

Just a heads-up; This one's a cliff hanger. A Grand Canyon sized cliff hanger.

Everyone keeps asking for "more" and "faster" (pun intended). Anyway, just to give everyone an idea of what and when I try to post. Each chapter is about 10- to 12 pages long and that's about all I can manage each week. Sorry! I do stay a couple of chapters ahead, but I only do that to give myself a cushion, in case something comes up and I don't get to work on a chapter.

I try to post once a week. Usually I post each chapter by Sunday or Monday, so you should see it by Tuesday at the latest. Hope this helps. And, please send me feedback and tell me how you liked the chapter.

WARNING AND NOTICES: This is a work of fiction. All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. Do not read if you are underage according to the laws in the country, state/province, county, city/town/village or township where you live.

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Chapter 9

After Liam dropped off the kids at school, he headed over to the mall. With morning traffic, it was almost a forty minute drive from their little suburb to the mall, which opened at ten. He ended up getting there about twenty minutes early and had to wait in the parking lot until they opened.

The swim trunks for himself and Chris were an easy purchase. However, the bathing suits for the little girls were a real shocker. He couldn't believe they actually made bikinis for toddlers. '*Who, in their right mind, would put a bikini on a two year old?*' He grumbled to himself, as he held up one to inspect. It had little fish right in the spots that would cover the front top portion. '*Yeah, she doesn't even have anything to help hold the fish in place. No way in hell is my little girl wearing that.*' He mumbled, again to himself. In the end, he chose a nice one piece that had several of the Disney princesses on the front.

After he made his purchases, he started the forty minute drive back to their little burb. Robert lived up in the hills, not too far from where Julie and Adam had lived. His house was in a slightly more affluent neighborhood. The houses were more secluded and had more land surrounding them. It was a beautiful home with a long drive that circled around the front of the house. There was a huge recessed double entry door with a large arched transom.

Robert was at the door to greet Liam before he even got out of the car.

"Liam, I'm so glad you could make it. Hopefully you found the place easily enough." Robert said, stepping outside and extending his hand in friendly greeting.

“Hello, Robert, thanks for inviting me and yes, I found the place just fine. This is a very beautiful home.” Liam replied, shaking Robert’s offered hand.

“Yes, it is, why don’t I give you a tour. Lunch should be ready by the time we’re done.” He said as he showed Liam into the house.

The house was amazing. The first floor had a formal living and dining room appointed with columns, flank by a two-story foyer. The living room was warmed by a hearth and the family room, also hearth-warmed, opened to a nook and the kitchen. The dining room adjoined the island kitchen via a butler’s pantry. A covered porch opens just beyond the nook. Down a short hall was a home office, one half-bath, one full bath, the laundry room and access to a multi-car garage. On the opposite end of the main level was a magnificent master suite with sitting room, fireplace, and pampering bath.

The upper level had two family bedrooms, a guest suite, a library, an exercise room and an entertainment room.

Liam was in awe. He had driven up through the hills in the past, but had never actually had a chance to see the inside of one of the homes. Julie and Adam’s home was extremely large, almost the same size, only without the library and exercise room, but it definitely wasn’t as grand as this house.

Lunch was waiting for them outside on the back porch. The back yard was complete with children’s playground, swimming pool, and tennis/basketball court.

While they ate lunch, Liam filled Robert in on how the kids were doing, the state of the investigation, and the situation with their living arrangements.

“Yeah, I talked to your dad yesterday and he mentioned you were looking for a place. He also mentioned this morning that you were probably going to be staying with them until you found someplace. That’s one of the reason’s I wanted to meet with you.” He said, pausing to take a drink of his tea, and then continuing.

“As you know, there is a substantial settlement coming from the insurance company that you can put towards your purchase. I know that you were fairly comfortable to begin with, but now that you’ve added to that with Adam and Julie’s estate, you have more funds at your disposal than you probably realize.” He finished.

