

What's it about get back in that thing and get out of here that that bag of bones doesn't get? Is he deaf?

Where's the pepper spray? I'll use it on him if . . . where is it? Why do I always carry so much stuff in my purse? I'll use the horn button on my key thing if that scarecrow gets any closer. Where are you dad? Why doesn't he hear me? The whole world has to be hearing me screaming at that freak to leave me alone.

Why didn't I do what I was planning to do? They're waiting for me.

So help me mother. You've done it this time. Why are you always putting me in the middle of your fights with dad? Why can't you just tell me why you're always so mad at dad?

What's it going to take to get the dork to stop staring at me like . . . thank goodness, the pepper spray.

Like the pepper spray is going to help if . . . he can at least act like he's scared of me or something. Why won't he leave? Why did he follow me home? Why was he on the drive to my house? The meathead has to be blind if he didn't see the sign that says private road. That blockheaded stork probably can't even read.

He could've gotten me killed. There was no way for me to know when I came around the curve that he was puttering along in that rusty heap that he's driving. I couldn't have when I went around him missed that tree by more than just a few inches. No one ever comes down the drive to dad's house.

Maybe if I take off running . . . and if the crazy follows you into the house? What are you doing dad? Why aren't you ever there when I need you? This isn't good at all. I need help. Why won't someone help me?

You may be right this time mother with one of your self-fulfilling prophecies that . . . how many times have I heard you tell dad that we're living in a perfect place to be robbed or even worse. If this numskull had a gun, he probably wouldn't know how to use it.

What a sad looking flake. And like all your screaming and yelling and threatening and . . . has really been making an impression on him hasn't it?

Come on guy – why won't you get into your car and leave. I don't need this right now. I don't want this right now. Stop looking at me like . . . like maybe you need to use that pepper spray after all gal to wipe that dopey smirk off his face. He's not taking you serious. Just spray him. Why don't you spray him?

You're going to let him talk? He wants to know if this is where who lives? How does he know dad? He doesn't sound like he's from around here. What's that state on his wreck's license plate? There's no way that dilapidated thing could've made it from there to here by the way that . . . who is this guy?

This is going to get bad. Dad isn't going to come. What should I do? He wants to talk to dad. Why does he want to talk to dad? No one ever wants to talk to dad – unless it's senior pastor wanting him to write a check for something. Your name to fame dad – being a church treasurer for life.

Maybe the tramp was sent to . . . yah – like senior pastor is going to sign off giving an overgrown kid like that homeless bum some money. Has senior pastor ever given the okay to give benevolent fund money to anyone? That would be a miracle if . . .

How long are you going to stand there gal and . . . that gorpy looking wannabe stork really doesn't look very threatening so just put away your pepper spray, take your finger off the button on the fob, stop telling him to get back into his car or else and . . . dad has to be around here someplace.

What was mother's big emergency this time about anyway? You're always panicking mother. I wouldn't be here right now though mother if . . . you were hysterical. You were sounding like you were about to lose your best friend. You don't have any friends mother so . . . I told you mother that I'll give you five minutes and then I'm out of here. One less hour on the beach with . . . just to appease mother. It better be worth it mother. And I thought moving away from home was going to change everything.

What's that noise? It sounds like an old truck. Why would a truck be coming here? This is a private drive. What kind of truck is that? Why is there a pickup following the truck? Okay – the guy here has to be with them. What're they doing here? There's absolutely no way that they should be here.

He's not going to be happy if . . . I could tell that he wasn't pleased when I called him to tell him that I needed to go home for a few minutes – to take care of a crisis there. Other than this impatience thing, I sure do like the guy. Okay – you've only known him for a couple of months. This going to the beach with him today sure is going to be fun. This expecting me though to ask him first about inviting someone like best bud and her fiancé to go with us is a little over the top but . . . I'll get him to come around. I never thought that I would meet someone so . . . like almost perfect, from the church's post college age class. The guy sure can come up with some intriguing takes on those discussions that he likes to start.

I really want to settle down. It's so good to be finished with college – for now, and to be on my own with a job that I like. I'm not going to do what my cowardly sisters did to get away from mother – like finding jobs together way away from here but . . . it's sure going to be a happy day when I no longer have to listen to mother's groaning and moaning and . . . how can someone be so often so negative?

No – no – no. This is big time trouble. That's one big, scary . . . how did he get behind the steering wheel of that truck? If mother sees him, she'll really flip – like she hasn't already gone off the edge? How did mother get to be such a racist anyway?

I've got to scream. I can't. Run legs. Why won't they move? Don't let me stand here. Those two guys getting out of the pickup . . . the little guy looks like he has spent way too much time on the bottle. The skinny guy with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth . . . what's that about? Does he know that it's not lit? Where did that kid come from anyway? He has to be the skinny guy's kid. He looks just like him.

They're walking towards me. Why did I put the pepper spray and my car's key back in my bag? If I can get back into my car, I'll lock the doors and . . . dad will hear me honking my horn and . . . what're they planning to do to dad and mother?

He wants me to shake his hand. That's one big, strong hand. Don't make him mad. They call you Tiny. Why not? It has to make sense to someone. Okay – so the little guy's name is Paco, the skinny guy is Possum and his kid's name is Po. The guy does look a bit like an opossum. That's horrible being called an animal – especially an opossum.

Guess Tiny figured the skinny blockhead had already introduced himself to me – seeing that he had gotten here first. Why are they here? They don't belong here. They don't have any reason to be here.

You're going to have to look for dad. He must be behind the house. Do I go through the house to look for him or do I . . . make up your mind gal. Like it's a good thing to leave this weird oddball bunch of thieves standing around waiting for you to come back with dad so that . . .

Finally. Dad must've heard the noisy truck. How come he didn't hear me yelling like an idiot at whoever he is? Dad knows Tiny? How does he know Tiny? Why does dad seem like he's glad to see the other guys? What's going on here? Does this have something to do with mother's call? Just go in the house, talk with mother and . . . then have fun. Whatever is going to happen, dad seems to be on top of it so . . .

What's this thing dad about follow me guys to the back of the house? At least they're going alongside the side of the house to the back of the house instead of going through the house. Why are they going to the back of the house? I'm still alive. What just happened?

Did you see me dad? When you get wrapped up in your world dad . . . a daughter might like a hug from her dad once in awhile. I didn't do anything to make mother so . . . why is mother always so mad at you dad? You need to ask him sometime instead of . . . why doesn't dad ever want to talk with me? He doesn't talk with anyone. All he knows how to do is to move numbers around. He's an accountant gal. Your dad loves numbers. They're his friends.

How does dad know Tiny and his cohorts? What're they doing behind the house? If dad wanted me to know why he was taking the gang behind the house, he would've told me . . . yah – right away. When has dad ever told me what he's going to do? Just go in the house and . . . you need to clean your house mother.

Where's mother? Why doesn't she hear me calling? Has she locked herself in her bedroom again? Like that really helps. Come on mother – those five minutes that I told you that I'd give to you are already gone. If she messes up my relationship with my new guy, I'm never going to talk to her again.

About time mother showed herself. Mother sure can make a bad hair day look like a good hair day. She's been crying again. Her eyes are swollen. Great. What's new? At least she's not crying now. How can someone look so much like a lifeless, empty shell?

Why won't she say something? You need to get her to tell you what has upset her so much this time that . . . it's not right for her to keep them waiting from spending time on the beach soaking in the sun.

What's it going to take to get mother to say something. Why doesn't she just tell me whatever it is instead of . . . I'm getting a really bad feeling about today.

She wants me to sit down? I can't sit down. I've got to go. She's got to understand. Does she understand anything? Is it really true that after I was born that she began to act like . . . did I really make her like she is? I don't blame papa and mama for moving where mother's sister lives. Why can't you be happy mother that they still come back here a couple of times a year to spend time with you? Why do you always have to make everyone's life so miserable mother? Those two spineless sisters of mine moving as far away as they did leaving me with mother – they better know that they owe me big time.

How can mother do it year after year? Tomorrow morning mother you'll get yourself dressed up, you'll act chipper and you'll sit with dad like he's the greatest husband in the world. You and your class of middle school gals will have a great time together. Who is that person? Why does she only come alive when there's a church service? You need serious help mother. Why doesn't dad find help for you?

What does she want me to do? Staring at that pitiful thing curled up in a ball at the end of the couch is getting old fast. You could go sit next to her. And when have you ever done that? When have you ever gotten a hug from your mother? Why does it have to be her that gives you a hug; why can't you give her a hug? Why won't she just tell me what she wanted to tell me and . . . she has no right keeping my friends waiting. Just because she hasn't had any fun in her life since who knows when, it's wrong for her to keep me from having fun. How many times have you told her this? And what has it gotten you?

I know my guy will listen to me when . . . I'll make sure that we keep our marriage great. Papa buying a lot out in the woods as a wedding present where mother could build her dream house isn't what I'm going to ask dad to do for me. It would've been nice to grow up with neighbor gals to play with instead of being stuck in a home with a mother who really wasn't there and when she was there, having her telling us over and over again how miserable the kind of guy that dad is and that guys can't be trusted and . . . it's not fair that my sisters got to have a real mother for a few years – like until I was born.

Why can't mother be like her sister? She's so kind. I'm glad that Auntie has papa and mama nearby. I'm glad that papa and mama can enjoy their retirement in a place that they really enjoy. Why can't mother just fake being happy for them instead of . . . if she can do it for a church service, why can't she . . . why has dad stayed with mother? That's a rhetorical question gal. You know dad never gives up on anything. Dad respects papa and mama way too much to . . .

You're really getting someplace gal going over something that . . . nothing is ever going to change. Mother is going to continue to be who she is. Dad is going to . . . just get out of their worlds gal and everything will be fine. Do you really believe that? It's not going to happen.

What's mother mumbling about anyway? What did she just say? Dad is going to do what? I couldn't have heard that right. Dad can't do that. I've got to stop him.

Who does that fruitcake think she is anyway ripping me apart like I've done something horrible? I didn't do anything wrong. I was just doing what I was told to do.

She has totally flipped. Doesn't she know that all that yelling isn't going to get her anyplace?

So I was driving slow. That's not a crime. This is my first time to this place. She didn't die. She didn't hit anything. If she'll just stop screaming for a moment, I'll explain to her why . . .

What's she looking for in that purse? She's liable to pull out a gun. Maybe I should leave. Who is she? What has she got to do with this place? She sure has gotten herself all dolled up for someone.

That's a can of mace that she has in her hand. Is she going to try to mace me? She's scared of me. Why? No one is ever scared of me.

This screaming and yelling over and over again for dad . . . her father must be moneybags. The way that this place is maintained, moneybags has got to have money. Someone has sure put a lot of time in making this place look like a park. Mom-mom and all those rose bushes blooming in front of this place . . .

