

Exploring

by
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Characters:

Liam - Muscular forty-year-old straight man

Grant - Thin thirty -five-year old gay man

A bedroom, with a 40-year-old man, LIAM, tentatively removing the bedspread. Each time he tries to get into bed, he stops, as if there is a force field preventing him from proceeding. He tries fluffing up the pillows. The door creaks open, and a younger man, Grant, enters.

GRANT

Oh, I'm sorry, it looks like you were trying to get to sleep.

LIAM

That's a good word, "trying," but not succeeding. You know, this is the first time I'm sleeping in this bed. Since Betty died, I've been sleeping on the couch in the living room. How could I dare to be on this mattress without her by my side?

LIAM almost tears up but stops himself.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Did you want to talk to me about something?

GRANT

The memorial service for Betty.

LIAM

I thought it went okay. I guess it was a good thing that we waited until all the family from out of town could attend. I think your sister would have appreciated the event.

GRANT

Yes. The thing is I'm worried about you. I know it would have been difficult for you to speak. But you hardly talked to anyone afterwards. You're usually such a good conversationalist.

LIAM

I think the grieving process is catching up with me, or I'm still in shock. We were married for fifteen years, but it feels like a lifetime.

Cancer is such a shit storm. And we were so intimate with one another. I didn't want to share that with anyone.

GRANT

I saw her OB-GYN there. I'm surprised she made an appearance.

LIAM

I still blame her for Betty's miscarriage. Not knowing that Betty had celiac disease.

GRANT sits down on a chair by the bed.

GRANT

I know that Betty wanted to be a mother. You both would have made such great parents.

LIAM

Don't remind me. If there had been a child, I wouldn't feel so alone. Damn! Hey, what was the deal with Craig? I could feel the awkwardness. Didn't you used to date him? I never understood why that didn't work out.

GRANT

He wanted me to move in with him, and I just didn't want that sort of commitment. And don't even mention the word *monogamous* to me or anything about my fear of saying "*I love you.*" That seemed to be a showstopper for Craig because I couldn't express that feeling with him.

LIAM

Wow! That really hit a nerve. At least in that department, you are so different from your sister. You would think that after AIDS and with marriage being legal for same sex that fidelity would be more popular in the LGBTQ community.

GRANT

I guess I'm old school or an outlier. In the past, gay men didn't want to follow heterosexual guidelines about relationships. So many straight people end up getting divorced over the issue of cheating. I've always practiced safe sex, so Betty never had to worry about me getting sick. I'm still young. I think I'll have time to settle down when I get to be an old man . . . like you.

LIAM hits GRANT.

GRANT (CONT'D)

Ouch! That hurts!

LIAM

You have to respect your elders.

They both laugh.

LIAM (CONT'D)

When you mentioned about having a hard time saying "*I love you,*" it seemed that you had no problem telling Betty that you loved *her*. In fact, you've even said that to me.

GRANT

I guess I'm complicated. But seriously, you know Betty told me that I should act like some sort of Guardian Angel after she died. That you didn't have any friends besides her. I should take care of you.

LIAM laughs.

LIAM

Ha! She told me the same thing about you, "My brother is going to need lots of help after I'm gone. Think about it. He and I lived together most of our lives. And he's never had any kind of long-term relationship. It's a good thing he's living with us."

GRANT

And she probably said I was immature and a slut because I've been with so many men. And that I was bad with money. She was so supportive of me with my dreams of being an actor. That was part of the reason she wanted me staying here. That if I didn't have to pay rent, I could pursue my acting career full time. Look how *that* turned out. I failed her!

LIAM

Betty never said that. She was always proud of you. You don't know how lucky you are to even have a sister. I'm an only child, and so many of my friends are either not close with their siblings or even estranged from them. I mean, you guys were like twins!

GRANT starts to cry.

GRANT

If your goal was to make me cry, you've succeeded.

LIAM

But I have to tell you, that it's a blessing having you here. There are times when I get home from work and can't bear to open the door. Like this place is a tomb. So quiet without Betty. You're a piece of her, and that is so comforting to me.

GRANT

In some ways, you're a piece of Betty, too. You know the cliches about after you're married, you take on the characteristics of your spouse. Sometimes even looking alike. Look at you; how you would finish either other's sentences! I was jealous.

LIAM

Oh, come on! Talk about *jealous*! How do you think I felt when you and Betty

were so tight with each other. There were times that I felt like a third wheel when you guys reminisced about the past.

