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Chapter 12

“Rise and shine, up and at ‘em.” Liam heard Rick say from the doorway. Liam rolled over and groaned.

“What time is it?” He asked, his eyes refusing to open.

“It’s time to get up. The kids have a surprise for you.” Rick said.

“What?” Liam asked, finally opening his eyes to look over at Rick. What he saw brought a huge grin to his face.

Rick was standing just inside the doorway, the kids flanked on either side of him. Rick had a tray of food in his hands, while Chris was holding a glass of milk, and Cassie holding a little vase that contained two dandelion flowers.

“What’s all this?” He asked, as he sat up in bed.

“We made breakfast for you.” Chris said.

“I pick flowers.” Cassie said, as she came forward and gave Liam the vase.

Both Chris and Rick came forward at the same time, Chris putting the glass of milk on the bedside table and Rick setting the tray in Liam’s lap.

“Pancakes again?” Liam asked, looking over at Rick.

“What can I say? We’re getting good at pancakes.” Rick said, shrugging his shoulders. “How are you feeling this morning?”

“Fine, I don’t even remember falling asleep last night. How’s my face look?” Liam asked, as he reached up and gently felt around the bruised area. It was tender, but it felt like the swelling had gone down.

“Yeah, once you fell asleep, you were out like a light. You didn’t even stir when the kids came in this morning. We decided you probably needed the extra sleep. You’ve definitely got a

wicked bruise on your face, but the swelling's gone down quite a bit. I want to take a look at your head again too. I would recommend you take a bath today instead of a shower, and don't wash your hair. Give the wound another day to heal." Rick instructed.

While Rick was talking, Chris and Cassie had both crawled up into bed with Liam, one kid on each side of him. He had to slide over a little to make room for Cassie. "Well, thanks for letting me sleep in. At the rate things have been going, I haven't slept through the night in a while," he said to Rick, and then turned to the kids. "And thanks for breakfast. I don't think I've ever had anyone bring me breakfast in bed. I feel spoiled." He said, leaning over and giving each of them a kiss.

"I make pancakes." Cassie said. "I pour and fipped."

"Wow, you did a good job, Cassie." Liam said.

Not to be outdone, Chris spoke up. "I made the scrambled eggs. I never made scrambled eggs before." He said, proudly.

"Well, they look delicious." Liam said, as he picked up his fork and started eating. "Aren't you guys going to eat too?" Liam asked.

"We ate while you were sleeping. We ate the mistakes, it took us a couple of tries to get it right." Rick said.

"Well, the end product came out pretty good. Hey, I just remembered. Don't you have to work today?" Liam asked Rick.

"Nope, I took a couple days of vacation. I've got plenty of vacation time accrued. Most of the time I don't use it and they have to pay it out, so they are perfectly happy to have me take the time. I am on call though, so if something comes up, I'll have to go in." Rick said, as he sat down on the bed in front of Liam, his hand automatically reaching out to rest on Liam's calf.

"We are gonna go camping and Rick said we can make s'mores." Chris said, bringing Liam's attention away from the hand that was slowly caressing his calf.

"Camping? Is he serious?" Liam asked, his attention going back to Rick.

"I was talking to the kids about some of the stuff we could do today, and when I mentioned camping out in the back yard, Chris got all excited and said that they'd never been camping. Can you believe they've never had s'mores?" Rick said, like it was a crime to have never had s'mores before.

"We've got the whole day planned out. There's an area out back that I cleared in order to plant a vegetable garden, but never actually got around to doing any planting. The kids decided that they want to help. Cassie wants green beans and cucumbers and Chris wants carrots. So, after lunch, we'll head into town to get everything we need for the garden and the camp out. After that, we'll

head over to Frankie's for dinner and then go visit Sam and Mike at the hospital." Rick said, his hand still caressing Liam's calf.