Does she know how bonkers she sounds? This would be hilarious if I wasn't the one who . . . what if she decides to come at me with those long, skinny arms? They could cause some serious hurt the way that she keeps waving them around.

Does she really think that I'm going to be intimidated by her screaming jumping-jack antics? Like a little can of mace is going to stop me if . . . if she would just let me . . . why is she acting like a maniac?

Maybe if I get back in old faithful, she'll . . . then what'll you do guy? Where would you go to get the money? What a bad decision you made guy. What other choice did you have anyway? Where would I be right now if . . .

Why is she looking at me like . . . about time that she stopped yelling for help. Why was she yelling for help anyway? Talk about someone being paranoid.

Why did she act so surprised when I asked her if moneybags lives here? At least I'm at the right house. The GPS actually got me to the right address. I still think that it's wrong that money is being taken out of my paycheck to pay for the thing. I didn't ask to have one. If I'd known before I . . .

Why does she need to know why I want to talk to her father? She's his daughter? He has a daughter? Senior pastor didn't tell me that moneybags has a daughter? Like that would be important to you guy?

Now what? What do I have to do to get her to understand that I'm not going to hurt her?

She's not listening to me. Why is she looking down her drive? What's that noise? Something sure needs a new muffler.

I thought that this was a private drive. What's a truck doing here – and a beat up old pickup? What's that thing behind the pickup? Does she really think that a can of mace is really going to . . . it's obvious that she wasn't expecting whoever those guys are to show up here.

Man – that's a big dude. What does he want? Why is he heading right toward us? Good grief gal – either scream or close your mouth. Please don't pull out that can of mace. You need to get between her and that giant before . . . why would I want to protect her? The guy would beat me to a pulp with one hand if . . .

What's the big brute got about showing his teeth? I sure hope that's a smile. If it isn't . . . shake his hand gal. Your name guy is what? That can't be his real name. That's who with you? Under what rock did he find those other guys? Why didn't he shake my hand? Why are they all looking at me like I'm supposed to know them? I would remember if . . .

They're looking for moneybags, too? Okay mom-mom, you wouldn't be happy at all if you heard me calling the church treasurer moneybags. But mom-mom, everyone on the church's governing board calls him that. Talk about a yes board. Whatever senior pastor wants or decides . . . why did I leave you alone? I didn't want to go on that spring break trip. Just because I had to go someplace in order to graduate . . .

Her father. Finally. He must have heard the truck. He knows the bruiser. There's no way that I'm ever going to call that guy Tiny. They know each other? Does she know that she's using her mouth to catch flies? It's obvious that she didn't know that . . . that's sad that her father never even said boo to her. The guy didn't even look at her. Hey guy – that's your daughter standing there looking like she's getting ready to cry. Like the guy has given you the time of day. Face it – he didn't recognize you. Now what do I do?

I might as well follow them to the back of the house. Wow – is this a beautiful place. The gal isn't coming with us? Are you wishing that she was going with you instead of going through the front door into the house? She really needs a big mom-mom hug. I'm sure not going to give her a mom-mom hug but . . . what's wrong with her father anyway? The guy has to be blind to not see how flustered that she was.

Why is everyone going to the back of the house? I feel like I'm trailing the three stooges plus one. The toothless short guy has to be from Mexico as . . . he's probably not legal. He probably doesn't speak a word of English either. The other guy . . . what's this thing about walking around with a cigarette dangling from your mouth. Either light the thing or . . . guy – you really aren't setting any kind of example for your kid. Like you really have a handle on life yourself don't you guy? Go ahead and stereotype everyone if it makes you feel any better. If they knew where I grew up . . .

Talk about an idyllic setting. This would be my dream place. I didn't know that there was a lake around here. To live in a house that's located right at the edge of a lake . . . it's too bad that that big tree has died. Everything else is so . . . let's see – the GPS said I was heading east when I was coming down the drive towards the church treasurer's house. This means that the back of the house has to be facing towards the east. Mom-mom would for sure get me up early every morning for me to watch the sun come up with her.

The city parks back home don't compare to this place. This place is like a botanical garden. How many different kinds of flowers are blooming back here? Butterflies are everywhere.

There must be birds around here, too. There are enough bird feeders to . . . that big tree had to have been fun to climb. Why do things die? How come I didn't know that there was such a beautiful place like this around here? Senior pastor probably has never been here. Why did I fall for his . . .

Why is everyone staring at the dead tree? There're all kinds of other things that they could be looking at right now instead of . . . I'm glad that they're having a good time. Will I ever feel like someone sees me around here? Why doesn't the church treasurer ask me why I'm here?

Senior pastor probably didn't call him – to tell him that I was coming over to his house for a check. It would be just like him. How did he ever become senior pastor? The guy is more of a flimflam artist than he's a preacher. That was really deceitful how he got me to come here to be the church's youth pastor.

This baloney about a growing church needing a youth pastor . . . how did senior pastor come about believing that a youth pastor is to act like a glorified babysitter? Just what I really want to do – have a lock-in at the church with a couple of undisciplined high school mush brains. At least their folks will be very happy to have them out of their houses for a night. What a waste of time the lock-in is going to be for me. All that those kids are going to want to do is to eat, watch movies and complain. You're doing really good yourself guy with this complaining thing. What am I to expect from some high school kids whose bar for a lock-in is to eat, watch movies and complain about their folks and their school and how unfair life is?

How could senior pastor even begin to think that I'd pay out of my own pocket for the pizza and for renting some movies? Having me show up after promising me that . . . and then telling me that the church can only pay me less than half than what he promised . . . that's wrong. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong. There was no way that I could go back home. Who would I go home to anyway? If mom-mom was still . . .

What is it God that you're trying to teach me? You're really making it awfully hard for me to believe what senior pastor is always saying – take advantage of God's grace that abounds. How come senior pastor gets to have all the fun around here? I can't believe that the guy has the gall to call preaching work. The guy is never in his church office. When does he prepare his sermons – as if they really sound prepared.

Standing here now guy looking out over the lake isn't going to solve your problems. If you're going to feed and entertain those spoiled high school kids all through tonight's lock-in, you need to get the check now from moneybags before he gets tied up with that assorted bunch of yahoos in doing whatever it is that they've come here to do. The morning is about half over with already.

What's this about walking around and around that tree and then looking up at . . . is there something up in the tree that I don't see? The tree sure looks out of place. There's color all around here. Everything is so alive – except for . . . did it just die or has it been dead for awhile? Hey old dead tree – I sure can identify with you.

They want me to do what? They want me to go with Po? Just like that – go with Po. I don't have time to follow a scrawny kid around. Can the guy just stop talking for a second with Tiny and . . . this is ridiculous. I'm never going to have everything in place for tonight. Face it guy – those self-centered teenagers aren't going to pay attention to your devotional. The last thing that those pinheads wanted to hear from anyone is that their sins without asking for forgiveness are going to . . . especially when senior pastor keeps saying that God's love guarantees a place in heaven for everyone.

I might as well go with Po. He kind of looks like he could be about as friendless as I feel.

Guess we're going to the pickup. Wonder why? Those are what? Chainsaws? That puny little squirt is going to carry both of those chainsaws? They have to be really heavy. What're they going to be used for anyway? Why don't you ask Po? Like I want the freckled face kid to know that I don't know anything?

Okay – I get to carry the rope and . . . why a chunk of iron? Just ask Po. What's wrong with Po knowing that you don't have a clue what's happening around here. Why don't you ask Po how old he is or what school he's going to go to when school starts in a couple of weeks or . . .

Like why doesn't Po ask you what your name is? When has someone around here asked me what my name is? It's been over two months and . . . ghetto life sure beats living in this part of the world. You should never have gone to the suburbs mom-mom to visit your family. The last time mom-mom that they visited you where you lived was years ago. They'll never miss you. The kids in the high school though are really, really going to miss you mom-mom. Why aren't I like you?

Am I mom-mom really like what my father was like? You could've told me more about him. I just don't know what to do anymore mom-mom. Being a youth pastor isn't like what I thought it was going to be.

Now what? They're going to cut down the dead tree. Why is that lock-in at the church have to be tonight? This could fun. Okay – I know – I wouldn't be here right now if it wasn't for the lock-in. What is it that you still have to do anyway for tonight? Buy food. Get the movies. You need to cash that check before the bank closes at noon otherwise . . . you need to get the check first.

Why doesn't Tiny try to get the other chainsaw going? He sure isn't having any success with the one that he's trying to . . . the thing is like a toy in his hands. Maybe I should volunteer to give it a try. I've sure gotten good at getting the church's old mower started. Good thing that I know something about working on motors. Old faithful could use mom-mom's old neighbor's touch these days. Nothing like having everything explained step by step no matter how many times the same things were done on old faithful. Before I got a driver's license to drive the thing, Mr. J sure was great about starting up old faithful every week, driving her around the block a few times and then putting her back in mom-mom's garage.

Why is it so funny that that thing won't start? Were they drinking before they showed up here? The guys sure make a really goopy looking trio. I feel like I'm watching a comedy act. Where did she come from?

Don't let dad do it. You know that you just told the chainsaw that it's not to start. You just made of a fool of yourself again. I don't care. The tree can't be cut down. It just can't be. I'm going to stand here with my arms around the tree so that they won't cut it down.

How does dad know that the tree is dead? Maybe it's not dead. Just because it doesn't have any leaves on it . . . why doesn't dad get it? He's not to cut the tree down.

Why won't dad listen to me? Why can't dad say something else besides the tree is dead and . . . why won't the guys stop staring at me? Why don't they just go away? I'm not leaving until they go away.

I know that they're laughing inside at me. I don't care. If dad cuts this tree down, this means that dad and mother are going to . . . I can't let that happen. Everything else has already died between them.

How can dad even think about cutting something down that papa and mama gave to him and mother right after they were married? Why can't my sisters be here? It's their tree, too. They're the ones who named it the nuptial tree. I've got to get dad to call them. They'll get dad to change his mind.

Why doesn't dad ever talk to me? How can I get dad to understand that he doesn't have the right to cut down this tree? What do I have to do to convince him that I'm not going to let him cut down this tree? Doesn't he care at all how mother feels about this tree? Why won't anyone listen to me? Why won't those nitwits just leave? Why am I crying?

That's my cell phone. What do I tell her? How can I go to the beach today when dad wants to . . . thanks dad. You and mother sure know how to mess up your daughters' lives. If you would like us to get married someday, you're going to have to quit always putting yourselves first.

I don't need to hurry for her? That's really kind of her. I wish that I could flex so easily. I'm so glad that she's my best bud. If it wasn't for her . . . I'm so glad that she asked if she and her beau could go with me and Mr. Right to the beach. I wish though that she felt the same way that I do about that good looking dude who . . . my guy will be talking so much that he won't even notice that best bud doesn't like him. It must be nice to have an ego. Why are you thinking about him now when . . .