“I hadn’t really given much thought to the amount of money coming from their estate. I just don’t feel right using that money. I don’t know why, but using that money just feels wrong.” Liam responded.

“Yes, I can understand that, but you know that Julie and Adam would only want the best for Chris and Cassie. They would want you to use the money to make sure they had everything they need. The sole purpose of the money is to take care of Chris and Cassie. You shouldn’t feel guilty for using it for that purpose. Now, with that said, I have a proposition for you.” He said,

before pausing to take another drink of his tea and, Liam supposed, waiting for a response from him.

“A proposition? Okay, I’m listening.” Liam said.

“Yes, well, my wife and I bought this house just after Adam and I made partners at the law firm. It was sort of a gift to us. However, it has always been a dream of ours to have our own house built. We purchased the land over a year ago and construction has already started. It’s expected to be finished in about sixty to ninety days. We would like to sell this house to you.” He said, pausing again for another drink.

“What?” Liam asked, thinking that he couldn’t have possibly heard Robert right.

“You heard me, we would like to sell you this house. We’re willing to offer you a price well below market value. Besides, since we won’t have to put the house on the market, we can expect to save a substantial amount just from that alone. Please understand Liam, that I loved Adam and Julie very much. Adam was like a brother to me and I miss him tremendously. We, my wife and I, would very much like the opportunity to do something for the kids and for you.” He finished.

“Wow, I’m... I’m...Speechless. Can we really afford something like this once the estate’s been settled?” Liam asked.

“Yes, most definitely, like I said, there will be a substantial settlement coming from the company that insured Julie and Adam’s house. That will cover a large portion of the purchase price. Their estate can easily cover the balance. Plus, we’ll be offering you a very good price. And, please don’t think that you have to accept right now. You can think about it over the weekend, maybe talk with your mom and dad. We can discuss it more next week. Right now, I just wanted to put the offer out there.” Robert said.

“Thank you Robert, I don’t know what else to say, except thank you.” Liam said.

“No thanks are necessary. My wife and I really want to do this for the kids.” He said.

After that, discussion moved on to the subject of Julie and Adam’s estate. Robert had several documents that needed Liam’s signature. The will had gone through probate and the law firm was now working to transfer all holdings over to Liam. Robert explained that this would still take some time, probably a couple of months before everything would be transferred, but now that the will had gone through probate, they could actually proceed.

Later, while Liam was driving over to pick up the kids from school, he started thinking about Robert’s offer. The house was amazing. He could easily see the kids growing up in that house. He wasn’t sure if the kids would still be in the same school district though and that could be a problem. He felt that it would be more important to keep Chris in the same school, than to have that house. In the end, he decided that he would talk to his mom and dad and get their opinion.

If it still sounded like a good idea after talking with them, he would talk to the school principal to see if something could be worked out.

Once Chris was in the car, he talked non-stop about his day at school, especially about his math test.

“I got all the math problems right on my math test. I missed school all last week and I still got all the problems right. Mrs. Piper said she was proud of all my hard work.” He said, the self gratification obvious in his voice. “Oh, and I also got invited to Peter’s birthday party next week. Can I go?” He asked.

“Yeah, you can go. And, I want to see your test. We’ll have to put it on the fridge at Grandma and Grandpa’s.” Liam responded.

“Okay. You have to call Peter’s mom and tell her I can come. It says that in the invitation, so don’t forget to call.” He said.

“I promise, I won’t.” Liam said, chuckling slightly at Chris’s excitement.

Once home, Liam gave the kids their swim suits and told them to go get ready for the barbecue. Later, after they were ready, Liam let them watch TV and eat a snack that Grandma had waiting for them, while he sat down with his mom and dad and told them about Robert’s offer.

“That’s a very generous offer, Liam. Are you going to accept?” His dad asked.