It was hard to concentrate on anything but the thought of wanting that hand to work its way up into the leg of his boxers. The feel of Rick's warm hand and the thought of where he wanted that hand to go was causing things low in his body to stir, and it wasn't just his cock stirring. He actually had butterflies in his stomach. '*God, you'd think I was twelve and unable to handle my hormones,*' Liam thought to himself.

"So... Umm..." He stammered, trying to get his mind back to the subject at hand. "Wow, you guys do have the whole day planned out."

"Well, I figured since the kids weren't going to be in school, it would be good to plan things so they don't spend the whole day in front of the TV. I've got enough sleeping bags for everyone. We'll have a camp fire and roast marshmallows. It'll be fun," Rick said. "I hope that's okay with you," he added hesitantly.

"Oh, yeah, sure, that's okay, and that reminds me, I forgot about school. I've got to call their schools and let them know they won't be there this week and make arrangements to pick up Chris's homework. Plus, I've got to talk to Chris's counselor and see if we can make arrangements for Chris to keep seeing him," Liam said, as he set his finished breakfast aside. "Oh, and I had better call my mom too."

"Mitch already talked to Chris's school. The officers are going to swing by and pick up his work on their way out here for their shift change each afternoon. So, that's one less thing you have to worry about."

"Oh, wow, that was really nice of Mitch." Liam said, the surprise evident in his voice.

"Well, he's a good guy," Rick said, as he removed his hand from Liam's leg, stood up from the bed and picked up the breakfast tray. "The kids and I will clean up the breakfast dishes. Why don't you go ahead and get ready. You can use my bathroom. I've got a Jacuzzi tub in there and you'll be able to soak comfortably. Remember not to wash your hair or get it too wet. I don't want you to reopen the wound. Also, before we leave, I want to take another look at it, okay?" Rick said. "Oh, and take it slow when you stand up." Rick added, as he walked out carrying the tray. The kids following close behind.

Liam sat up in bed slowly. He paused, sitting at the edge of the bed for a few minutes, making sure he wasn't going to have another dizzy spell. Once he felt he would be okay, he slowly stood up, pausing again before deciding he was fine and heading to the bathroom.

As soon as Liam walked into the bathroom, he was assaulted by Rick's scent. With Rick freshly showered, the scent of him in the bathroom was still strong, and Liam couldn't help but stand in the middle of the bathroom and just breathe deep. It was a very rich and spicy scent that had Liam craving for a taste of the skin that went along with the scent.

Shaking his head and trying to refocus his thoughts, Liam headed over to the mirror to have a look at his face. He looked horrible. A dark purple bruise covered one side of his face and part of his eye. A large area around his eye looked slightly swollen, but it wasn't as bad as he'd expected. Liam tentatively reached up and pressed against the area. It was a little tender. He tried to look at the back of his head, but no matter which way he turned, he couldn't see the gash. Liam reached up again, this time gently feeling his way around the gash. He could feel that a large knot had developed, and just that little bit of pressure to the area sent pain shooting through his head, causing the area to throb for a few seconds afterwards.

Deciding he'd better get a move on, Liam started the bath water and then got undressed. Rick was right; the bathtub was oversized and could easily fit two. That line of thought led him to imagine Rick and him entwined chest to back in that tub. It was a nice thought and his cock gave a little twitch of agreement.

Once the tub was about half full, Liam stepped in. The warm water enveloped him, causing him to release a huge sigh of relief. Just as he was settling in, there was a knock at the door.

"Liam, I brought you some towels and my medical kit. If it's okay with you, I'd like to take a look at your head again." Rick said from the other side of the door.

"You sure you're not just trying to come up with an excuse to come in here and take advantage of me?" Liam said, only half joking.

He was met with silence on the other side of the door, causing him to worry that his presumptuousness had scared Rick off. When Rick finally responded, the response was one word that was spoken so quietly that Liam was surprised he'd heard it, but hear it he did, loud and clear.

"No," Rick said in a whisper.

"No, you're not sure, or no, you're not trying to take advantage of me?" Liam asked, the playfulness obvious in his voice.

"No, I'm not sure," Rick answered, his voice holding a little more confidence this time.