Where did everyone go? Why didn't they all get back into whatever it is that they came here in instead of doing whatever it is that they're doing by the lake? I'll give him a call right now before . . .

Why is that gangly beanstalk coming toward me? Why does he want to know why the tree is so important to me? Who does the impudent smart aleck think he is? What's it to him anyway? He's not going to understand? Like I'm going to bring up family dirt to a total stranger? No way that's going to happen.

Why doesn't he go away? Tell him to get a haircut. He really needs one. How long is he going to stand there without saying anything else? Does he really expect me to tell him why . . . he doesn't need to know what I'm thinking. Why does he look so beaten down? Why doesn't he look at me? So – I'm crying – and I probably have mascara all over my face. Okay – he's not going to go away. How can it be so important to him to know that I watched this tree grow from something that wasn't much taller than what he is to . . . he has never climbed around in it like I did. He didn't fall from the big branch and break his arm like I did. He didn't swing from the swing that dad . . . no one has the right to take away memories just like that.

Why am I talking to him? Who is he anyway? If his eyes didn't look so haunted . . . he's listening.

How long have I been talking? When did we sit down on this bench? Why didn't I get the chance to sit out here with dad and mother like my sisters did to watch the sun come up in the mornings? Why is it my fault that dad and mother . . . does dad and mother ever talk to each other when they're home alone together?

Why did dad and mother decide to plant the tree in the middle of the back lawn? I would've probably planted it where mother has her garden. The only way to really appreciate the sunrise now is to sit on one of those plastic chairs next to the water.

Those motley guys are no more than overgrown children. I've got to get dad's video camera. Everyone would die laughing watching that bunch of goofs seeing who can skip a stone the furthest out into the lake. I've got to give that little Hispanic dude credit for trying. I sure wouldn't like it to have everyone laughing at me like they're laughing at him. That had to have been the first time that he has ever tried to skip a stone on water. That really was funny to see. I hope that Tiny doesn't keel over with a heart attack or something. The guy can't even stand up he's laughing so hard.

Dad's smiling. You're laughing dad. He can laugh? You're letting him put his big paw on your shoulder? Where's that space thing dad that you have with everyone? You don't touch anyone. No one touches you. You're not supposed to have fun. It's not right. You're going to destroy everything if . . .

There's no way the way that he's laughing that Tiny is going to . . . he's actually going to try and . . . I can do better than that. That's good – I'm glad that he's decided to sit down in one of those chairs before he falls into the lake.

What did he just say to me? Did he just thank me for telling him about the tree? I wish that his eyes weren't so . . . he obviously has known tough times. He probably needs the money from helping cut down the tree to get some food to eat. The guy probably doesn't have a day job by those rags that he's wearing. Talk about a mismatched shirt and pants. Poor guy having to do whatever to . . .

You're going to have to tell him that there's someone waiting for me – that you can't keep answering his questions. Just tell him. He'll understand. How do you know that?

This can't be happening. I'm not sitting on the bench right now right outside the sun porch of dad and mother's house telling an unkempt guy who looks like he's a homeless derelict about this place. This place should look like the way that it does for the amount of time that mother puts into taking care of her plants. Mother has a green thumb that's for sure.

If mother wasn't so . . . she'd be a really, really good . . . this having to make everything a teaching moment is probably why I'm a good cook. I'll probably want to have a garden, too, wherever my husband and I . . . quit gal putting off calling your guy. So he's not going to be happy that you're stuck here at your parent's house. He sure was up for spending an afternoon at the beach.

Why can't I stop talking to him? He's never seen a deer? I can't believe that. Deer are everywhere around here. Just because he asked me if there were fish in the lake, you don't have to tell him about the big bass that . . . if the guy has spent any amount of time living around here, he has to know something about fishing. There's something definitely back woodsy about him.

Like he really wants to know that papa taught his grandkids how to use a rod and reel to catch bluegills and bream and perch and whatever else that thought the worm that papa would put on our hook looked good enough to eat. If papa was telling the story right now . . . so I was the cute, spoiled little . . . who was to start kindergarten in the fall and who was always finding a way to get in trouble. Like he really cares that I thought my cousin's worm needed to be washed off as . . . or that she had left her rod and reel lying on the ground when she went into the house to go to the bathroom. He's smiling. Like he knows what's coming. He can't know. He can't know that as I was moving the worm back and forth in just an inch or so of water right at the edge of the shore when a monster bass swam in like a speeding torpedo to grab the worm. No way was I going to let go of the rod. He's not interrupting me. He's just letting me talk. He had to have been there to . . . I still don't believe papa when he says that I kept yelling at the fish to give me back my worm. If papa hadn't set the drag real light on the reel . . . I'll never forget the sound of the reel squealing as the bass was pulling out line.

Why would he say that? He was trying to be funny. That silly grin . . . okay – so now he knows why I've the best scream that he has ever heard. He's lucky that I didn't whack him.

Where did dad find these goof-offs? It's obvious that they're not going to leave. It's not fair. I shouldn't have to be the one to stop these guys from cutting down the tree. If mother doesn't want the tree . . .

Why did the tree have to die? Why did dad have to pick today to cut down the tree? Why can't things come together for me to do something that I really want to do – like spend an afternoon on the beach with friends who I like a lot instead of . . .

Why doesn't mother come out here? Why doesn't mother tell dad that . . . why didn't dad talk to mother before he asked a bunch of drifters to come out here to cut down the tree? Dad should've known that mother wouldn't want him to cut down their tree.

Why didn't dad have the tree cut down last week – when papa was here? Papa would know what to say to mother. He for sure had to have seen that the tree had died. Maybe papa and dad talked about the tree and decided that . . . why does mother always . . . for someone who never goes anyplace, mother sure knows how to keep constant drama in your life.

Why did I just tell that nosey dodo that the tree was a wedding gift from papa and mama? He didn't need to know that if the tree is cut down that that would be the end of dad and mother's marriage. Yah – go ahead guy and wrinkle up your face like you don't believe me. Why am I talking with him anyway? I don't have to talk to him. I didn't ask him to . . . why is he saying that he wishes that the tree hadn't died? The tree really was a beautiful tree when it was alive – especially in the fall when the leaves started to change colors. What does he mean that he wishes that . . . it was just a tree that died.

Why won't he stop staring at me? He's got a lot of nerve. What's this with always wanting to know what I'm thinking? He doesn't even know my name. Okay – I hope that he's happy with my answer. That sudden odd look said no. Maybe his parents are divorced and . . .

Good grief guy – please don't . . . how do I get him to believe me that I know that I overreacted – that I'm okay now? If mother decides that she can no longer live with dad because dad cut down that tree . . . I just can't anymore let mother make her issues with dad my issues. It's time to live my own life.

Okay gal – you know that your dad hasn't been a bad dad. Just because he doesn't give you hugs and tells you that he loves you . . . you know that he loves you. And so does mother. If mother would make an effort to get out more, just maybe someone would come here to do visiting with her again. Mother should know by now that no one comes here anymore because . . . this poor me thing gets really old in a hurry.

Why did I do that? The guy's face is beat red. You just touched his hand and thanked him for listening to you and for understanding. You've really freaked him out. I'm going to start giggling. You can't. It's not funny but . . . he's so embarrassed he can't even look at me.

They're all staring at us. First they saw me screaming hysterically like a banshee; now they're all standing there looking at an immature school girl hysterically laughing like a hyena. What an impression you've made on everyone. I don't blame dad looking at me like who're you – like I don't know you.

Dad just smiled back at you. That sure felt good. That was a look that I've never seen from dad. You've just earned tons of points guy with dad.

He's telling me it's okay. I want to know his name. Where did that come from?

What can I do? Those wacky guys came out here to cut down the tree so let them have their fun. I'll just quick go inside and tell mother that she's just going to have to live with the tree being cut down – that it won't be the end of the world for her. She has got to understand.

How long has mother been standing there right inside the back door? She probably saw and heard everything. Here it goes. Everyone put their hands over their ears. She's smiling at him. He's looking at mother like he knows her. How do they know each other?

You would have to ring right now phone. It's him. What do I say to him? I don't feel like going to the beach anymore today. I sure hope that he'll understand. What did he just say? Why would he do that?

Does she know how to scream. Wow! Someone needs to record her screeching. I'd be really embarrassed to hear myself making those kinds of noises. What would you do mom-mom if you were here? You for sure would find a way to get her to stop acting like the worst thing in the world is happening to her.

What's the tree to her anyway? This telling the chainsaw not to start or . . . nice insolent moment gal. Does she have screws loose or something? This hugging that tree like it really needs her protection is . . . it's a dead tree gal. If the stubborn chainsaw would've started, the tree would've already lost a couple of its limbs. How're the guys going to cut down the tree now with her long skinny arms wrapped around it? If they're ever able to get the . . . and if they're thinking that I'm here to help them . . . just do what they tell you to do guy and . . . it shouldn't take them very long to cut down the tree. Once they do . . .

Why won't her father try to reason with her? Come on moneybags – be a good father and give her a hug. If your father guy had . . . what do you think he'd do? Was it really true mom-mom what you said to me about my father – that he was always so concerned about everyone else that he never thought about himself? And from whom would he have gotten that from mom-mom?

I'm starting to get a cynical spirit mom-mom especially about guys who call themselves Christ-followers. Senior pastor is the ultimate egghead mom-mom. I'm sorry but . . . he really misled me to get me to come out here to . . . now I'm having to watch a wailing gal do tree hugging because her pet tree is going to be cut down. I'm so tired mom-mom of being around people who only think of themselves.

Does she know what she's doing? She isn't doing her clothes a favor that's for sure. She doesn't have a clue that her makeup . . . talk about someone needing you mom-mom.

That's a good move moneybags – use the lake as an excuse to ignore your daughter. I'm glad that they all have the time to throw rocks out into the water. I've got an activity at the church that . . . why won't senior pastor let me generate the youth activities? That's what I thought I'd be doing here when . . . why did I . . . who cares. You're stuck here guy. You're going to have to make the best of it.

Go – talk to her? Where did that come from? Why would she want to talk to me? She's a mental case.

Good – she's got a phone call. She had plans to go to the beach with some friends? Now she has to stay here until her dad decides not to cut down the tree? Wish I had a friend who'd do that for me.

Mom-mom would be by now having her sitting on the bench next to the back door and . . . but that was always in the high school's lunch room. Okay – there were always kids showing up at our house wanting to talk to her about whatever. Why won't you give me God that double portion that mom-mom had that I asked You for after mom-mom . . . why did you let it happen?

Why are you walking towards her? She's going to scratch your eyes out or . . .

