll tell her. We love you too and give Chris and Cassie a big hug and kiss for us.”

“Will do, dad. Talk to you later.” Liam said and then hung up the phone.

Taking a couple of deep breaths, Liam headed to the dining room only to find it empty. Following the sound of the television, he found Chris playing a video game and Cassie giving verbal support.

Liam sat down on the couch and just stared at the television. He didn’t know what to do with himself. He didn’t feel like he could work right now, but he didn’t know what else to do. He had to do something, needed to do something, but didn’t know what that something should be, so he just sat there staring at the television.

Liam wasn’t sure how long he sat there, but it was Cassie that brought him out of his stupor. She had reached her little hand up, cupped his cheek and said, “Unca is sad, why are you sad Unca Leem?”

“I’m okay, sweetheart, I’m okay.” Liam said, grabbing Cassie and pulling her into a bone crushing hug.

Liam finally decided it would be best to get some more work done. With everything going on, he didn’t know when he’d actually get another chance. Cassie came in and sat on the other side of his desk while he worked. She was busy helping him finish up some graphs that he had printed by mistake and then filed in the recycling bin.

They worked like that for a couple of hours, with Liam getting up once because Cassie was hungry and wanted a snack and another time when Chris came in and decided he wanted to help with the graphs as well. It wasn’t long before Chris was trying to force Cassie to play office. He wanted to be the manager and Cassie was his secretary. Chris was at Jack’s desk, pretending to be working on the computer, while giving Cassie orders. It was quite funny actually, and Liam couldn’t help but stop and watch. The problem that Chris was having was that Cassie didn’t understand what Chris wanted and wouldn’t play the game right.

Liam couldn’t help but chuckle at the sight and found that the little scene had actually helped bring him out of his funk a little bit.

“Well guys, we should probably make some dinner. You guys interested in helping? How does spaghetti, garlic bread and asparagus sound?” Liam asked.

“Ooooh, I like sgetti, Unca Leem. Can I help with that?” Cassie asked.

“Sure you can. Chris, think you could handle the garlic bread?” He asked Chris.

“Yeah, I can do that. But, Uncle Liam, I don’t like sparagus. Do I have to eat it?” Chris asked, looking a little worried.

“Well, I’ll tell you what you have at least one bite and if you don’t like it, you don’t have to eat it. You can have some carrots instead. How does that sound?” Liam said.

Chris just shrugged in response.

Dinner was good. It did take a little longer than usual to prepare, and the mess was a little larger than usual, but still, everyone had fun, so it was worth it.

After they had cleaned up the dinner mess, Liam took the kids upstairs for their baths, and then they settled in for their evening movie, which seemed to have become a ritual.

During the movie, Liam had Cassie curled up against one side, his arm wrapped around her and Chris, in the same position on his other side.

When the movie finished, Cassie was already asleep and Chris was almost there, struggling to stay awake.

“Come on Chris.” Liam said, nudging Chris fully awake. “Let’s get to bed. I’m beat.” Liam said, and then added. “Hey, you guys want to sleep with me tonight?” Liam asked. He had decided that he needed the kids close tonight. If Jack didn’t like it, then Jack could sleep on the couch again.

“Okay.” Chris said, yawning and stretching.

Liam picked up Cassie and carried her upstairs. Before putting her in bed, he woke her up, as much as he could, and had her go to the bathroom. There was no way he was going to chance waking up soaked with urine.

Once everyone had taken care of business, they all crawled in bed. Liam in the middle of the bed, with Chris curled up against him and Cassie curled up against Chris. *‘This is nice.’* Liam thought, as he reached over and pulled both Cassie and Chris as tight as he could against him.

As he lay there, he started thinking, which wasn’t good, because that brought on the tears. He started thinking about his sister and what was going through her and Adam’s minds as they tried to escape the fire. He wondered if they had seen their killer. God, he missed his sister, but he was so glad he still had Chris and Cassie here.

At that thought, he instinctively pulled Chris and Cassie to him even tighter. Their little bodies not even waking up from what was probably a rather tight hug.

Then Liam’s mind went to Michelle, her husband and daughter, and then to Laura. He still couldn’t believe it was true. How could something so horrific happen twice in such a short time

span. He did take some solace in the thought that Julie and Adam would have been there, where ever they were, to greet Michelle and her family. In fact, Michelle, he was pretty sure, hadn't even heard about Julie and Adam.

Slowly Liam's thoughts drifted again. This time to Jack. Would Jack be able to accept the kids? He didn't want to lose Jack. He just hoped that Jack would come around. They were really good kids. Who could not help falling love with them? Yes, Jack would eventually come around. He just needed time.

