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*Author's Note: Okay, I'm going to ramble for a minute. So, those of you who can't stand my rambling, go ahead and skip to the story. I promise I won't be offended.*

*Anyway, I was thinking, as I was shamelessly waiting for feedback on my last chapter, that I felt like the Mervyns lady. A lot of you won't know who that is, unless you are from the U.S., but, Mervyns is a clothing store here in the U.S. and back in the 80's, they ran whole line of commercials revolving around this mom who would be waiting at the crack of dawn, outside, in front of the store, waiting for it to open. Her face and palms would be plastered to the glass and she would be repeating "Open, Open, Open" over and over again.*

*That's how I feel about the feedback I get. You should see me, with my face and hands plastered to my computer screen while I repeat "Feedback, Feedback, Feedback" over and over again. Sad, I know, but you guys are so awesome about sending feedback. It keeps me smiling from ear to ear while I'm working on the next chapter. Thank you.*

*And thanks for listening to my rambling. Now, on with the story...*

## **Chapter 8**

On Thursday morning, Liam woke with the customary foot in his face. Smiling, he reached out, pulled the foot closer and gave it a little kiss. 'Well, at least there weren't any wet beds or night terrors. I actually got to sleep through the night. That must be progress'. He thought to himself as he extricated himself out of bed and started getting ready.

After Liam dropped the kids off at school, he went home and called the real estate agent. Luckily, she agreed to meet with him again this afternoon.

After he hung up with the agent, he called his mom again to make arrangements for her to pick up the kids from school and watch them until he got home.

He spent the morning doing laundry and cleaning up after the kids. This was definitely becoming a tedious routine. When it had been just Liam and Jack, they only had to worry about cleaning up after themselves. Liam only did, maybe, two to three loads of laundry a week. That amount had almost tripled now that the kids were here. The kids were also prone to leaving little messes throughout the house and he found himself always picking things up and putting them

away as he walked through the house. He knew Jack didn't like clutter, so he always made sure he kept the kid's stuff picked up. Liam figured it would be better to try to keep the tension in the house to a minimum until they could move out, and this was one way to do just that.

He was meeting the real estate agent at one o'clock, just after lunch, so once he was finished cleaning, he sat down to eat a quick lunch and then headed out to meet the agent.

She showed Liam several homes, about five in all, including the one they didn't get a chance to look at yesterday. Liam liked a couple of the homes, but nothing really stood out in his mind. He was having a hard time trying to decide if he should just settle on something, just to get the kids out of the loft, or take his time and find something that he really liked. He decided he would at least wait until after the weekend, so he'd have time to really give it some thought. He made another appointment with the agent for early Monday morning, just after he dropped the kids off at school.

When Liam got home, his mom was there with the kids. She had already started dinner, which was a huge help for Liam.

"Jeesh mom, that smells really good. You're amazing, can I keep you, please?" Liam joked, as he came up and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

"Sorry, but you'll have to negotiate that one with your father." Rebecca said.

"Yeah, that's what I figured." Liam said.

"So, how did the house hunting go?" His mom asked.

"It went fine. I found a couple of places that I liked, but nothing that really stood out. I just don't know if I should settle for the first house I find that I like, or if I should wait until I find exactly what I'm looking for. I've scheduled another appointment with the agent on Monday morning, so I'll decide by then." He said.

"You're buying a house, Liam, that's a big step. That's something you don't want to settle with. If you feel you can't stay here, you and the kids can always stay with us." She offered.

"Thanks mom, but your house isn't really big enough for all five of us. It would be a little crowded." Liam replied.

"We'd manage, besides being cramped in our little house might be better than the tension going on in this house." She said.

*'She had a pretty valid point. I'll definitely have to consider the offer.'* Liam thought to himself, after contemplating her comment, before switching topics.

"So, how were the kids today?" Liam asked.

“They were good. We did have one little incident though.” Rebecca said.

“Oh, what happened?” Liam asked.