Why did she have to start crying again? What do I say to her? Why are girls so . . . this just standing here staring at her isn't going to help anyone. You've got to say something. It's obvious that she isn't going to say anything to you. Ask her why the tree is so important to her.

She's talking. How can I understand how she feels about the tree? It would've been really nice if there had been room in front of mom-mom's house where a tree . . . a cement jungle isn't a place to grow trees. Pull a mom-mom guy – just listen to what she has to say. Your life story has nothing to do with her life story so just . . . I'm not about to take one of her hands mom-mom like you always did and then to keep holding on to it. You probably talked to every single kid that went through my high school mom-mom during those nearly fifty years that you worked in the school's cafeteria. Why can't I give everyone a dose of Jesus just like you said that you were always doing when . . .

She broke her arm falling off that limb? That wasn't smart falling out of the tree. She was playing tag in the tree with her sisters? Where are her sisters? Ask her. When she takes a breath . . . the way that she's dumping right now on you guy, that's not going to happen soon.

This standing here in the middle of the yard listening to this whining gal is . . . the guys are looking over here again. Just start edging over to the bench next to the back door. Maybe she'll follow me. She is.

There was a swing in that tree? There isn't one now. She doesn't want this tree cut down because . . . it's all about her. No wonder her father . . .

That was a strange reaction. Why did she screw up her face like . . . look at what you're wearing guy plus when is the last time that you've shaved. You probably look like a vagrant.

At least she has stopped crying. Now what? She's looking around like . . . just ask her something – anything. She doesn't need to look at me that intensely again.

That was a giggle. She's looking at the guys throwing rocks in the lake. What's so funny about that? Why is Tiny laughing so hard? The guy has tears running down his face. He's laughing at the little Mexican guy. That's not cool. At least the little Mexican guy thinks whatever it is that they're doing is funny, too.

Now she's laughing as hard as Tiny. Her laughing sure beats her awful screeching. Does she have an emotional middle ground?

Her father seems to be having a really good time with Tiny. They're obviously old buddies the way that they're acting with each other. It would be nice to have a buddy around here who . . .

Wow – does Po have an arm! Like it was nothing for him to throw that rock as far as he did out into the lake. There's no way that I can throw as far as that little shrimp just did. I'm not even going to try.

Now that she seems to have gotten past having the tree cut down, now what do I do? You can thank her for telling you why she didn't want the tree cut down. Not that strange quizzical look again. Just because I'm a sorry looking character, don't be sorry for me. You're the one gal who needs help. You do the pensive look for one thing gal really well.

Why does she keep looking around the yard like . . . ask her about the flowers. Someone has done an awful lot of work around here to make this place look as beautiful it does. Where's her mother? Is she around? She can't be here otherwise . . .

Did she just say that she wishes that her father and mother had planted the tree where her mother has her garden? That's a garden over there? That would've been a good place. When the tree was full of leaves, it probably did a good job of obstructing the view of the lake from where we're sitting right now.

What's this about her father's birdfeeders? He'll have to find another place for them. Did I ask her what kinds of birds are around here? Guess I'm going to find out. Cardinals, blue jays, goldfinches, chickadees, nuthatches, wrens, sparrows – juncos, what's a junco – crows, turkeys – did she just say turkeys? Most every morning there're turkeys eating the deer corn that her father puts out? There're deer around here? I'd probably see deer this evening if . . . she's not kidding. Does she know how lucky that she is to have lived here in a place like this? Okay mom-mom – I know – there's no such thing as luck. You thought of yourself being blessed living where we were living.

Having a lake right behind your house . . . ask her if there are fish in the lake. Was she looking for an excuse to tell you a fish story? Does she think that I know anything about fishing? Slow down gal. The way that she's waving her arms, I'm not safe anywhere near her. Her hands are talking as much as her mouth – and her mouth is going a mile a minute.

I bet that she was a precocious little imp when she was little. She definitely has a zest for life the way that she's telling her fish story.

You do know guy that she's probably your age. Mother was about her age when mom-mom had her over for dinner and . . . was it really true mom-mom that father didn't have a chance when . . .

Poor fish. I would've taken off as fast as I could if someone started yelling at me. Why did you just say that? You didn't have to tell her that you know now why she's such a good screamer. She thought that you were serious. She was about ready to hit you. That's funny.

What's she thinking about now? Are we just going to spend the rest of the morning sitting here? Ask her what it is that she's thinking? So what if she tells me to mind my own business. That would be a relief. Her emotional roller coaster sure can go up and down in a hurry.

Did she say family dirt? This is way too much information. This is stuff that I don't want to know. Her papa and mama gave that tree to her dad and mother when they got married? She has grandparents? They sound like really nice people. I'd have a grandparent today if . . . thanks a lot God. I still can't believe that You'd do what You did to me when . . . I was totally sold out to serve You doing whatever wherever. After all that mom-mom did for me – and especially for You, You didn't even give her the chance to see me graduate. You didn't let her see her son graduate either from Bible School. You're cruel God.

What's she talking about. You've got to pay attention guy. She isn't making any sense. The tree is like her dad and mother's marriage – the tree is dead and her dad and mother's marriage is dead? How can she believe that when the tree is cut down that her father and her mother's marriage will end? How does she know that? That was a big breath. I hope that she feels better telling me something that I really didn't want to know. Just what you wanted guy – being stuck with the knowledge that moneybags is having marital problems. There's no way that senior pastor is ever going to get that news from me.

What do I say to her? She really does believe that her parent's marriage will end if the tree is cut down. How can she believe that? Marriages don't end that easily – can they? At least she'll still have a father and a mother who'll be there for her when she gets married, when she has kids, when she . . .

Why did she do that? She touched me on the hand. Why did I jerk my hand away from her? She's laughing her head off at me. It's not funny. She thinks it is. I've never felt so . . . everyone is staring at me. How can I get out of here? Where do I run?

The guys are coming over. Why does her father have such an incredulous look on his face? That was a smile. Would this be a good time to ask him for the check? Ask him. Why didn't you ask him?

Did she just thank me? Why? What did I do? What do I say to her? Please stop staring at me. She's intimidating. Why did I tell her that it's okay? That's not saying anything.

She's leaving. Where's she going? Why do you want her to stay?

Now I know why nothing was making sense when she said that her father and mother would get a divorce if . . . I've seen her. How long had she been standing there? She and moneybags are always sitting together in church. She's one of the Sunday School teachers.

She recognized me. Go – greet her. You haven't gotten a smile like that from someone for a long time. That really felt good.

There's a phone . . . it's the gal's phone again. She doesn't look terribly happy about the call. Too bad there's no way whoever is on the end of the line can see the way that her hands are trying to explain whatever it is that she's trying to say. Look out everyone – she's really getting animated. She's crying.

Why did she just give her mother a really frustrated look? She's big time disappointed about something. She's going into the house. How come you didn't stop her. When mom-mom knew something had happened to someone, nothing could stop her from talking to that kid. Why aren't more people like her?

That nod from her mother to her father must've been a go ahead to start cutting down the tree as . . . you'd have to start right away this time chainsaw. When are you going to ask for the check? What're you going to do if . . . where's that faith you claim to have that everything will work out for the good of those who . . .

I couldn't have heard him right. Why would he have reserved a room in a motel on the beach? Why won't he listen to what I'm saying about the tree and about dad and mother and . . . why is it such a big deal that we have to use the motel room because he has it reserved?

Did he really just say that there were other things that a guy and a gal can do at the beach besides . . . you do know gal that you just hung up on that egotistical imbecile? I'll never see him again. Why did I hang up on him?

Why does everyone have to keep looking at me? You're crying again? This has been an absolutely horrible morning. Why can't anything go right for me? I should be on the road with my friends to the beach by now. You can at least be glad that you found out what the idiot did before . . . I'm the idiot.

I've got to get away from those guys. What're you going to do in the house? I'll call best bud.

I need to talk to you girl – please answer your phone. Thank goodness. Why do I sound like I'm crying? She was right all along. She knew that the duplicitous guy's motives were all about from the get-go. Why didn't I listen to her? Why did he have to be such a . . . he's such a . . .

Do I want to meet her someplace? Why do I suddenly want to stay here? I'll be fine.

Why did she start to laugh? You just told her that you're going to help the guys cut down the tree. Like I've never gotten my hands dirty? Who was always helping mother in her garden? Who helped dad rake the leaves in the fall? Okay – so I liked to jump into the piles of piled up leaves but . . . thank goodness that she's fine with not heading for the beach today. I sure hope that she knows how much I appreciate her.

Guess I've the time to talk if she has the time to talk. The guys who showed up here to cut down the tree are a bunch of real goof-offs. How can someone really describe over the telephone a gang of misfits who are being led by the quintessential mountain of a man? I wish I could. She has to come out here to see them with her own eyes. They're hilarious together. They're always trying to pull each other's chains.

What does she mean are any of them cute? They're all probably married except for Possum's shadow. Okay – there's the mop head string bean who . . . if she saw the guy, she wouldn't be asking me if he's nice. Okay – he's nice but . . . she's not going to hear me saying that about him. You're the one who isn't nice. Calling him a scarecrow because he looks like one . . . how does mother know him?

So that's what a chainsaw sounds like. I won't forget to call her back in an hour or so. Doing lunch together if . . . that's a good idea. Why didn't you invite her to come over now? Why didn't I? Oh well.

I wish that I had my camera. It's with my stuff that I was going to take to the beach. Ask dad for his camera. Having some photos of the tree being cut down . . . that way papa and mama will know that it really was dead when dad cut it down. If dad's camera can take videos, odds on I'll get some great video of those jokers cutting down the tree. How can they enjoy life so much? They're having way too much fun.

That didn't take them very long to cut off those limbs that they can reach with the chainsaws. Why are Tiny and Possum cutting the branches off those limbs? What're they going to do with those branches – and with those limbs? They aren't just going to leave them lay there – are they? Maybe they'll just pile them up someplace and burn them later.

Why the surprised look dad when I asked him where his camera is? Getting your camera for me was the fastest thing dad that you've ever done for me. You really do want me to take pictures of the tree being cut down. I think dad is really glad that I'm still here.

Mother hasn't gone back inside? She almost looks like a normal person. Why can't mother act normal all the time instead of when . . . why won't she leave some things alone – like constantly telling me that I need to eat more. Just because she's . . . why is it so wrong that I feel like I weigh too much? Why can't she just mind her own business instead of . . . this being criticized all the time sure gets old.

Why is everyone heading to the front of the house? What're they looking for at the end of the drive? What's dad asking mother? Whatever mother said, dad's okay with it by that nod.

What in the world is that thing? What're they going to do with it? Why are they pulling it over there? Why are Possum, his kid and the Hispanic pulling branches over here? I didn't see them leave. There's a motor on the thing. And I thought that the chainsaw was noisy. They're shoving the dead branches in the thing. So that's how wood mulch is made. I can help shove branches in that thing.