“I think I’m going to, yes, I really want to, but I’ve got a couple of other things to consider. I’ve got to make sure that Chris can stay at the same school. No matter what, he’s staying at that school. I’m going to talk to the principal on Monday and see if that can be arranged. The other problem is that we won’t be able to move into the house for another sixty to ninety days, so I don’t know where we’ll stay until then.” He finished.

“Of course, you’ll just stay here.” His mom interjected. “I know it will be a tight squeeze.” She added, putting up her hand to stop Liam’s obvious argument. “But, it’s only for a couple of months. This is really an opportunity that you can’t pass up, Liam. Besides, it’ll be nice to have the kids here for a while.” She finished.

“We can put a queen size bed in your room and you can sleep there. The kids can sleep on the pull-out sofa or with you, whichever is easiest, but we can easily make accommodations.” His dad added.

“Well, I guess I don’t have much of an argument. So, I’ll call Robert on Monday, after I talk to the school.” Liam said, grinning from ear to ear. This house was really more than he could ever have dreamed.

They arrived at Rick’s at about half past five. The front door was wide open and they could hear music playing and people talking. Liam knocked on the open door and was soon greeted by a

big dog. He looked to be a german shepherd mix and his tail started wagging ninety miles an hour when he saw the kids.

“Hey, Uncle Leem, look, it’s a dog. Isn’t he cute?” Cassie exclaimed as she reached out to pet him. The dog thought this was a great idea and immediately started forward, knocking Cassie down on her bum. Cassie was laughing heartily and the dog was giving her face a bath with his tongue.

Chris walked up and grabbed the dog by the nape of his neck and started pulling him off of Cassie.

“Hey, you guy’s made it.” Rick said, suddenly appearing in the doorway.

“Rick!!!” Both the kids screamed excitedly, their attention turning away from the dog long enough to run up and give Rick a hug.

Rick bent down, wrapped his arms around both of the kids and picked them up into a big bear hug.

“Ecco i miei piccoli campioni! Come state bellissimi? Che bello rivedervi.”¹ He said, as he started spinning around with them in his arms, causing the kids to break out into giggles, while the dog started barking and jumping up, obviously wanting to join in the fun.

“Rick, is that your dog? What’s his name?” Chris asked, as Rick finally set them down on the floor again.

“Sorry about the dog. He’s overly excited right now. I don’t know his name. He’s been wandering around the fire station for a couple of days now. At first I figured he probably belonged to someone and had just gotten loose, but when he was still coming round after a couple of days, I figured I better get him off the streets before he got hit by a car. I’m going to take him to the humane society on Monday.” He said.

“Oh, well, he seems to be a really good dog. Good with the kids. How come you’re not keeping him?” Liam asked, as they watched the kids. The dog had rolled over onto his back and was having his tummy rubbed by both Chris and Cassie.

“I would love to keep him. I’ve always wanted a dog, but with my work schedule, since I’m gone for several days at a time, I can’t really have any animals. I can manage fish, but that’s about it.” Rick replied. “Anyway, come on in. Just about everyone is here already.” He added, as he escorted them into the house.

Before Rick had a chance to introduce Liam to anyone, Chris and Cassie saw Bren and Jacob, Stacey’s kids, and were off to play with them. Of course, the dog was glued to their side, hoping

¹ “Ecco i miei piccoli campioni! Come state bellissimi? Che bello rivedervi.” Translates to; “Here are my little champs! How are you, cute ones? It’s so good to see you again.”

for some more attention. Liam noticed that there were kids everywhere. Maybe even more kids than adults.

“Liam, I want you to meet my mom and dad.” Rick said, as he escorted Liam outside.

Rick’s dad was sitting at a table with several other men, Mitch included.

“Liam, this is my dad Niccolo, or Nico for short. Dad, this is Liam.” Rick said, as Nic stood up and shook hands with Liam.

“Good to meet you Liam.” Nico replied.

“You too, sir.”

“Please, just call me Nico.”

“Okay, Nico.” Liam said, as Rick turned his attention to a couple of the other men at the table.