“Well, the kids were in the living room watching television while I was getting dinner started. After I got everything going, I went to check on them. Chris was still watching TV, but Cassie wasn’t in the room. I found her in your office.” She paused to take a breath, and then continued. “She colored on a bunch of paperwork that was on Jack’s desk. The paperwork is pretty much ruined. I’m hoping it wasn’t anything too important.” She finished.

“It’s okay, it’s really my fault. I was working in there a few days ago and I let the kids color on some of the recycling that I had. Cassie really didn’t know that she shouldn’t be in there when I’m not in there with her. I’ll talk to them about it tonight.” Liam said, trying to reassure his mom, but silently hoping that Jack wouldn’t be too upset.

“Well, I should get back home and get dinner ready for your dad. If I don’t fix it for him, he’d be eating a bunch of junk, which isn’t good for his heart.” She said, as she grabbed her sweater, kissed Liam and the kids goodbye then headed out.

After he walked his mom out, Liam went into their office to check out the damage. It looked like it was some cover art for one of Jack’s software packages. Liam just hoped it wouldn’t be a big deal, but he wasn’t going to bet on it.

Leaving the office, Liam headed over to where the kids were watching television.

“Hey guys, how was your day?” Liam asked.

Chris answered first. “It was good. I took a spelling test today and I got them all right. I was the only one in my class. Bobby missed one but he’s usually the one who always get them all, so I beat him.” Chris said proudly.

That’s great Chris. Do you have the test? Can I see it?” Liam asked.

While Chris was rummaging around in his backpack, Liam turned to Cassie.

“How about you Cassie, did you have a good day?” Liam asked.

“Mmm hmm, I made something for you Unca Leem.” Cassie said, before she leapt from the couch and ran up the stairs.

“Walk, sweetie, I don’t want you falling down the stairs.” Liam yelled in vain to Cassie.

“Here, Uncle Liam.” Chris said, handing his test to Liam.

Liam looked at the list and was pretty impressed. Not only had Chris received a perfect score, but he also had really nice writing for a seven year old.

“Chris, this is really good. I’m very impressed. You did really well and your writing is very neat and very legible.” Liam responded.

“I have to write good or my teacher will make me write it all over again.” Chris said.

Well, you did an excellent job. We should tape this up on the fridge along with the picture Cassie made the other day.” Liam suggested.

“Okay, and Uncle Liam, can you help me with my math homework tonight? I missed everything last week and I can’t get it right. We have a test tomorrow and I want to do good.” Chris asked, a little hesitantly.

“Yeah, sure, I can help with it.” Liam said, as Cassie came back with her drawing.

Liam, looking at the drawing, couldn’t really make out much. “So, tell me about your picture, Cassie.” He asked, trying to avoid admitting that he didn’t know what it was.

“It’s our house. See, my bedroom.” She said, pointing to a cluster of scribbles that looked nothing like a bedroom. “Chrissie’s bedroom.” She said, pointing to another cluster. Both clusters seemed to be on the second floor, but he wasn’t positive. Liam did notice that there were several blobs on the page that seemed somewhat familiar. It appeared that there were four people standing outside the house. It was obvious that there were two adults, that Liam assumed was him and Jack and then there were two smaller forms that he assumed would be Chris and Cassie.

“Is this us?” Liam asked, pointing to the figures.

“Uh huh.” She answered, nodding her head.

Next to the smaller forms, there was another spot on the page. This one also seemed to take on a familiar form that he guessed was some kind of animal. However, before Liam could ask, Chris, who had also been listening and watching Cassie point out the features of her house, spoke up.

“Who’s this Cassie?” Chris asked, pointing to the animal.

“That’s Bullet, he’s our dog and he runs really fast.” She said.

Both Chris and Liam looked at each other, then at Cassie.

“Bullet? Where’d you come up with that name?” Liam asked, thinking that it was a somewhat unusual name for a child to pick out for a dog.