Now what does mother want? If I'm going to help, she has an old top that I can wear instead of . . . when mother isn't thinking of herself. . . why has she made her life such a tragedy? Why does she have to blame dad for everything? Why can't she accept some of the blame – whatever it is, that she has against dad?

Why is she giving me two pairs of gloves? Oh – one pair is for me and the other pair is for . . . how does she know his name? Why doesn't she give him the gloves? I don't want to give him the gloves. His hands are already bleeding. He didn't have to look so surprised – and pleased, when I gave him the gloves.

Those chainsaws are sure going through those limbs like . . . Tiny and Possum know what they're doing. I could help dad take those cut up pieces of limbs to the firewood stack.

Keep taking photos gal. Those guys know what they're doing. Best stay out of their way. Take a photo of Tiny's truck. The thing must be a hundred years old. What's that printed on the side of that old thing? Tiny's Tree Removal and Firewood. Now I know why the name Tiny sounds so familiar. I've seen this truck before. Dad gets his firewood from Tiny's place. How come I've never seen Tiny there as often as I've been with mother when she has turned that corner to take me to school or when I've gone with her to the store or . . . there's always someone there splitting tree trunks and making stacks of firewood to sell.

The poor guy. He's already dragging. He's exhausted. Po is running circles around him. I've got to give the scraggly mutt credit for trying.

Now what does mother want? You want me to take this lemonade out to the guys? Why doesn't she take out the lemonade? Cookies, too? They're not a bunch of kids mother. Guys – you're attacking. They must've been really thirsty – and hungry. He just took one cookie. Hand him a handful. Don't cry guy.

Another pitcher of lemonade – and more cookies? Mother – you're unreal. You're really enjoying this now aren't you? You were definitely what's his name's rescuer. He sure needed a break.

Back to work. That didn't take the guys long at all to clear out those lower branches. Now what? What're they going to do with that rope – and that thing? What is it? Why is Tiny tying it to the end of the rope? Why is Possum betting him that he can't do it on the first try? What's Tiny going to try to do?

Why are they looking at the top of the tree? Why are they pointing to different areas like . . . the top of the tree would hit the house if . . . this could be really interesting. How're they going to cut down the tree so that it doesn't fall on the house? What's Tiny doing now? Does Tiny know that giggling really is totally not manly? I'm sure not going to tell him. Is Possum ever going to light that cigarette? It really looks ludicrous bobbing around in his mouth as he's talking. Does Possum ever let up on Tiny? Tiny sure doesn't seem to be bothered at all with Possum's constant ribbing. How do they know each other? They appear to be really good cronies.

Dad is sure looking awfully bemused. How can an hour or so . . . the guy has to think that I'm completely adlebrained the way that I was hugging that old tree to keep it from . . . how could I've thought that cutting down that tree would end dad and mother's marriage?

Why did Tiny throw that whatever that thing is up into the tree? That thing must be a weight or something. Why is he pointing at Possum like that? Guess Tiny won the bet. That was a dollar bill that Possum just gave to Tiny. That was a bet? What's Tiny going to do with the weight thing when . . . now what's Possum going to do? Why is he tying the rope to the big pine at the back of the yard?

Would you rather be here right now gal with this bunch of oddballs or would you rather be on your way to the beach right now with knucklehead? You're the bonehead gal for falling for that . . .

Common sense gal should've told you that the guy was an ignoramus. He's the tree hugger. How does driving a wannabe tank fit into his thinking that going green is the way to go? I bet that he doesn't even know what organic means.

Why all of a sudden is it so important to be sticking up for mother earth instead of . . . what's wrong with focusing on the down and outers? This having to find homes for kids whose parents or caretakers or . . . and then finding out later that their foster parents are horrible people. Those poor kids.

If I hadn't been in his place, I would swear that conceited fool lives under a rock. Mother would be horrified to see his stock of different kinds of wine. Dad probably, too. Has dad or mother ever drunk anything stronger than lemonade or sweet tea or . . . coffee – how many cups do they drink a day?

The tree looks so . . . it's like it isn't there anymore – it's like looking at something that gave me good memories and now . . . it probably won't take very long to forget what the tree looked like. The backyard is sure going to look different with the tree gone. You sure look sad tree without your lower branches.

Now what's Tiny doing? Take pictures. Do a video of what they're doing. Why did he just cut a slice out of the tree trunk? Now what? Oh – that's the direction that they want the tree to fall. I get it now. He's cutting from the other side. How come the tree doesn't . . . wow – that's what it sounds like when a tree falls in a forest. It fell exactly where they wanted it to fall. If I had waited to take a photo of the tree toppling . . . I would've missed it. Thanks for the grin dad for my thumbs up that I got on video the tree suddenly crashing to the ground.

You're looking smug Tiny. I don't blame you. You've got to get photos of all those characters – even the shabby guy who mother knows. If he . . . what're you thinking now gal? You and your savior complex.

The way that they're attacking the tree they could get the tree all cut up by lunch. It's back to dragging limbs to that thing that . . . do I help or . . . why not?

That was a condescending look. Why can't I help? There's no way that he and Po are going to get ahead of that little old Mexican. Why can't I remember his name? The guy sure doesn't look like he's working very fast but . . . he's steady that's for sure. He's definitely a whole lot stronger than he looks. Po is practically running back and forth. He's making three trips to two trips that whoever he is is making. Po doesn't even look like he's working up a sweat. The poor guy . . . he's trying so hard. Don't stare at him.

Dad is having trouble keeping ahead of Tiny and Possum with what he's doing stacking up that firewood. Just start doing something. There's plenty to do.

This branch didn't look that heavy. How can that little lightweight be pulling those branches like they're nothing? This is work. Good grief. Why did I decide to help?

Where did mother come from? I'll start helping dad if mother is going to help pull branches to this hungry wood eater or whatever it is. If this is supposed to be fun . . . maybe I'll take a few photos.

Like the emaciated guy really cares that I just told him that Possum is about to cut up the limb that I fell off and broke my arm. What's he telling Po? Now what's Po telling his dad? Why did Possum look at me? He wants me to come over? Why? He wants me to show him where I was on the limb when I fell off it? Why does he want to know that? What does he want Po to do with that piece? Po can't carry it by himself. It's too big and heavy. He's going to help Po? Good. Where are they going to go with it? Why did they throw it into the back of the pickup?

It's back to work. I can't believe that I'm doing this. I'm glad that I'm doing this but . . . isn't it time for a break? That look just told me that I'm not the only one who . . . why does he always look so – so – so lost?

Why are you staying? Get the check and . . . senior pastor isn't going to be a happy camper if . . . this having to call that egotistical guy senior pastor instead of just pastor let alone the senior pastor is . . . who does he think he is anyway? He and I are the pastoral staff at the church. There's no way that I'm going to include senior pastor's cousin as being on the pastoral staff. Just because senior pastor made him the worship leader . . . the guy should still be jail. Since when does knowing how to play a guitar qualify a guy to be a worship leader? I would be the worship leader if that was the case. How am I ever going to get my guitar out of the pawn shop? I sure miss it.

Guy – just face it, he doesn't begin to see you as part of his pastoral staff. He's it. That's it. You're just that flunky that he says that you are.

Okay guy – is this really the perfect time to get all riled up about what senior pastor has done to you. Why don't you just focus on what's happening right now instead of . . .

Why did she have to go into the house? What's she doing in the house? And why is what she's doing now suddenly become so important to you?

It sure was good to see her mother. She sure doesn't seem to be upset at all that Tiny and Possum are cutting limbs off the tree. Wonder what the plan is after they've cut those lower limbs off the tree? They sure know how to use a chainsaw. I should be doing something, too, instead of just standing here.

That sure didn't take Tiny and Possum very long to cut off and then trim the branches off those limbs. What're they going to do with the limbs and with the branches? Why are they heading my way? They're going to the front of the house. Why? I take it Po that you're wanting me to go with you. Okay.

What's everyone doing? You want to know my name? Why did I just tell him that my name is saltine? Just because everyone where I grew up called me saltine . . . he doesn't have any way to understand why no one back home would ever call me cracker. What has that got to do with anything right now? No one knows you around here. No one cares to know you around here. Okay – her mother knows my name. Her smile says that . . . I like her. Why does her daughter have such a case against her?

Why are they unhooking that . . . what is it? Pay attention guy. They're wanting you to help pull that thing over near that small clearing at the end of the driveway. What're they going to do with that thing? Just like Po to clue me on what the thing is. I'm starting to really like that little half pint.

I sure would never have guessed that thing would be called a chipper. Wonder what a chipper does? Guess I'll find out soon enough. Where did everyone go? Where did she come from?

Why are the guys pulling branches over here? Good grief – that thing makes those two chainsaws sound like a couple of cats purring. That's what it's for. That's why it's called a chipper. Hey – that's pretty neat. It sure does a number in a hurry on those branches. I can help pull branches over to that thing, too.

Looks like it's going to be me and Po doing the branch hauling. The scrawny old Hispanic seems to know what he's doing shoving the branches into the thing's hopper. Sure glad that Tiny and Possum are cutting up the branches to make them easier to haul.

Looks like moneybags is going to have plenty of firewood this winter. Talk about being focused. He's on a mission the way that he's . . . this is work. Po is a working fool. I can't keep up with him. This is really embarrassing. What's this thing about running? What's this – I'm doing really great? He means it.

I can't keep going at this pace. How does the little runt do it? Oh no – I've got blisters on both of my hands. Great. Has she been taking pictures all this time? Why did she just look at me with that sorry about that look? You know that you can just leave guy. You don't have to stay here. You're an interloper anyway. The check . . . forget it. Now your hand is bleeding. How did that happen?

Now what does she want? She spooks me. Her mother told her to give me those gloves to wear?

Where is her mother? Why don't you talk to her? Maybe she can stop her husband long enough for him to write you a check. Forget it guy. Keep pulling branches.

Is that lemonade that . . . her mother is an angel. I can really have another glass of lemonade? Did I need this break. Once these guys go into a work mode, get out of their way or . . . guess lemonade trumps work around here. Those are cookies. Food. Wait your turn. She really wants me to eat all those cookies? How did she know that I hadn't . . . more cookies – and more lemonade. This is heaven.

They're right – the tree isn't going to cut itself down. These gloves sure do make a difference. Does Po have any other speed besides fast forward. Whew – I'm . . . how did that happen? Are all those cut up lower limbs be used for firewood? Can all that chipped up stuff be used for something?

Why is everyone looking up in the tree? I don't see anything. Now what's so funny? What's Tiny going to use that rope for anyway? Why is he tying that weight thing to the rope?