“You know Mitch already, of course.” Rick said, as Mitch and Liam nodded to each other.

“This is Michael. He’s married to my sister Angelica. She’s the one who works at the hospital and will be getting us in to see Sam and Mike next week.” Rick said, as they shook hands.

“They have a couple of rugrats running around here somewhere and they also have one more on the way.” He finished, looking around to see if he could locate the rugrats.

“I think they are in playing the game box.” Rick’s dad said.

“Oh, okay. Where’s Gino and Savio? They were here a minute ago.” Rick asked.

“They decided to get the barbecue set up.” Nico said.

“Oh, okay, we’ll catch them later.” Rick said to his dad, and then turned to Liam. “Come on, I want you to meet my mom. She should be in the kitchen.”

Liam followed Rick back into the house and to what he assumed would be the kitchen.

The kitchen wasn’t very large, but there were three women squeezed in there busily working and chatting away.

“Ma, come here, I want you to meet someone.” Rick said, once they graced the entrance to the kitchen.

“Riccardo, what are you doing in here. There’s not enough room. I’ve been trying to get your sisters out too, but they will not go. You, you go on and get out of here.” Rick’s mom said, shooing him away and not really even listening to what he had said.

“Ma, I just want you to meet someone. Come here Mami.” He said, this time getting her attention.

“Oh? Who do you want me to meet? Is this your Liam?” She asked, nodding her head towards Liam while she dried her hands on a dish towel.

Surprised by her choice of words, Liam looked up at Rick.

“Oh, Liam, look at you. You are quite the handsome man. I’m so glad to meet you. My Riccardo and Stacey have talked about you and your Christopher and Cassandra so much.” She said, coming up and enveloping Liam in her arms. Over his shoulder, she addressed Rick. “Questo è un gran bel ragazzo, Riccardo, non fartelo scappare.”²

“Mamma, per favore! non di fronte a tutti! è già fidanzato”³ Rick said, reaching over and trying to pull Liam from his mother’s clutches.

“Tua sorella Stacey mi ha detto che ha lasciato il suo fidanzato.”⁴ She said, as she finally released Liam from the hug.

“Ma, voi e Stacey bisogno di fatti gli affari tuoi.”⁵ Rick said, but his mom just harrumphed and turned her attention back to Liam.

“Umm… I… Well, thank you. It’s nice to meet you too, Mrs. Romano.” Liam said, not quite sure what to say, since they were obviously talking about him.

“Oh, no, you call me Isabella.” She said.

“Okay, Isabella, thank you.” Liam said.

“Now, you boys head on outside and visit.” She said, shooing them off again.

A little later, while the kids were playing catch with the dog, Liam was sitting at the picnic table with Rick’s dad, Michael, Savio, and Mitch. They were all consumed in conversation. Liam, however, wasn’t listening. His eyes were focused on Rick.

Rick was working at the barbecue while talking to one of his brothers. They were talking and laughing while they worked and Liam couldn’t help but take the time to study Rick’s features. He truly was a beautiful man. He had dark brown hair, almost black actually. It was cut short in the back and over the ears, but a little longer in the front, where it almost reached his eyes. His

² “Questo è un gran bel ragazzo, Riccardo, non fartelo scappare.” Translates to; “This is a very handsome guy, Riccardo, keep it.”

³ “Mamma, per favore! non di fronte a tutti! è già fidanzato; Translates to; “Mom, please, don’t embarrass me! He’s engaged.”

⁴ “Tua sorella Stacey mi ha detto che ha lasciato il suo fidanzato.” Translates to; “Your sister, Stacey, told me he left his boyfriend.”