Cassie didn’t answer, just shrugged.

“Well, this is a great picture, sweetie. I was just going to put Chris’s spelling test on the fridge. How about we add this picture too?” He asked, before he got up and headed to the kitchen. The kids following close behind.

A little later, Liam had Cassie settled in front of the television, and Chris, with Liam’s help, was sitting at the kitchen table working through the math problems. Liam, in between helping Chris, started working on getting dinner finished. Liam’s mom had started a beef stew that smelled wonderful and was pretty much ready. Liam had also found some biscuits in the fridge. They had already been cut and placed on a covered cookie sheet. All Liam had to do was put them in the oven.

While he was waiting for the biscuits to finish, Liam drew his attention away from Chris and started inspecting the front of the fridge. He gave a little chuckle when he looked at the two pictures and the spelling test that were taped to the fridge. He definitely got that from his mom. He and Julie grew up with their stuff being posted on the fridge. It had become a sort of contest between them to see who could get more stuff posted. He’d have to get some refrigerator magnets. Magnets would work much better than the tape and they wouldn’t ruin the papers when you tried to remove them. A voice at the entrance to the kitchen startled Liam out of his thoughts.

“Mmmm, what smells so good?” Jack asked.

“Shit, Jack, you scared me half to death. I didn’t even hear you come in the door.” Liam said, trying to catch his breath and glancing down at Chris to see if he had heard his choice of words, but if Chris did hear him, he wasn’t letting on, he was focused on his worksheet.

“Sorry.” Jack said.

“That’s okay. I was just lost in thought.” He said, turning back to the stew to give it a stir. “My mom picked up the kids from school today and watched them here while I was house hunting. When I got home, she already had dinner on the stove. You’re home early.” Liam said.

“Yeah, I’m beat and couldn’t focus. I’ve got a big meeting tomorrow and figured I had better try to get some rest. When will dinner be ready?” Jack asked.

“In about ten minutes. Listen, Rick invited us out to his house for a barbeque tomorrow night. Stacey and Mitch will be there too. I plan to head over there about six. I was hoping you could come too.

“At this point, I won’t know until tomorrow afternoon. I’ve got a huge client meeting tomorrow morning and based on the out come of the meeting, I may be working all weekend. Can I call you tomorrow after lunch and let you know?” Jack asked.

Sure, that’s fine. Oh, that reminds me, there was an accident with some of the paperwork you had on your desk and...” Liam started, but didn’t get a chance to finish before Jack hissed out a

“fuck”, and then turned and sprinted for their office. Liam looked again at Chris, who had finally had his attention brought out of his homework.

“I’ll go make sure everything’s okay. You keep working on your homework.” Liam said, before he headed out of the kitchen.

Liam found Jack in their office, leafing through the stuff on his desk and mumbling, “shit, shit, shit”.

“Jack, I’m sorry…” Again, Liam didn’t get a chance to finish before Jack was screaming at him.

“Shit, Liam, do you even realize what this is?” He yelled, shaking the documents aggressively in front of Liam’s face.

“No, Jack, I don’t, but…” He was cut off again.

“Liam, these are the final artwork proofs for the client I’m meeting with tomorrow. How the hell am I supposed to tell them that a seven year old colored all over them? Do you realize how unprofessional that is?” He asked, still yelling.

Before he could even answer, Jack looked over Liam’s shoulder, causing Liam to turn to see what Jack was looking at.

“You, you little shit, this is all your fault.” Jack screamed while flinging the paperwork toward Chris. Chris was frozen in place, his mouth hanging open and eyes wide with fear.

“Jack, stop it.” Liam yelled, trying to force Jack’s attention to him. “It wasn’t Chris, it was Cassie and it wasn’t their fault, it was mine. I let them play in the office the other day, while I was in there working. They were both coloring on some of my recycling. Cassie didn’t know our office was off limits when we weren’t in there with them. It was my fault.”

“That’s bullshit. That little shit has had it in for me since he got here.” Jack said, his finger pointing menacingly at Chris.