My little buddy has come to my rescue again. His dad has bet Tiny a dollar that Tiny can't throw the rope over what branch? Why does Tiny want to throw the weight over a branch? I better back up the way that Tiny is whirling that weight.

There's no way that he's going to hit anything the way that he's laughing. I need to ask Po what the old Mexican guy's name is. I need to do better remembering names. Wish I knew what the guy is saying. He doesn't seem to care that . . . Possum sure is merciless the way that he rides Tiny. The guy would be dead by now if he said those same things back where I grew up. How does he get by saying what he's saying?

Who are these guys? How can they be so like they are with each other? Life can't be that much fun – can it? Have I been missing something? It would be nice to have at least one friend. There was no way that I could become a friend with any of the guys living in my neighborhood. If you weren't a gang member . . . plus getting through Bible school while working as much as I did each week . . .

When am I going to hear from someone from the school about the house?

JLG

Why mom-mom? Why did it have to happen to you? Why did I wait 'til the last minute to make the trip? I knew that I had to do it but . . . I just never had a good feeling mom-mom about . . . I shouldn't have gone. I should've stayed home. I'm so sorry. Guy – you need to stop letting your mind wander.

If that was the branch that you were trying to throw that weight over Tiny, you couldn't do that again in a million years. How did he do it? He just kind of flipped that thing up and over that limb – like the thing didn't weigh anything. How much did that thing weigh anyway? Okay Tiny – you're a dollar richer – now what? You're letting the weight slide down to the ground. How did Po know that I didn't have a clue what they're going to do next? They're going to tie the two ends of rope to that big evergreen tree over there so that it'll fall that direction instead of falling towards the house? Dah – that makes sense that they'd want to keep the tree from falling towards the house.

The tree still has a ton of branches on it. It's going to take forever to . . . I'm not going to begin to survive today. If I don't pass out from trying to keep up with Po, senior pastor is going to do me in for not being ready for tonight's lock-in. If I stay here, I'm going to be one sore out of shape city kid. I'm going to be sore tonight whether I stay here or not. You're just going to . . .

Okay – so Tiny is going to cut a notch out of the side of the tree that faces the pine. I'm not going to be able to escape Po if I keep hanging around here. He's going to tell me blow by blow – whether I want to know or not, what's going to happen next. That didn't take Tiny long to cut out that notch or whatever that is. Now Tiny is going to cut in from the other side. Be ready as . . .

Wow – it just fell – just like that. Did she get it falling on video? Does she know that she's jumping up and down because . . . about time dad that you gave her a smile. This place must really be quiet when she isn't around. Does she live here? I could sure live here. This is an amazing place. Does she know that?

And what was that – and now the work begins. What did Po mean by that? Weren't we working before? Okay – that's called going on the attack. Are they trying to set a record cutting up a big old tree that has at least a million branches? I've a really bad feeling about this.

Back to pulling branches to the chipper. How far is that thing away anyway? It has to be at least half the length of a football field away. How can that little squirt be stronger than me? How old is he? Where does he live? Does he still go to school? What do you think that he's thinking about you? You know guy that you're really a sad sack. Why would anyone want to have anything to do with me?

How can these branches be getting harder and harder to pull to the chipper? The incline up to the end of the drive is even getting steeper. Just keep at it guy.

She's going to help pull the branches to the chipper? I've got to see this. She has just found out that it isn't as easy as it looks. She's going back for another. Come on guy – you aren't going to let her outwork you – are you? Why doesn't she just go back taking pictures?

If you saw me now mom-mom . . . why did you have to go visit your family mom-mom? I sure wouldn't be here right now if . . . I'm all out of money mom-mom. Old faithful's gas tank is almost empty. I don't have any food in the house. I was really counting on being able to eat some of the pizza that I was getting for the lock-in tonight. I'm so hungry.

What senior pastor did just isn't right. Okay – I know mom-mom, why didn't I take the time to check out senior pastor's job offer that he got posted on the Bible school's job placement board? I just wanted so bad mom-mom to get as far away as I could. It was like the whole world came crashing down on me. What did I do mom-mom that has God so mad at me?

I can't believe the gall that that Bible school has mom-mom. Dad was within a semester from graduating from that place when . . . I was about six weeks from graduating from that place when . . . then the school tells me that unless I pay for my last month's tuition that they won't let me graduate with my class. They're sitting on your house mom-mom. How come you didn't tell me mom-mom that you had put your house in a living will for the school to . . . why won't someone at the school tell me what I can or can't do with the house? If it wasn't for all the money that the people gave who knew you over the years that you were at the high school, I wouldn't have been able to . . . let alone pay that last month's tuition payment. You sure were good mom-mom about keeping your checking account at a zero balance.

How many kids and neighbors and strangers and . . . did you give money to mom-mom? No one has ever or will ever give more mom-mom Jesus-hugs than you. I sure could use a mom-mom hug right now.

I really should let our old neighbor know where I am. Mr. J would've helped me if I had stayed at the house instead of . . . sure guy – you really liked repainting classroom walls, scrubbing bathroom floors, making sure the wastepaper baskets were empty, . . . the youth pastor job here sure sounded like it was what I should do next. What a bad move.

She wants to say something to me? Possum is about to cut off the branch that she fell from and broke her arm? Why did you have to tell Po that . . . what's Po doing? He sure got excited when you told him about the limb. They want her to come over where they are. Why is Possum cutting out the area where she said that she fell from and broke her arm?

Why does Po wants me to come over to where he is? This calling me saltine kind of makes me feel like I'm back home. Okay mom-mom – I know, you didn't like anyone to call me saltine but . . . no one around where we lived was about to call me by my given name.

He wants me to do what? That wiry mighty mite probably can carry that piece of limb all by himself. Why is he asking me to help him? Why did we put that piece of limb in the back of his dad's pickup?

What was that look about? I wish that she hadn't looked at me like that. She has to think that I'm a . . .

Has it only been about two hours since mother called me this morning? It has to be later than what my watch says that it is. Too much has happened. This means that lunch is still an hour or so away. They got to stop for lunch. You can stop. No one told you to help pull branches to that thing. I can't stop. Why can't you stop? Why do you want to keep looking at him? Just because he looks like a poor lost puppy, that doesn't mean that you can claim him and . . . why am I feeling so sorry for him.

Po has made him his friend. Yeh for Po. Wonder what Po's home is like? His dad doesn't seem like that bad of a guy – even though Possum obviously smokes. I sure wouldn't want to go through life being called an animal's name. Okay – it hasn't been that long ago since mother stopped calling me pumpkin. I'm so glad that she doesn't call me that anymore.

That's a great idea. Why didn't I think of that before? I'll call the brainless lout to tell him to come over here to get me. If I know him, he'll be over here before I can pull the next branch to this nerve jangling contraption to be gobbled up. When he gets here, I'll tell him that I'll be ready to leave just as soon as the tree has been completely cut up and . . . it'll be so much fun watching that egomaniac schmuck make a mad dash to his gas guzzler to escape helping.

How could've I been so blind? The guy thinks that the whole world exists for him. I'm not going to be his possession. I hope that he gets stuck for that motel room at the beach. It'd serve him right.

I bet I'll never see him in a Sunday School class again. Why would someone who thinks that the Bible is just a book want to waste a Sunday morning in a Sunday School class? The class is sure going to be boring without him there. What'll senior pastor's cousin do? Talk about someone who doesn't have a clue what's in the Bible. This going over the next week what senior pastor preached the prior week sure is a lazy way to do something. It might help if I went to church Sunday mornings but . . . there's no way that I'm going to sit in a pew and listen to that self-promoting, hypocritical preacher spew that garbage that he calls a message from God. How can You God let guys like him say what they say when they say that what they're saying is what You told them to say? There's no way that senior pastor is ever speaking for You.

And you're the epitome of a model Jesus-follower? You're shallower than senior pastor. You were a sitting duck for that car selling con artist. How often are you going to let yourself get duped by someone before you wake up to the fact that he's just another dud?

Whew – I've got to take a break. Even the scrawny nerd is able to make two trips to my one trip. The poor guy is sweating like a . . . he's soaking wet. When did he rip his shirt? Like that shirt should've long time ago been . . . what if it's the only shirt that he has? That would be sad.

Where did mother come from anyway? She was just helping dad. That's a pitcher of ice water. Give him some first. That's a look of relief if I've seen one.

You don't have to guy go right back to pulling branches to that whatever it is. Relax guy. It's still morning. Does he have to get someplace?

You smiled at me mother. You could've smiled back at her.

You don't have a chance guy with mother when she decides that she wants to talk to you. Please don't start vomiting on him mother. They're smiling at each other. Why are they laughing? They're looking at me. They're talking about me. Where's that camera. I hope that he doesn't like his picture taken. Like going behind that tree is going to keep me from taking your picture guy. Okay mother – you can stop your laughing right now. You're sounding like a teenage gal mother who . . . and you haven't been chasing after him like a . . . you don't even know him. Why does it seem like I've known him all my life?

I need to get back to helping Po. That kid sure is a worker. He sure seems proud of his dad. What does he see that I don't see in his new buddy?

Does that little Mexican know how to do anything but show his toothless gums?

I hope that this isn't going to take all day. I don't remember the tree having so many branches. It really was a great shade tree before it . . . wonder what caused it to die? Hope that papa is okay with . . . dad had to have cleared it through papa before he went ahead to have it cut down. It wouldn't be like dad to do something without passing it by papa. I'm glad that papa really likes dad.

Are Tiny and Possum competing with each other to see who can cut off more branches and cut up more limbs? It sure looks like it. They're all business. Where did all that craziness go that not very long ago had Tiny howling like a sick dog? Those guys had their glasses of water gulped down before . . .

You do know gal that you could be halfway to the beach with your friends by now if . . . you don't even like lying out on the beach gal. It would've been fun hanging out with best bud and her fiancé. How can she be so lucky? The guy is as solid as a rock. You do know that you're really fortunate to have her as a friend.

That was a big branch. Can't Tiny and Possum cut the branches smaller? That inept nerd isn't going to make it. His arms aren't much bigger than mine and mine are . . . face it gal, you're skinny. Why do you want to be so skinny? What did that self-obsessive egomaniac see in me?

That was klutzy. Now what's he going to think of me? Maybe he didn't see me trip and fall flat on my face. Okay – you just go ahead and . . . you didn't have to drop that branch and run over here and . . . why does he have such a concerned look on his face? I don't think I hurt myself. I don't see any blood. He's not laughing at me. He wants to help me up. Wonder what he'd do if I suddenly gave him a hug? I shouldn't have thought of that. Why am I sitting here giggling? That's a nice laugh. Why does he always have to look so . . . why are you feeling sorry for him again?

Okay – back to . . . I'm going to be aching all over tonight. I'm not going to be the only one. I've got to take a break. Tell him to take a break, too. He's not going to take a break. He's going to keep right on plugging along. Why?