Again, silence loomed with only the door between them before Liam responded.

"Well, at least you're honest," Liam chuckled. "Go ahead and come in."

As soon as Rick opened the door, their eyes met and they shared a moment or two before Rick's eyes drifted down the length of the bathtub. Liam noticed that his ears were rather red. He was obviously embarrassed by the whole situation, although not embarrassed enough to avoid checking Liam out while he relaxed naked in the tub, and Liam couldn't help but grin at the thought of Rick so blatantly checking him out.

When Rick's eyes came back up to meet Liam's again and he saw Liam's grin, Rick's cheeks suddenly flamed to match his ears and he returned Liam's grin.

"Are you done?" Liam asked, his grin widening.

"I don't know, I think that water might be distorting things. Think you could stand up and give me an unobstructed view?" Rick asked, again matching Liam's grin.

"I thought you were here to look at my head up here," Liam said, pointing to the top of his head. "Not my head down here."

"You mean I have a choice?" Rick asked jokingly.

"Ha, ha, very funny Mr. Romano. Get over here and give me a kiss and then get to work. According to you, we have a busy day ahead of us." Liam said.

Rick didn't waste any time. At the mention of the kiss, Rick dropped the towel and his medical bag and was at the tub, kneeling down before Liam even finished his sentence. The kiss was soft and gentle, both of them immediately opening up to each other while Rick's hand reached up to grasp the back of Liam's neck.

"Mmm, you have to warmest hands. They are like mini heating pads," Liam said, as he pulled back slightly from the kiss, but not fully separating their lips. Liam could feel Rick's hot breath ghosting over his lips, and he took a moment to nibble on Rick's bottom lip, and suddenly he had the strangest urge to bite hard, to devour Rick, to claim him, mark him. The feeling just consumed his entire body and caused flutters in his stomach. It was a very overwhelming feeling, something he'd never experienced before, not even with Jack. Thankfully, before Liam could think too much about it, or actually act on the feeling, Rick pulled away.

"Yeah, well, sometime soon, I'll have to show you how these warm hands can be put to good use. Right now, though, I want to look at your head," Rick said, as he left Liam's side, grabbed the towel and medical kit and then moved to the head of the tub, behind Liam.

"Okay, I'm going to clean the area a little bit. You've still got a little dried blood in your hair. I won't do too much, because I don't want to reopen the wound, but we'll at least get the blood cleaned up," Rick said, as he wet a wash cloth in the tub and then proceeded to clean the area. "You've got quite a knot back here. Let me know if I hurt you."

"You're fine. It's a little tender, but not too bad."

"Well, it looks good. The wound has closed up well enough. Like I said, stitches probably would have helped, but I think it won't matter much." Rick said, as he finished up. "How's the bath feel?" he asked, as he picked up a wash cloth and soap and proceeded to wash Liam's body.

"Mmmm... It's very relaxing. I don't remember the last time I got to relax in a bath."

“Have I told you what an amazing body you have? It’s hard in all the right places,” Rick said, as he worked Liam’s cock lightly with the cloth to emphasize his point. “The color of your skin and hair is so golden blond, and you’ve got the sexiest neck I think I’ve ever seen,” he said, placing a kiss right at the base of his neck.

“A sexy neck?” Liam asked, laughing a little at the odd statement.

“What can I say, I’m a neck man,” Rick said, as he set the wash cloth aside and started to massage Liam’s neck and shoulders.

“Oh god, that feels soooo good,” Liam moaned out. Rick was pressing his thumbs into Liam’s shoulder blades, working the tense muscles.

Just as Liam was about to melt down into the tub, he felt Rick’s lips at the nape of his neck, kissing and sucking. Slowly, his lips began working their way up Liam’s neck, while his hands started working their way down. He raked his nails across Liam’s nipples, while at the same time he bit down slightly on Liam’s earlobe.

“Oh, fuck, Rick,” Liam said, the dual sensation causing his body to tense with uncontrolled lust, his hips automatically thrusting up towards the surface of the water.