“What the hell are you talking about Jack? He’s seven years old, what could he possibly do to you?” Liam asked, but didn’t wait for an answer. He just turned his attention to Chris.

“Chris, go upstairs and get some pajamas and a couple of changes of clothes for you and Cassie, put them in your school backpack. We’re going to grandma and grandpa’s for a couple of nights.” Liam said.

Chris, shaking and with tears running down his face, turned and practically ran down the hallway.

Once Chris was gone, Liam turned his attention back to Jack.

“Jack, I’m not sure what’s going on, but we’re leaving. We’ll just stay with my parents until we get our own place. I’m not going to stay here and continue to let you do this to the kids. What the hell’s the matter with you? This is so unlike you. I just don’t understand where all this is coming from.” Liam said.

“Liam, I can’t believe you don’t see it. He’s doing all this stuff to get me mad. He’s trying to turn you against me. It’s so fucking obvious.” Jack said.

“Jack, I’m not even going to have this conversation. It’s so out there, that it’s not even worth the effort.” With that said Liam left the office, went downstairs, removed dinner from the stove and then headed back upstairs to get his things together. Liam didn’t want to waste any time, he just wanted to get out of there and away from Jack.

The car ride over was very quiet. The kids were very subdued. Liam however, didn’t notice this. He was too distracted from all the noise in his head. He couldn’t figure out what was going on with Jack. He’d never seen Jack react like that. It was so unlike him, it’s like he’s a totally different person with the kids around. *‘Well, it doesn’t matter now. We are out of there and there is no way we’ll ever be going back.’* Liam thought, deciding that he needed to stop fretting about it.

They stopped on their way to his mom’s to grab a bite to eat. While they were waiting for their food, Liam took the chance to call his mom and give her a heads up. She was also extremely surprised by Jack’s reaction.

“I mean, I knew he’d be mad, but I never expected he’d react like that.” She said.

“I know. It was so weird. He wasn’t making any sense. It’s like he’s jealous of the kids or something.” Liam said, still trying to find some rational explanation for the way Jack was behaving.

“Well, it’s probably best that you and the kids left. We’ll make room for you here.”

“Thanks mom, we’ll be there as soon as we’ve finished eating.” Liam said, hanging up the phone.

Liam then turned his attention to the kids. “Well guys, Grandma and Grandpa are really excited that we’re going to be staying with them for a few days.” He said, trying to offer some sort of reassurance.

Chris looked up at Liam and Liam could see the hurt and fear still lingering in his eyes.

“Chris, how are you doing? I’m really sorry that Jack talked to you like that. None of this was your fault, okay? It wasn’t even Cassie’s fault. I don’t want you to worry, okay? I promise, we won’t be going back there.” Liam said.

Chris nodded his head, as the waitress brought their food to the table. It was obvious that he was working hard to hold back the tears that were threatening to break loose.

When they finally arrived at Liam's parents' house, it was almost bedtime for the kids and they still needed their baths. While Liam got the kids in the bath tub, his mom got their beds ready. Chris would have his old room and Cassie would have her mom's old room, just as they usually did when they spent the night at Grandma and Grandpa's. Liam was relegated to the pull-out couch in the living room.

Shortly after the kids were in bed, Liam's mom and dad also retired to their room for the night. Liam, figuring that sleep wouldn't come easily, was trying to relax in bed with a borrowed book, hoping that reading might keep his mind empty and make it easier to fall asleep.

After about an hour of staring at the same page, reading and re-reading the page, Liam gave up, tossed the book on the floor and rolled over. Lying there in the dark, quiet house, Liam thought he heard something. He paused, listening more intently, straining to hear it again. Sure enough, it was quiet sobbing coming from the hallway.

Getting up, Liam headed towards the sound. As he got closer, he realized it was Cassie.

"Cassie, baby, what's the matter?" Liam asked, as he sat next to her on the bed.