It sure feels good sitting here. The lake looks so calm and peaceful. I can just picture dad and mother sitting here right after they were married and . . . dad ever a romantic – don't think so.

I don't remember the last time that I sat here and just . . . maybe I'll ask mother if I can stay here tonight. And if she falls over in shock . . . I don't care. I'm sure I can find a way to get her to tell me who . . . and why do you want to know who he is? Someone needs to tell him to rest for a bit. He's barely moving.

It's going to be so quiet around here when those chainsaws stop their whining and that branch eating thing stops that loud growling that it makes when . . . it sure does a number on those branches.

At least I'll have a story to tell at work come Monday. I was so lucky to get that job – like right out of school. I never thought that I would be a social worker. I must be doing okay by the way that the case loads are being assigned to me. Why do I like so much finding foster homes? Why does there invariably have to be a bad home where . . .

What's the plan for lunch? I'm starting to get hungry. If dad is planning on a pizza or some fried chicken, I'll get it. Are you trying to escape helping with . . . mother sure isn't slowing down. She and dad seem to be just fine with each other right now. Why can't mother be just fine with dad always?

And what has given you the right gal to be so hard on your mother? Is she the weaker Christ-follower or are you the weaker Christ-follower? Talk about an out of control Sunday School class last Sunday. That kind of class makes me want to never go back to another Sunday School class. If my best friend and her beaux weren't in that class . . . last Sunday would be my last Sunday in that class.

What is it going to take for senior pastor's cousin to realize that he's nothing more than an incompetent moron? This trying to convince everyone that being the teacher makes him the stronger brother and that his students – like me, is a weaker sister because . . . there's no way that I'm going to be told that I'm the weaker sister. This wearing being in prison like a badge of honor has gotten big time on my nerves.

You need to learn to keep your mouth closed like your friend and . . . how can she just sit there while that self-proclaimed expert buffoon makes claims that it's his Bible acumen and that it's his ability to teach what's in the Bible that makes him such a good . . . that's a bunch of bunk.

You know what gal – you should try reading the Bible and find out what's in it yourself. And when do I have time to do that? Maybe mother has an extra Bible around. There's got to be more in the Bible than what I'm told in that Sunday School class that I need to know.

Oh – my aching bones. I really don't want to go back to pulling branches. Why didn't dad have the guys set up that hungry monster closer to the tree? Okay – pulling or pushing that thing across the back lawn wouldn't have been good. The back lawn is looking so different with the tree down and . . .

Why is mother looking towards me? She's heading my way. She's going to sit down next to me. Please don't start on me mother. I'm way too tired right now to listen to your nonsense.

She just didn't do that. Why did she do that now – she hasn't done that for years. Is she putting on a front for the dweeb? Why? Didn't she see that the brainless looking gink wasn't even looking when she . . .

Please don't try to be nice to me now mother. Why is she looking at me like she has never seen me before? Has she forgotten that I'm her youngest kid – the kid who was her worst nightmare? Why doesn't she say what she wants to say instead of just holding onto my hand like . . . why don't you just give her a hug gal? You can't keep going on through life gal always wishing that your mother wasn't so terribly unpredictable. I know that she's going to bring up what I look like. Please don't do it mother.

She's thanking me for coming over. When is the last time mother that you thanked me for anything? Who is this woman? You just thanked her for calling you to . . . what made you say that? Just give her that hug. She sure looks like she's glad that I'm here. Stop staring over here guy.

Guess I have to admit that I'm glad that . . . ask mother what you can do to help her right now. Did she just say that if I want to, I can fill up a couple of pitchers of ice water – that I can use the folding table that's in the closet to set the pitchers on outside. Sure – I remember where she keeps her paper cups.

She asked me to do something. Mother never asks anyone to do something for her. What's she going to do now? You're glad dad aren't you having mother back helping you. Did dad really know mother before he married her? Meeting while they were doing Peace Corp stuff in a Latin American country for a couple of years should've given dad plenty of opportunities to see mother's eccentrics. I just don't believe what my sisters always tell me that it was my fault that mother is the way that she is. Mother had to have acted weird at times before I was born.

Hope that the guys know that they can come to this table and get a cold drink anytime that they want to have a drink. It has definitely gotten hot. Where are the clouds?

Okay – back to work. If Po has been cloned, I want to meet his bro as . . . he really meant it when he told me that he really appreciates my help pulling branches over to the old Mexican to . . . it even looks like mother's friend is getting his second wind. Why can't you look at him gal as a likeable young man who . . .

What's that vibration against my . . . it's your phone gal. Answer it. Maybe it's best bud. That's not her number. Let it ring. Whoever is calling can leave me a message if it's something important. Then why are you . . . when are you going to start listening to yourself instead of . . . I know that voice. Why is that voice calling me? Why is that voice sounding so . . . that voice is always happy and . . . it's Auntie. Why is she calling me? Auntie has never called me. Why is she asking me if I'll call dad and have dad call her? Why can't she just call dad on the home phone? At least her voice doesn't sound anymore like she just had the wind knocked out of her or something when I told her that I'm at the house and that I can put dad on the phone with her right now. What's this don't let your mother . . . it's about . . .

No – no – no – no – no . . .

Mowing the church's lawn was so much easier than doing this. What did senior pastor do before . . . the guy has me doing everything at the church. What's wrong with having a custodian who'll vacuum the sanctuary, who'll mop the basement floor, who'll wipe down the pews, who'll . . . how many hours guy are you spending just being a grunt at the church? Fifty – sixty hours a week – at least. Where am I supposed to find the time to somehow foment a friendship with a couple of insolent know-it-all who . . .

Okay – youth pastors aren't supposed to last a year anyway so . . . so you're going to give up guy? What would mom-mom say if . . . I need to be doing something where I'm making enough money to survive. There's no way that senior pastor is going to give me more money. How does the guy live with finding more and more ways of taking more and more money out of my check? What made think that living in one of his rentals would be a good thing? How many things has he already had me pay to get fixed? The guy mom-mom is a real . . . there's no way the guy is living a Christ-follower life. It's really disgusting how the guy uses the pulpit to say whatever in order to get strokes from whoever is trapped into having to listen to him. Why are people coming to his church anyway? The guy is a heretic. I hear you mom-mom but . . .

Is this supposed to be fun? Po doesn't seem to be slowing down a bit. I'm so out of shape. You're really making a great impression on . . . like that'd really be important to you right now in a perfect world? Like having anything to do with an unpredictable flake like . . . she's a dingbat.

What're you trying to tell me God? I know – I didn't ask you to close the door for me to head this way if this isn't where you wanted me to go. I do try to listen to you God. Okay – I haven't talked to you much lately. Please – I really need Your help now to get me out of this mess that I've gotten myself into here.

You've really trapped me here God. Okay – I know that You know that. Why did You let me come here? I don't belong here. No one cares that I'm here. Okay – her mother has noticed me but . . .

You know God that the only things that I haven't gotten rid of since coming here is old faithful. Like I have to tell you that God? Are you going to make me sell old faithful, too? Then what? Would you really let me starve?

You sure didn't leave anything behind for me did you mom-mom – other than what's in your cedar chest. What you called furniture mom-mom isn't going to last much longer. Maybe I should've tried to rent your house mom-mom instead of just letting that young couple who Mr. J knows live in it. You should've talked to someone at the school before you left about what it's going to do about the house. Why don't you just turn the house over to Mr. J for all that he did for mom-mom over the years? He'd take care of it. I hope that Mr. J is doing okay . . . there was no way that he could've kept mom-mom from . . .

You've got to just keep going guy. You can at least try to stay ahead of her. She's in no better shape than you. She looks like she's about ready to collapse.

Creeps – how did I rip my shirt? This is not good. That was the best shirt that I could find in the church's clothes barrel. You've gotten filthy dirty guy. You're soaking wet.

Where did she suddenly come from? Ice water? Water has never tasted this good. Does she really want to know how I'm doing? What's this about surviving . . . that's her name? It fits her. I like it. I hope that she didn't take it wrong when I told her that her daughter is the craziest gal that I've ever met in my life. Good – she's laughing. How come no one else has been pleasant to me like her?

Someone knows that we've been talking about her. There's no way that I'm going to let her take a picture of me the way that I look right now. She's not going to follow me behind this tree with that camera is she? She needs to get lost. Now she thinks she's really funny.

Just get back to work guy and she'll leave you alone. That was a disappointed look. What did she want me to do? If these branches don't get chopped up sometime real soon, there's no way that I'm going to have enough time to get myself ready for tonight. Forget about tonight guy. You know that you can't. Maybe no one will show up. There's no win to tonight. Why do you keep trying guy?

That was a face plant if I've seen one. Hope that she didn't hurt herself. She can at least cry. It sure looked like it hurt. Why is she looking at me like . . . I didn't trip you gal. You need to stop letting yourself always being the fall guy.

She doesn't seem to be hurt. Hope that she doesn't mind me helping her to . . . I've seen that look before. That's a mom-mom look when she's about to give someone a Jesus-hug. Get back guy before . . . what's her problem now? She looks like she's about ready to burst. You shouldn't be laughing at her. I hope that she knows that I'm laughing with her and not . . . where did that face come from? That face is the face that's on the wedding photo of . . .

I can't sit down. I just can't. I need to keep working. You should've sat down with her guy. She wanted you to sit down with her. Why did she want me to sit down with her? Okay guy – why didn't you want to sit down with her? Maybe she needs a friend? Like she'd want you as a friend? She wouldn't. She's way to . . . how do you know guy?

Why didn't you God let me have a mother? What were you thinking God when you . . . why didn't you ask mom-mom more about those people who were in that wedding photo?

Why wouldn't mom-mom ever talk to me about her husband and about her son? I know that she was proud of her son but . . . why did she always have to say to me that we need to put yesterday behind us, that we need to only think of today and that when tomorrow comes then we'll . . . if I somehow could've gotten your cedar chest mom-mom into old faithful . . . why didn't you ever tell me mom-mom about all those medals that grandpa . . . what happened to him that he was given two purple hearts? That wasn't like you though mom-mom to save all those letters that grandpa sent you. Why didn't you put those letters guy in a shoebox and . . . that one letter that I read mom-mom . . . grandpa really loved you mom-mom didn't he?

Where my parents really happy with me mom-mom? You said once that they were but . . . why didn't you stop them God from going to the Bible school's Christmas cantata. They'd still be alive now if . . . if only I had been sick that night. That would've kept them home.

Can someone when he's only a couple of months old really remember something? This waking up still to a dream of having long dark hair spilling over my face . . . how long was my mother's hair? Were her eyes always dancing and sparkling like that face in the dream? Why did you mom-mom one day refer to your daughter-in-law as a free spirit who . . . you really liked her didn't you mom-mom. If I'm like what you said my father was like, the house had to have been really quiet and boring before . . .