“I think your body is asking for a little attention down there.” Rick whispered in Liam’s ear, as he leaned forward slightly and took hold of Liam’s throbbing cock.

Liam’s head dropped back against Rick’s shoulder, while his hips again came up off the bottom of the tub, trying desperately to create some friction.

“I want to see you come, Liam, you are so fucking gorgeous, and I want to see your face when I make you come,” Rick whispered in Liam’s ear, his tongue following the words as he licked the rim of Liam’s ear.

“Oh, shit, Rick! If you don’t start moving that hand, I swear, I’ll take care of it myself!” Liam said, his hips desperately trying, in vain, to get what he wanted.

“Aren’t we a little impatient? Is this what you want?” Rick asked, as his hand finally started to work Liam’s cock.

“Yessss,” Liam hissed, his breath coming ragged and his voice gravelly.

Rick started working Liam’s cock in time with Liam’s thrusts, his thumb pressing firmly against the vein throbbing on the underside of his erection. Rick’s lips had securely fastened themselves back at the nape of his neck, while his other hand started working Liam’s nipples. The triple sensations were causing his body to vibrate with the mounting need for release.

“Oh, fuck... Rick, I’m... Almost there. Don’t... Don’t stop.” Liam gasped out. The water in the bathtub was sloshing around with the motion of Liam’s hips. “Oh... Oh... Oh ... G-ahhhh.”

Liam cried out, his breath escaping his lungs as he erupted with a mind-blowing orgasm, his cock shooting its load into the warm water.

As Liam's body finally settled down from its orgasmic bliss and started to relax, Rick pulled his lips away from Liam's neck to whisper in his ear. "You're so fucking hot. I definitely want to see that look on your face again. I think I'm going to have fun discovering new ways to get that look," Rick said, as he gave Liam's deflating cock one last squeeze before he pulled away.

"Oh, shit, that was amazing. I feel like jelly now," Liam said, still slightly out of breath.

"Yeah, I know I enjoyed it too. You ready to get out?" he asked, holding a towel out for Liam.

"I suppose," Liam said, as he stepped out of the tub and into the towel. Rick worked methodically to dry Liam's body. He knelt down and started with Liam's legs first. As he finished his legs, he leaned forward and planted a kiss on Liam's flaccid cock, snaking his tongue out to taste the tip. The water had washed away any hint of Liam's orgasm, so all Rick tasted was the clean flavor of Liam's skin, but he still couldn't help himself, as took the head of Liam's cock fully into his mouth. The spongy feel of Liam's flaccid cock sent a little thrill thrumming through Rick's body.

"Oh, fuck, Rick, you need to stop. There's no way I can get hard again," Liam said, even though his hips were unconsciously moving back and forth.

"I know, but I just had to taste you," Rick said as he pulled off of Liam's cock.

"Come here," Liam said, and he pulled Rick up so they were face to face, the towel in Rick's hands between them. "I don't think this constitutes slow." Liam said.

"I know, I'm sorry, I just couldn't help myself. You make me forget myself," Rick said, as he wrapped the towel around Liam's hips and then leaned in for a kiss, which was promptly interrupted by Chris knocking on the bathroom door.

"Uncle Liam, Cassie has to go potty," he said. Rick and Liam pulled back to look at each other. "Really bad, Uncle Liam. She's holding her pee pee," Chris added as a second thought, and both Liam and Rick couldn't help the hearty chuckles that escaped.

"I got it. You go ahead and finish getting ready," Rick offered, as he stepped out of the bathroom.

When Liam had finished getting ready, he sat down at the kitchen counter, armed with the telephone and called both schools, and then his mother. Chris's school counselor was going to e-mail Liam the names of a couple of counselors that Chris and even Cassie could start seeing outside of school.

When he talked with his mother, she reminded him that he was supposed to call Robert and let him know if he wanted the house.

“Crap, I forgot about that. What am I supposed to do?”