She immediately sat up and crawled into Liam's lap, sobbing harder.

"I want my mommy. I want my mommy." She said, over and over again. She was crying so hard now that her breathing was broken up by huge gasps of air.

"Oh, honey, I'm sorry." Liam said, wrapping his arms around her. Liam was feeling terrible now. It never dawned on him that putting her in her mom's old room might cause her to start missing her mom. *'I should have known better. I should have put the kids on the roll-out and I should have taken my old room.'* Liam thought, as he mentally berated himself for being such an idiot.

He was now rocking back and forth with Cassie sitting in his lap. Every so often he would make a shushing sound, hoping to sooth her sobs.

After about twenty minutes, she had finally settled down and was back asleep. She was still taking little gasps of breath from all the crying, but she was, at last, asleep again.

Liam stood and carried her out to the roll-out in the living room. Once he had her settled in the bed, he started to crawl in with her. However, before he even sat down on the bed, he heard Christopher screaming from his room again.

"Crap, will I ever get a break?" Liam asked of no one in particular, as he headed back down the hallway to Chris's room.

When he got there, his mom and dad were already in the room. His mom was just getting ready to sit down next to Chris.

“Mom, wait, don’t touch him.” Liam hollered over Chris’s screaming. Both his parents, startled, looked over at Liam.

“He’s having one of the night terrors I told you about. If you try to touch him, he only gets more aggressive. It’s better to just wait it out and keep an eye on him.” Liam said, trying to be heard over Chris.

“Wow, Liam, you told us about the terrors, but I never could have imagined this was what you were talking about. How can you just watch this and do nothing?” His mom asked. She was obviously having a hard time not being able to console Chris.

“I know mom, it’s not easy, but it’s what Chris’s counselor told me to do. Let’s go out in the hallway and talk.” Liam said, motioning for his parents join him in the hallway.

Once they were in the hallway, Liam pulled the door almost closed, leaving just enough of an opening so he could peer in and see Chris.

“The counselor said that it can be even worse for him if we try to wake him. He usually settles down within fifteen or twenty minutes.” Liam said.

“He has these every night?” His mother asked, still shocked by the situation.

“Every night except last night. He doesn’t remember them in the morning and they don’t seem to affect his sleep, only mine.” Liam said, turning his attention away from Chris to smile slightly at his parents, and then turn his attention back to Chris. “The counselor said they will probably decrease and then hopefully stop all together once his life settles down.”

“Look, see, he’s settling down already.” Liam said, opening the door further so his parents could look in on Chris.

“The poor kid, he’s got to be going through some major internal turmoil to have this happening to him subconsciously every night.” Frank said.

Liam walked over to Chris and sat down next to him on the bed. He was still a little restless and was still mumbling in his sleep, but at least he wasn’t screaming any more.

“You guys can go ahead and go back to bed. I’ll take him to the roll-out with me. He should be fine the rest of the night. Cassie’s already there anyway. She woke up a little upset by being in her mom’s old room, so I put her in bed with me.” Liam said.

“Are you sure you don’t want to put one of them in bed with us? It will be a tight squeeze for all of you in that little pull-out.” His mom offered.

“Nah, we’ll manage. We’re kind of used to this by now. Don’t worry about us, we’ll be fine.” Liam said, as he stood up and then scooped Chris up in his arms.

“Alright, but if you need anything, you come get us.” Frank said, as he led a reluctant Rebecca back to bed.

Liam carried Chris out to the living room and placed him next to Cassie, then crawled in himself. It didn’t seem to matter where they were, this seemed to be becoming routine.

Friday morning, Liam awoke to the smell of coffee and bacon. His mom was obviously already awake. He sat up and looked at the clock on the VCR; it was just before six am. Lying back down, he rolled over only to be greeted by two feet. “God, how do you do that, Cassie?” He said, laughing quietly.