⁵ “Ma, voi e Stacey bisogno di fatti gli affari tuoi.” Translates to; “Mom, you and Stacey need to mind your own business.”

eyes were a very vibrant blue color. His lips were actually a little narrow, but looked extremely soft and definitely kissable. When he smiled or laughed, his whole face lit up and his eyes sparkled. He had broad shoulders and a large chest. His pecs were well defined through the tight shirt he was wearing and his nipples were pressing against the material. *‘Those are definitely kissable.’* Liam thought to himself, as the smile on his face grew from the thought.

“Hello, earth to Liam, come in Liam.” Mitch said, while waving his hand in front of Liam’s face.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I guess my mind was wandering.” Liam said.

“Yeah, your mind and your eyes.” Mitch said, grinning at Liam.

Liam looked at Mitch, surprised and embarrassed that he’d been caught drooling over Rick. Liam’s eyes then scanned the table and all of them were looking at him.

“My son, he’s not so bad to look at, is he?” Nico asked, grinning like the cat that caught the canary.

“Umm, no, I was just... I mean I...” Liam stuttered.

“It’s okay, we didn’t mean to embarrass you.” Mitch said.

“No, really, I was just lost in my thoughts.” Liam said.

Just then, Liam was saved, none too soon, by Isabella bringing out several dishes of food. Rick’s sisters, Angelica and Stacey were following with condiments and paper goods. He briefly glanced back over at Rick, only to find Rick watching him this time. Rick smiled and gave a slight nod as Liam turned his attention back to Isabella.

“Nico, go let Riccardo know that everything is ready and help him get the chicken on the table. Mitch and Michael, you go get the ice chest and drinks.” Then she turned her attention to Liam. “Liam, you go into the kitchen and get the salad and dressings that are in the refrigerator. The dressings are in the door and the salad is on the top shelf.” She finished.

“Yes ma’am.” He said.

“No, no ma’am, I told you Isabella.” She said firmly.

“Sorry, I’d be happy to help, Isabella. Be right back.” He said.

Heading into the kitchen, Liam opened the door to the refrigerator. The salad was on the top shelf, but there were no dressings in the door. Liam leaned in to start moving things around to see if he could locate the dressings.

Just as he found what he was looking for and stood back up, he felt someone come up behind him and press in really close.

“Whatcha looking for?” Rick asked, pressing in closer and looking over Liam’s shoulder.

Liam could feel Rick’s breath ghost over his neck as he spoke. The sensation caused goose bumps to break out on his arms and he involuntarily closed his eyes.

Rick reached under Liam’s arm, like he was going to pull him in and hug him to his chest, but instead, only reached for a container of parmesan cheese. “Can I help you find something?” Rick asked.

This time, Liam thought he could feel Rick’s lips almost brush against the sensitive spot between neck and shoulder. It practically took every bit of self control he had not to lean forward so that his ass would press against Rick’s groin. Still, he couldn’t help the slight moan that escaped his lips as he tried to get his mind and body to focus. His heart was beating fast and hard as he tried to catch his breath and respond to Rick’s question. God, he could even smell him, and fuck, did he ever smell good.

“I... I... Your...” ‘*Shit, come on Liam, spit it out.*’ He mentally berated himself. “Your... Uh... Your mom... She sent me in here for the salad and dressings. I was trying to find the dressings.” He finally managed.

“Oh, well, let me help you with that.” Rick said, and he took the salad dressing from Liam, their fingers brushing momentarily. Rick’s hand was warm and the slight touch caused the goose bumps to rise again.

“Uh... Thanks.” Liam said, as he reached back into the fridge for another bottle of dressing. Leaning down into the fridge inadvertently caused Liam’s ass to actually press into Rick’s groin, and he could swear he heard a hiss escape Rick.

“I think that’s it. Why don’t you grab the salad and I’ll follow you with the dressing and parmesan cheese.” Rick said, as he finally stepped back from Liam. “Mom sent me in for the cheese. I don’t know how she can like this canned crap. Everything she makes has to be from scratch, but when it comes to the parmesan cheese, she has to have this processed canned stuff. Go figure.” Rick said, rolling his eyes and effectively breaking all sexual tension in the room.