“Well, your dad and I talked about it last night and we figure that if it was Robert’s intention to lure you into buying the house, so he could kill you, he probably wouldn’t want to wait for a couple of months. Didn’t he say that the house wouldn’t be available for another couple of months, once the house they are having built is finished?” She said.

“Yeah, he did.”

“Before he became a suspect, you were planning to accept his offer, weren’t you?” His mom asked.

“Yeah, I was. I guess I should talk to Mitch first though. I don’t want to cause any problems with their investigation,” Liam said.

“That’s probably a good idea. Call me in the next day or two and let me know how you guys are doing, okay?”

“Okay mom. I love you, and tell dad I love him too,” Liam said.

“I will sweetie and we love you too. Give the kids a hug and kiss for us,” she said before hanging up.

After disconnecting with his mom, Liam sat at the counter for a few minutes watching Rick and the kids. Rick was lying on his side on the floor in the living room, with Cassie curled up against him. Both of them were engrossed in some stupid cartoon that left Liam wondering what kind of person it would take to dream up something that stupid. Chris was sitting Seiza style behind Rick, leaning forward with his arms crossed and resting on top of Rick.

As Liam watched them, his thoughts turned to Jack. Jack had been his first real lover. He’d had a boyfriend or two during high school and college, but nothing nearly as serious as Jack. Liam remembered the first time he laid eyes on Jack. He was tall and handsome and looked so sophisticated in his custom tailored suit. He was unlike any other man that Liam had ever met. Jack’s entire life was organized and planned out. He was bold, self-assured and very ambitious. It was his strong nature that attracted Liam. Later, Liam realized that all of those traits actually spelled out ‘obsessive-compulsive personality disorder’. Because of this, Liam now understood that Jack would never have been able to live with the kids. He never would have been able to let the mayhem that comes with kids into his life.

Rick however, was like a breath of fresh air. Liam felt like he had been holding his breath for the last five years and only now was he able to finally release it. Tension had built up inside him that he hadn’t even realized was there, that is, until it was gone.

“Liam, are you okay?” Rick asked, bringing Liam out of his thoughts.

Liam brought his gaze back over to Rick, lying there on the floor with the kids. “Yeah, sorry, I was just thinking,” he replied. “I actually need to make a couple more phone calls and then we can head out.”

“Okay, no problem, take your time,” Rick replied, before he turned his attention back to the TV.

Mitch was of the same mind as his parents. He actually felt that it would be a good idea to not let on that Robert may be a suspect. It was Mitch’s plan to approach the investigation of Robert and the firm as if he were trying to rule out everyone. He figured this way it would be easier to get Robert’s continued support in the investigation. That being said, Liam then called Robert’s office and told him that he would take the house. Robert was very pleased with Liam’s decision and told him that he would start the paperwork for the sale as soon as Adam and Julie’s estate was completely settled.

Once done with his phone calls, Liam turned his attention back to Rick and the kids. “Well, I think I’m ready, how about you guys?”

After receiving a resounding “yes” from everyone, they all headed out to Liam’s car. Rick stopped to talk with the policemen stationed out front. He gave them their itinerary and confirmed that the police would be escorting them.

The rest of the morning and afternoon ended up being a lot of fun. They shopped for nonsense camping gear, to which Liam couldn’t help but comment that they were only camping out in the back yard, and they wouldn’t need most of the stuff Rick had picked out, but Rick decided that this was their first time camping out, so they had to do it right.

Each of the kids got their own little battery powered lantern. All of them got their own plate and utensil kit, complete with plate, cup, bowl, and double-sided spoon and fork. Rick also added an excess of freeze dried food that also included freeze dried ice cream. And, don’t even get Liam started on the backpack for the dog or the camper’s ice cream ball, which is supposed to make ice cream by rolling it around. *‘How much ice cream do we need?’* Liam thought to himself, as they finally headed to the check out.

While they were waiting in line, Liam leaned into Rick and whispered in his ear. “Man, these kids have you wrapped around their little fingers. You’re such a sucker,” He said, laughing slightly.