As all of these thoughts were rolling around in his head, Jack quietly slipped into the room.

"Hey." Liam said. "How are you doing? The kids are in our bed again. I'm sorry, I just needed them here tonight. I'm sorry, Jack." Liam said quietly, as Jack changed into a pair of pajama bottoms and climbed into bed behind Liam.

"It's okay. I pretty much expected it." Jack said, pulling Liam up against him and nuzzling his neck. Jack placed a small, open mouthed kiss at the base of Liam's shoulder and neck.

"Mmmm, that's nice. Jack are you staying in our bed tonight? Cause, I really need you here." Liam said, his tears suddenly and uncontrollably falling in a torrent. He couldn't help it. He tried to stop them, but everything was falling apart.

"Hey... Hey, hey, hey." Jack said, rolling Liam over to face him.

"Baby, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. I'll stay in bed tonight, don't worry." Jack said, feeling bad that he was only adding to Liam's distress.

Liam nodded his head, snuggled closer to Jack and breathed in his scent. His breath shuddered slightly from all the crying, and then settled back down. Now Liam could sleep. Now that Jack was here, everything would be alright and he could sleep.

When morning dawned, Liam woke up again with two little feet in his face. Somehow, Chris and Cassie had switched places and Cassie had again managed to turn completely around.

Rolling over, Liam found Jack lying next to him. He smiled, moved closer and gave him a small kiss on the lips.

"Mmmm, good morning." Jack said, and then added. "How come your breath smells like stinky feet?" He tried hard, but just couldn't hold back the grin that graced his face.

"Oh, I see how it is, Mr. Smartass." Liam said, grabbing Jack's pillow, pulling it out from under his head and giving him a good smack across the face with it.

"Sorry, just couldn't resist that one." Jack said, trying to hold back his laughter.

“Well, you can just get that smart ass of yours right out of bed and get in the shower.” Liam said, as he used his feet to push Jack out of the bed.

“Okay, okay, I’m going. The kids are still asleep. You going to join me?” Jack asked, giving Liam a leering grin.

Liam glanced over at the kids. Yep, they were, surprisingly, still asleep.

“Okay, come on.” He said, as he grabbed Jack’s hand and raced for the shower.

Luckily, they weren’t wearing much and it didn’t take long to get naked. As soon as they were naked and Liam had the water warmed, he pulled Jack into the shower with him.

Jack slammed Liam up against the shower, capturing his mouth in a kiss that almost knocked their teeth together with the force of it, their tongues working together, tasting each other like they were starving. Jack reached up to the shower caddy and grabbed the lube.

“This time, I’m getting what I want.” Jack growled, as he generously lubed his straining cock. Jacking off the other night didn’t really relieve much of the pent up need, but this definitely would.

Once Jack was nicely lubed, he leaned in, kissing Liam again, this time a little more gently. Liam lifted his legs and wrapped them around Jack’s waist. Jack reached down from behind Liam and worked to guide himself into Liam.

“Oh, god, Jack. That feels so good.” Liam said, as Jack slowly, almost agonizingly slid inside him.

As soon as Jack was fully seated, he leaned in again for another kiss, and then pulled out and slammed back home again.

All Liam could do was moan into the kiss, as Jack slammed into him over and over again. He used his legs and feet to grasp Jack and make sure he didn’t stop. Between the beating his prostate was taking and the friction his cock was getting between their bodies, it wasn’t long before Liam was screaming out his orgasm into Jack’s mouth.

Jack wasn’t long to follow. He gave one more hard slam into Liam and then gave way to his own release.

“Oh, yeah, shit, Liam. You don’t know how much I needed that.” Jack said as he shuddered one last time and then leaned in for one last kiss, he just couldn’t get enough of Liam’s mouth. He tasted so good.

“I think I have a pretty good idea.” Liam said, as he settled his legs back down on the floor. “Or, at least my ass does.” He added, laughing. “But, we better hurry and finish our shower before the kids wake up.” Liam said.

“Okay.” Jack said, as both he and Liam watched some of the tension, frustration, grief, and worry wash away down the drain with their semen.

After they emerged from the shower, they found that the kids had already woken up and were downstairs.

“Do you suppose they heard us?” Liam asked.

“Don’t know, but there’s not much we can do about it now.” Jack replied.

“Yeah, I suppose not. I need to get downstairs and call my mom to find out what time we need to be at the funeral home.” Liam said, as he got dressed, gave Jack one last kiss, and then headed downstairs.

After Liam got off the phone, he went into the kitchen and found Jack and the kids sitting quietly at the table. The kids were eating cereal for breakfast and Jack was having his usual cup of coffee while reading the paper.