Dinner was delicious. Rick had barbequed the chicken and Isabella had put together a couple of Italian dishes. Rick said it was ‘Risotto alla milanese’ or rice with saffron. There was also a pasta dish that Rick called ‘tagliatelle alla bolognese’. Liam liked the rice, but wasn’t too keen on the pasta dish. The kids also ate healthy helpings of the chicken and the rice.

After dinner, several of the kids and a few of the adults decided to go swimming. They ended up forming a group to play Marco Polo. It was a competition of the adults against the kids. Even the smaller kids, like Cassie were included in the game. They went piggy back on the adults. The kids got to call Marco Polo and the adults would be their vehicles. Liam almost couldn’t stop laughing long enough to play the game. It was basically eight or nine kids, who ganged up on Rick, Gino and Mitch. The adults didn’t have a snowball’s chance in hell. Savio finally

joined in too, hoping, unsuccessfully, to give the adult team a fighting chance. They had a lot of fun and Liam couldn't remember the last time he had laughed so much and he hadn't seen the kids so carefree since the fire. It was truly a wonderful sight.

After the game ended, several of the kids, Chris included, headed inside to play games on Rick's game system. Liam and Rick were relaxing in the lounge chairs on the patio by the door and Cassie was lying with Liam, trying desperately to stay awake.

"So, Liam, tell me about yourself. Have you always lived in Manitou Springs?" Rick asked.

"Yep, both my sister and I were born here. In fact, my parents still live in the same house. I couldn't imagine living anywhere else. What about you?" Liam countered.

"No, we moved here from Colorado Springs when I was twelve. By the time we moved, there were only three of us kids left at home. Most of my brothers and sisters still live in Colorado Springs." He said.

"What made you decide to become a firefighter?" Liam asked.

"I did a stint in the Army as a field medic right after high school. When I got out, I knew I wanted a career where I could use my medical training. I did a little research, and it was firefighting that really caught my interest. It was a good choice. I really love what I do and I have a great group of men and volunteers that support me. How about you? You work in finance or something like that, don't you?" Rick asked.

"Yeah, sort of. I'm a business analyst. Basically, I do financial feasibility studies. I assess existing and new business opportunities and products and then provide my customers with business models that they can base their decisions on." Liam said, and then added. "I never know how to explain what I do to people who aren't familiar with the business. It's a hard job to define."

"That's okay, I think I have a pretty good idea." Rick said. "Well, it looks like someone finally lost the battle." Rick said, nodding towards Cassie, who was lying across Liam's chest, completely conked out.

"Yeah, it's been a busy day for her. We should probably head out." Liam said, as he stood up while cradling Cassie in his arms.

"I'll run in and get Chris." Rick said.

A few minutes later, Rick was walking Liam and the kids to the car.

"Listen, I was thinking that maybe we could go to the hospital on Tuesday. My sister will be on duty and wouldn't have any problems getting the kids in. Would that work for you?" Rick said.

“Sure, we can do that. Did you still want to meet for dinner at Frankie’s beforehand?” Liam asked.

“Yeah, that would be good. How about we meet there at six, have dinner and then head over to the hospital?” Rick offered.

“Okay, that works for me. Oh, and Rick, thanks for such a great evening. I don’t remember the last time that I enjoyed myself so much and I know the kids had a really good time tonight too. Maybe they’ll even sleep through the night.” He said.

“No problem. My family had wanted to meet you and the kids. I just hope my family wasn’t too overwhelming and that you’ll want to come back.” Rick teased.

“We’d love to come back and your family is great. You’re a very lucky man to have such a loving family.” Liam said, as they reached the car and he started to get Cassie buckled into her seat. She was sleeping like a baby, didn’t even wake up while he was buckling her in.

Rick helped Chris get buckled in and then came around to the driver’s side as Liam was getting into the car.

“You take care of yourself, Liam, and call me if you need anything.”