Not expecting an answer, Liam was a bit surprised when Chris responded. “At our house, Cassie always came to my room to sleep with me at night, but my bed was too small, so she would always sleep turned around. I think she just got used to sleeping like that.”

“Well, at least that explains it.” Liam said, while peering over Cassie’s legs at Chris. “How are you doing? You sleep okay? You’re up a little early.”

“Grandma and Grandpa’s talking in the kitchen woke me up.” He said.

“I guess their not used to people sleeping out here in the living room. Well, I smell bacon, what do you say we go see what else Grandma’s got cooking for breakfast.” Liam said, smiling at Chris.

In the kitchen, Liam’s mom was busy fixing a huge breakfast of french toast, hash browns, bacon and sausage.

“Good morning. Mmmm, Mom, that smells really good. Where’s dad?” Liam asked as they entered the kitchen.

“Good morning. Your dad’s in the bedroom on the phone. Did you guys sleep well?” She said.

“Yep.” They replied in unison.

“Well, breakfast should only be another ten minutes or so. Liam, there’s coffee if you want some.” His mom said, pointing to the coffee maker.

“Thanks.” Liam said, helping himself to the coffee, just as his dad walked into the kitchen with Cassie in his arms.

“Hey, dad, want a cup of coffee?” Liam asked.

“Oh, he can’t have the leaded coffee, Liam, you know that.” His mom answered, before his dad even had a chance.

”There are decaf coffee singles in the cupboard above the coffee cups. You can fix him one of those.” She said.

“Okay.” Liam said, glancing at his dad and giving him an apologetic look.

Once they were all seated at the table and working on breakfast, Frank spoke up about the phone call from this morning.

“Liam, I just got off the phone with Robert and he was hoping you could meet him this afternoon. He wants to go over some things with you.”

“Oh, what things? Did he say?” Liam asked.

“Well, I think he needs you to sign some paperwork regarding the settlement of the estate, but I’m not entirely sure. He did mention that the will finally made it through probate. He was hoping you could come by his house tonight for dinner, but I told him you already had plans tonight, so he invited you over for lunch instead. Here, he gave me the address and directions.” Frank said, handing Liam the piece of paper with the information on it. “He said anytime after eleven thirty this morning would be fine. His cell number is on there too, just in case you can’t make it.” Frank finally finished.

“His home? Isn’t that kind of strange?” Liam asked.

“Don’t know, but I wouldn’t worry about it. Robert and Adam have known each other since law school. Last time, we spent half the day cooped up in his office. He probably just wants a more comfortable setting this time. I’m sure it’s been hard for him too, having lost his best friend.” Frank said.

“Yeah, you’re probably right.” Liam said.

After they had finished breakfast, Rebecca hauled the kids off to get them ready for school, while Frank and Liam washed the dishes.

“So, what’s your plan for today, other than meeting with Robert?” Frank asked.

“Well, after I drop the kids off at school, I’m going to head over to the mall to get bathing suits for Chris and Cassie. Rick has a pool and I’m sure the kids will want to go swimming tonight. After that, I’ll head over to Robert’s.”

“Do you have a swim suit, or are you going back over to the loft and pick yours up? You’ll probably have to go in the pool with Cassie, since she doesn’t know how to swim.” Frank said.

“Crap, I hadn’t thought about that. No, there’s no way I’m going to the loft today. I really don’t want to chance running into Jack. Even though he’ll probably be at work, I just don’t want to take that chance right now. I’ll go back to the loft on Monday while Jack is at work and pick up some more of our things then. I just don’t want to deal with any of that right now.” Liam said

“Can’t blame you on that one.” Frank responded.

“After I pick up the kids from school, we’ll come back and get ready for the barbeque at Rick’s tonight. It’s going to be a very busy day.” Liam said.

“That’s probably a good thing.” Frank said, putting a hand on Liam’s shoulder and giving it a reassuring squeeze.

“Yeah, probably. Well, I guess I should get the kids off to school.” Liam said, effectively finishing his conversation with his dad.

To be continued.