The only response Liam received was a ‘guilty-as-charged’ grin from Rick.

‘Well, the first step to recovery is admitting you have a problem,’ Liam thought, as they finally reached the check out counter.

After they loaded up the car with their purchases, they headed out for lunch. Rick said it was too nice a day to eat indoors. They ended up going through a drive thru and taking lunch out to a local park. At Rick’s suggestion, they also picked up lunch for the two officers that were assigned to follow them. They sat under the trees in the grass and ate, or actually, Liam and Rick

ate, Chris and Cassie scarfed, as they were anxious to go play in the playground. The officers were parked in their car, watching from a short distance.

Once Chris and Cassie were '*finally*' released, as Chris put it, they were all over the playground.

"This is so much better than sitting in one of those fast food joints with the indoor playgrounds. At least here, you don't have a bunch of kids running around and screaming in a confined space. Plus, those places stink. Can't stand them," Rick said, as they sat and watched Chris pushing Cassie on the swings.

"Yeah, but you still have the kids running around and screaming," Liam replied, as he watched Chris say something to Cassie and then turn to walk over in their direction.

"I know, but at least now it's just my kids doing the screaming." Rick said, causing Liam's head to snap up to Rick to see if he realized what he'd just said. It was obvious he didn't, as his eyes were focused on the kids.

"Uncle Liam, can you push Cassie? I want to play on the monkey bars," Chris asked.

Nodding his assent, Liam got up from the grass and then turned to Rick, who was also in the process of standing up.

"Come on, we can take turns pushing her," Rick said, as he headed in Cassie's direction.

Instead of taking turns, Liam took up the front, pushing Cassie's feet, and Rick took up the rear, pushing her from the back. She didn't get a lot of height this way, but Cassie didn't seem to care.

Once the kids had worn themselves out and worked off lunch, they left for the grocery store, this time to get the required ingredients for the s'mores. In addition to the s'more fixings, Rick also decided they needed to get Jiffy Pop to cook over the open fire. Forget the fact that the stuff is probably the worst popcorn ever. "It's a camping tradition. Everyone does it. It's a staple of camping. Besides, everything tastes better cooked over an open fire," Rick said.

"Yeah, just like ice cream?" Liam asked, the sarcasm obvious in his voice.

"Okay, you got me there, but maybe we can start our own tradition with that one," Rick responded.

"We could do that, Liam said, the two smiling at each other like a couple of love struck buffoons.

As they were walking back to their car with the groceries, Liam happened to see the police cruiser parked in the loading/unloading zone of the store. It was a location that would provide good visibility of the parking lot and the front of the store.

“It’s giving me the heebie-jeebies having those officers following us around. I’m keeping getting the ‘*being watched*’ feeling, Liam said.

“That’s probably because you *are* being watched, Rick said, moving out of the way just in time to avoid Liam’s backhand.

“Stop being a smart...” Liam said, but was interrupted by Rick.

“Hey, watch your language. There are kids present.”

“What I was going to say, before you so rudely interrupted me, was stop being a smart butt and load the groceries in the trunk. I’ll put the kids in the car,” Liam said before he turned his attention to Cassie, sitting quietly in the cart. “Come on sweetie, let’s get you in the car.”

To be continued (that’s a promise)...

Author’s note: Thank you all so much for your patience and your impatience. All your constant nagging was greatly appreciated and kept reminding me not to forget about this story. Life just got too busy for a while there and this story means too much to me to produce anything less than what I have been. Also, I didn’t want to restart it until I knew I could get back into regular updates. Thank you all so much for all the support and you all deserve to see the story come to its conclusion and I promise you that I will not abandon the story. I hope you enjoy this chapter and that you will drop me a note at myoregon@yahoo.com to tell me what you think.

Also, I have another editor. I think he did a great job on this chapter and hopefully it will help reduce the number of e-mails I receive about my grammar. Besides, I need all the help I can get to prevent me from mixing up Jack and Rick.