LIAM looks at his hands and winces.

LIAM (CONT'D)

I've started chewing on my fingernails again since Betty died. Damn! She would always reprimand me. She would clean up my nails and figure out a way for them to heal. I miss that.

GRANT

I watched her do it once. Do you want me to attempt it?

LIAM

As long as it doesn't make things worse.

GRANT finds a bowl in the bathroom, fills it with warm water and takes LIAM's large rough hands and gently places them in the bowl. He begins massaging the palms searching for pressure points. Then GRANT cups his hands like a fist and rolls his open fist up and down LIAM's fingers.

GRANT

Am I hurting you?

LIAM

No pain, no gain!

GRANT continues massaging LIAM's fingers and then stops.

GRANT

Why don't you take off your wedding ring? You probably have dry skin under there.

LIAM

I've never taken off the ring since we got married.

GRANT

Just for a minute. I promise we'll put it right back on.

LIAM

God, I was just remembering when I broke my index finger on my left hand and the doctor kept insisting he had to take off the ring. That they couldn't x-ray my hand, and if it was broken and needed to be splinted the ring had to be removed. I begged them not to do it. Luckily, it was only a sprain.

As GRANT uses oil on LIAM's fingers, the ring naturally falls off into the bowl. LIAM gasps, closes his eyes and lets GRANT take the ring out of the bowl. LIAM looks liberated. GRANT finalizes the massage. LIAM smiles looking at his fingers.

LIAM (CONT'D)

You're a miracle worker. Almost as good as your sister.

GRANT

It *is* amazing, the change. Good enough for a commercial. Now don't let my work go to waste by biting your nails.

LIAM

How much do you charge?

GRANT

How about we do a trade? Wanna' give me a pedicure? My toes are in almost as bad shape as your fingernails.

LIAM takes the bowl of water and begins massaging GRANT's feet until GRANT starts giggling.

GRANT (CONT'D)

I'm ticklish! Stop!

LIAM

Don't be such a baby! I'm just getting started.

LIAM uses his knuckles and kneads them against GRANT's feet. When GRANT moans, LIAM stops.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Your sister used to joke that when I massaged her feet, it felt like she was having an orgasm.

GRANT

Ach! Too much information.

After drying GRANT's feet, LIAM takes a special jasmine moisturizer and rubs some on GRANT's feet.

GRANT (CONT'D)

Boy, you are good! I can see why Betty fell in love with you. Wow!

LIAM

When I was massaging your feet, they reminded me so much of Betty's. Even your smell is similar to Betty's. In some weird way, it feels like Betty is still alive And with us.

As LIAM takes away the bowl, GRANT stands up. He loses his footing and collapses into LIAM. LIAM is about to kiss GRANT, but GRANT stops him.

GRANT

What's going on? Do you know what you're doing? I'm your brother-in-law!

LIAM

But I've seen the way you've looked at me. It never bothered me. To be honest, I was flattered by it. I've always been secure in my sexuality. There is something going on between us.

GRANT

But still this doesn't make sense! You should stop!

LIAM

And you're telling me that my wife dying at thirty-five makes any kind of sense?

GRANT

I'm going back to my bedroom.

LIAM doesn't let GRANT leave and attempts to kiss him. GRANT tries to resist but eventually succumbs to LIAM's affection. Then GRANT becomes the aggressor and begins sucking on each of LIAM's fingers. GRANT takes his hand and leads him to bed. Lights dim. When lights come up, LIAM is frantically searching the room.

LIAM

Where is it?

GRANT

What?

LIAM

My wedding ring. My hand feels naked.

GRANT gets up out of bed and finds the ring on the bedroom cedar chest and shows it to LIAM. Only when GRANT slides the ring on LIAM's finger, does LIAM relax.

LIAM (CONT'D)

It's a sign from Betty. She wants me to grieve. I don't deserve any happiness! I don't deserve you, Grant!

GRANT holds LIAM's hands.

GRANT

Don't say what you don't deserve. Honestly, I have always had a crush on you, but I would never do anything about it. I wouldn't dare do something to hurt my sister. And anyway you're straight.

LIAM

Then why am I feeling this way about you? I just had a crazy thought. That this is what Betty meant about taking care of one another. Could she have had that kind of insight? That we might be attracted to one another? This is dangerous territory, but you know, maybe I don't care.

GRANT

I think she would approve.

GRANT begins kissing LIAM.

THE END