“I will, and thanks Rick... For everything.” Liam said.

“No problem. I’ll see you on Tuesday.”

On the way home, Liam started thinking about the evening while both Cassie and Chris slept silently in the back. He really did have a good time. Rick really was an amazing man, in fact, his whole family was pretty amazing. Goose bumps started to rise again, when he thought about the slight contact in the kitchen. He could almost smell Rick again. ‘Shit, Liam, get a grip, you don’t need to start anything right now.’ Liam silently reprimanded himself.

When he arrived back at his parents, he was torn against waking Chris up or leaving him in the car while he hauled Cassie into the house. He really didn’t want to wake Chris up, but he didn’t ponder on it too long. With everything going on, there was no way in hell he was going to leave Chris in the car. So, he got Cassie out of the car first and then carried her around to the other side of the car and woke Chris up.

“Come on Chris, let’s get you upstairs and into bed. You and Cassie want to just sleep with me tonight?” Liam asked.

“Uh Huh.” Chris said, as he nodded drowsily.

When Liam got to the door, he found it wide open and it appeared that all the lights were off in the house. ‘That’s strange.’ He thought to himself, while the hairs on the back of his neck stood out in warning.

It was dark and he couldn't really make anything out inside the house, so he reached inside and turned on the entryway light. Light instantly flooded the living room and what Liam saw, made his heart skip a beat. The living room was ransacked. Everything was turned upside down, the whole place was a mess.

His first instinct was to run inside, calling for his mom and dad, but then he remembered the kids. They couldn't see this.

Instead, he grabbed Chris's hand, wheeled around and headed back to the car.

"Where are we going? What happened to Grandma and Grandpa's house?" Chris was asking.

"I don't know Chris, but I need to make a phone call really quick. You guys can wait in the car." Liam said.

Liam locked Chris and Cassie back in the car and then pulled out his cell phone to call Mitch.

Liam was pacing back and forth along the side of the car, impatiently waiting for Mitch to pick up the phone.

"Hello?" Mitch finally answered.

"Mitch? It's Liam. Something's wrong at my parent's house. I need the police here right now. I'm afraid they might be dead or hurt, or... Shit... I don't know where they are and I can't go in the house. I can't leave the kids and..." Liam rambled.

"Whoa, Whoa, Liam, slow down a minute. Where are you?" He asked.

"I'm at my parents and when I got here, their front door was wide open. When I turned on the entry light, the whole living room was a mess. God, Mitch, what do I do, what if someone is still inside. I have to keep the kids safe, but what if my parents are in there hurt?" Liam said.

"Okay, where are you and the kids right now? You're not in the house, are you?" Mitch asked.

"No, we're out front. I've got the kids locked in the car." Liam responded.

"Okay, that's good. Now, give me your parents address and I'll get the police dispatched out there right now." Rick said. After he got the address, he told Liam to stay on the phone and that he'd be back with him in a second.

That second dragged on for what seemed like forever before Mitch came back on the phone. In the meantime, his mind couldn't help thinking up horrible scenarios. Liam was so scared. He didn't think he or the kids could handle it if something happened to his parents too. He couldn't hold still while he waited for Mitch. He didn't know what to do with himself. He felt like he should be running into the house to make sure his parents were okay, but at the same time, afraid

of what he would find if he did. Besides, he knew he had to stay with the kids. He was really starting to get agitated, when Mitch finally came back on the line.

“Okay, Liam, I’ve got all available units on the way now. You just sit tight and they’ll be there in a few minutes. I’m still at Ricks, but I’m leaving now and I’ll be there shortly as well. Why don’t you get in the car and pull down the street a couple of houses down and wait for us there. I want you to stay on the line with me until I get there, okay? You don’t have to say anything, I just want to keep you on the line.”

“Okay, okay.” Liam said while nodding his head as he got in the car and headed down the street for another interminable wait.

To be continued...