“Well, mom says that we’ll be leaving the funeral home for the church at ten thirty, so we’ll need to be there about ten. We’ll follow the procession to the church, where we’ll have the services. After the services, the procession will head to the cemetery for the burial services. After that, we’ll head back over to the church for the luncheon. It’s going to be a busy day.” Liam said.

The day did, indeed turn out to be busy. Liam gave a heartfelt eulogy. He tried not to cry, but couldn’t hold back. Not that it mattered, because there really wasn’t a dry eye in the church. There were other people who also stepped forward to say a few words. There was a large turnout, which included a lot of city and county officials.

Rick, Stacey and Mitch were there too, as was Laura. During the luncheon, Liam took the chance to introduce Jack to Rick, Stacey and Mitch.

“Hey guys, I want you to meet Jack. Jack, this is Stacey, Mitch and Rick. Stacey and Rick were real lifesavers while you were gone. They are the ones that worked to pool together all the stuff for Cassie and Chris. Stacey even took me shopping. I don’t know what I would have done if they weren’t here to help.” Liam said, and then turning to Mitch, he said. “And Mitch is the detective who’s working on the arson case.”

“Well, it’s nice to meet you all and thank you for coming forward and helping Liam out. I wish I could have been here for him. It was really hard being so far away and not being able to be with him when he needed me.” Jack said, shaking everyone’s hand.

“Hey, it was our pleasure. They are really great kids.” Rick said.

When they got home that night, everyone was exhausted. All the tears they had shed had left them all feeling numb. Liam's heart was literally aching and again, he didn't try to put the kids in their own rooms. Tonight was another night that he just wanted them close by.

The rest of the week went by pretty quickly. On Thursday Liam met with the lawyers and finalized the guardianship paperwork. It would probably be another sixty to ninety days before they finalized the rest of the will, but the lawyers made sure that there was a small amount of funds available if Liam needed anything until then.

On Friday, he, Chris and Cassie, met Stacey, her kids, and Rick for lunch. It was a good visit and the kids had a lot of fun. After lunch, Liam dropped the kids off at his parents while he went to meet with a client.

Then, on Saturday Liam dropped the kids off for a play date with Stacey's kids while he, Jack and his parent's went to Michelle's memorial service. Actually, it was a joint memorial service for Michelle, Jason, and Abigail. It was pretty tough seeing the coffins lined up like that, especially the little one for Abby. Laura wasn't doing so well and Liam's mom spent a lot of time tending to her.

After the service, they took Laura home and Rebecca gave her some medication to help her sleep, and then put her to bed, promising to be back later that night.

They picked up the kids and headed back to Liam's parents for dinner. After dinner, as they were getting ready to head out, Liam's mom gave him a box.

"Laura asked me to give these to you. I think they are mostly pictures that Michelle had of Julie, Adam and the kids. She figured since the kids lost so much in the fire, that these pictures would be nice to have. There's even a package of pictures that were still in Michelle's mailbox. Anyway, she wanted you to have them." She said.

"Thanks mom, I'll go through the pictures and maybe we'll put some up in the kid's bedrooms. I'm sure they would like that." Liam said, taking the box from her.

Liam put the box in the trunk of the car and they all headed home after another exhausting day.

Sunday was also pretty busy. Since the kids were starting back at school on Monday, Liam took them shopping. Cassie didn't need much, since she was in preschool, but Chris needed all of his school supplies and they both needed more clothes.

Two other problems seemed to crop up during the week.

First, much to Jack's continued frustration and complaints, Liam and Jack had yet to have the bed to themselves. They usually started out alone, but ended up with at least one, and sometimes both of the kids in bed with them. Liam just didn't have the heart to turn them away. At least, not yet.

Secondly, Liam was really struggling with how Jack treated the kids. Although he was never out right mean to them, he would just pretend that they didn't exist. He rarely said two words to them and had yet to help Liam with anything directly related to the kids. It was like Liam existed in two different worlds at the same time and he didn't know how to bring those two worlds together. He was hoping that with time Jack would become more comfortable with the kids and things would get better.

Author's Note: I've received so much great feedback (Nifty Readers are awesome!). Thank you all so much. I sincerely hope that the readers that took the time to review enjoyed the little treat I sent all of you. If you are interested in commenting, good or bad, you can e-mail me at myoregon12@yahoo.com

Also, I would like to thank a couple of people that have worked to help me bring this chapter to a finish. First, as always, I would like to thank Miguel Sanchez, author of "You Can Run But You Can't Hide" for reviewing and editing this chapter. His stories can be found on the Nifty Archive under Prolific Authors. He truly is a gifted author.

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