I really have to start listening to what you used to always tell me mom-mom and forget about yesterday and to . . . but mom-mom – today – like right now, has really become a terrible nightmare. What am I doing here pulling one branch after another branch to that angry wood eating beast? That thing's growling is giving me an awful headache. My stomach is screaming mom-mom. I'm so hungry. I don't remember when I last had a decent meal. I miss you so much mom-mom.

What did you do mom-mom when you were told that grandpa had been killed fighting for his country? Father was what – about two years old when . . . then father gets killed when . . . you knew mom-mom what life as a single mom was like didn't you? And then you were stuck having to raise me, too. I know mom-mom that you didn't mind raising me but . . .

How many branches were there on that tree? Thank goodness for the gloves otherwise . . . what're you going to do about tonight if . . . the way that my back and shoulders are hurting right now . . .

What's Tiny going to do with the trunk of that tree once he cuts all the limbs off it. How thick is that trunk anyway? Could you've gotten your arms around it?

That's nice. You're holding her hand. I don't think she knows what to do Mrs. Moneybags. You're really making her uncomfortable. Don't look at me gal. She's your mother. Maybe I should say – you're her daughter. Your mother seems like a nice lady while you . . . I bet you're really good at chasing guys away.

Now why is she going into the house? Her mother must've asked to do something. She didn't seem to mind going into the house. Moneybags seems to be happy having his wife helping him. With all those limbs that moneybags is piling up next to his woodpile, he's going to have plenty of firewood this winter.

A card table? What's she going to do with that? Okay – her mother must've asked her to set up it up to put that pitcher of cold water and some cups on it. You better believe that I'm ready for some more water. How long have we been working out here? What're they going to do for lunch? What'll I do for lunch?

Okay mom-mom – I'll wait another hour and then I'll start thinking about what I'm going to do about lunch. That's what you'd do mom-mom. How could you always be so positive mom-mom? You always saw the bright side of everything mom-mom.

Did that water hit the spot. Here's hoping that the guys will have the tree all cut up by noon and . . . here's hoping the guys don't mind not having pizza tonight. You know that they'll go home if there isn't food. Senior pastor will have an excuse to ream me out again. You know what senior pastor – if it makes you feel better getting mad at me, go for it. I really don't care anymore.

She doesn't have to help dragging these branches anymore. I don't have that light-headed feeling anymore. I'm going to make it. You probably should drink more water guy.

You're so off the wall gal. Was she thinking that one of the branches from that branch that she was pulling was poking her backside? She probably has no clue how animated she gets. It must've been her cell phone buzzing as . . .

Don't eavesdrop guy. But . . . whoever just called isn't someone she was expecting to call her. That's not a good look. Why is she looking towards where her mother and father are? She dropped her phone. Here we go again. The screaming should start any second now by the way that she's shaking her head back and forth. Her face has really gone white. She looks like she has just gotten hit in the stomach or something.

Is that how I looked when Mr. J met me at my house when I got home from my trip and told me about mom-mom? Go to her. Someone has got to go to her. You're looking at me Po like . . .

Why don't you get her father or mother to . . . why are you going to her? What help can you give her? Those eyes – they're rolling up. Grab her before she falls. Take her over to the bench and . . . you're going to have to kind of carry her guy. Why is she looking like she just lost her best friend?

Why is Po handing me her phone? There's someone still on the line. What am I supposed to do? She sure isn't in any shape to talk to anyone. Tell whoever it is to wait a moment while you get her father or her mother. Why wouldn't she want me to get her mother? She wants to know who I am. Why did I just tell her that I'm the youth pastor at the church where her father and mother are members? She's glad that I'm a pastor at the church because. . . why would she be glad?

She wants me to take the gal's father aside to tell him that about a half an hour ago the Lord took papa home to be with Him? Eh? She's going to have to tell me more – what's she trying to say to me? Who is papa? What has the Lord, home, papa got to do with . . . the EMTs think papa had a cardiac arrest – that he died instantly. Okay guy – focus, did you just hear that . . . ask her if that's what you just heard.

No – no God – don't put me in the middle of someone else's death. I don't want to go there. I can't go there God. Make it all go away God. Please God – make it go away. I'll do anything for you God if . . .

She's staring at me like . . . it isn't my fault that . . . why did you just tell Po what you were just told by that lady who was on the gal's phone? Is Po heading over to where his dad is to . . . now Tiny knows, too. They've shut off their chainsaws. It sure has gotten quiet all of a sudden.

I need to get to moneybags before . . . just go ahead and tell both of them together. Put your arm around her shoulders before . . . but . . . she'll be okay with it. Just do it now. Please help me God.

Don't let this be true. Please don't let it be true that papa . . . no – no – not now when . . .

Why is everything spinning? Just go back to pulling branches to that . . . Auntie didn't just call. Papa couldn't have just . . . he was just here. I won't let it happen. I'll make papa alive. God can't be that mean to . . . I'm going to fall.

Why is he coming towards me? Don't get near me. What's he doing? Don't do that. Please don't let go of me. Please don't leave me. Please stay sitting here on the bench with me. He knows that . . . how does he know? Please don't give me that look. I don't want you to care about how I feel right now. Go away.

That's my phone. How did Po get my phone? Don't give it to me. I don't ever want to see that thing again. Tell him to throw it in the lake.

He gave my phone to . . . why is he talking? There's no one on the phone. Auntie didn't call me.

What's this about being the youth pastor at dad and mother's church? He can't be the youth pastor there. The youth pastors that senior pastor has found . . . that's where mother knows him from – she's seen him at the church.

Please Auntie – don't tell him about papa. The guy is a klutz Auntie. How will he know who Auntie is? Don't get up guy. Don't forget about me. You have to tell him who Auntie is.

She has to have just told him that . . . why did she? He's not family. He's a total nobody. Please guy – go away. If I can get him to go away than papa will be . . . make him go away. Maybe if I hit him . . .

He has no right telling Po that papa . . . I know that papa is still alive. You're not telling your dad are you Po? Please don't. Now . . . Tiny knows. They're . . . why did they do that? You have to tell them to keep cutting up the tree. Mother will know that something is wrong if . . . she can't know.

He's leaving me. Why couldn't he have just stayed here with me? What's he doing now? Don't walk over there. Tell him to come back here. Hitting this bench with your hand isn't helping you – so why are you?

You can't put your arm around mother. No one puts their arm around mother. Do something dad. Don't let him tell mother. Stop him.

She's falling. Help him hold her up dad. Come on dad – you've got to help him. Don't just stand there like . . . don't walk away from them dad. Where's dad going?

Don't look at me guy. You made the problem. You fix it yourself. Just let mother lie there on the ground.

Don't get near me Tiny. Don't do that Tiny. Why are you hitting him? He wants to hug you. Let him hug you. Don't let go of me. Why are there tears running down Tiny's face?

What's Tiny saying? He looks so kind. He doesn't know me. Why is he telling me that he's so sorry? What's he so sorry about? Nothing has happened. Papa didn't just . . .

I can't go help him with mother. Who is Tiny to tell me that . . . what's this about him praying that I'll be strong for my parents. Tiny is praying. Who asked Tiny to pray for me? I don't want him praying for me. Praying doesn't help anyone. If God really cared . . .

What nerve to thank God for His love and mercy. Thanking God for me . . . God doesn't know that I exist. Why would God want to do something for me? What've you done for Him? Is that why God You . . . it's my fault that . . . why did I ever stop going to Sunday morning church services?

Tell Tiny that he's wasting his time asking God to help me to . . . papa is mother's dad. Let mother decide what . . . you know gal that she won't know what to do. And you know what to do?

I want to stay sitting here Tiny. Let me stay here. Just because you think that I need to go to where mother is looking like Raggedy Ann lying over there on the lawn . . . I'm going to my car. I'm going to go to the beach. I'm going to start this day all over again. You've got more screws loose gal than mother.

Am I walking or is Tiny carrying me? Doesn't he know that . . . what am I going to do with mother? I sure would be glad, too, if I'd been left with . . . that had to have been really awkward sitting there with mother while . . . he doesn't have a clue what to do. And like you know what to do?

Where's Tiny going? Just let dad stand there staring out into the lake. Maybe he'll get him to come over here. Don't just stand there Tiny staring out over the water with him. Guys. He's not going to get dad to do anything. Why don't you both just sit down in those two chairs and . . . that's going to really help.

You can't stay here gal. There's no way that you're going to be able to help anyone. Stop looking at me guy like . . . you do something. This always acting like you're the one who has the answer for whatever . . . who're you anyway guy? Why don't you take care of yourself? Now when I need your help . . .

What're those guys doing? Why are they standing there with their arms around each other? They can't be. God doesn't listen to someone praying to him who is . . . when did Possum light that cigarette that's always . . . if mother sees him smoking . . . you need to come to mother. Stop pretending that . . .

Maybe he'll help you get mother into the house. And then what're you going to do when you get her into the house? You can't just leave her lying there on the lawn. She's breathing okay.

He seems to think that it's a good idea to get mother into the house. How're we going to do it? Okay – you hold her up on one side and I'll . . . we'll just have to drag her to the house as she's still totally out of it.

Why does he have such an angry look on his face? Good – the guys have seen us trying to . . . once we get mother in the house, he can hang out with his buddy. Is that what you want? Do you really want to be left alone with mother when . . . do you want him here? She likes him. She'd listen to him. Leave him with her. You can . . . you're really mature gal. It's time to stop acting like a spoiled brat and . . .

Your bedroom is a mess mother. This is embarrassing. Maybe they didn't notice. The way the guys look their places probably look like junkyards.

He's not staying. Tell him to stay. When mother . . . maybe you should call her doctor. And like you know who your mother's doctor is? Call 911 then. Maybe whoever answers can tell you what to do next.

Best bud – she'll know what to do. Where's my phone? He must still have it. Go – get it from him. You can't leave mother. Someone needs to be with her if . . . why did he leave me here with her?

Use the phone here in the bedroom to call best bud. What's her number? This pushing a button and . . .

She's moving. Is she going to be okay? What's she mumbling? She wants me to call papa. Where's dad? Why did that idiot youth pastor leave me along with mother? It was wrong for him to leave me alone with mother. Aren't pastors supposed to . . .

You have to tell mother that you can't call papa because . . . stop telling me mother to call papa. I can't. Maybe if you call Auntie, Auntie will . . . okay – okay, tell her that you won't call Auntie. That wasn't a good idea. There has to be something that I can do.

Hug her. And what good would that do? Just hug her. I don't want to hug her. Just hug her. Go away voice. I don't want to hug her.

She's letting me hug her. She's putting her arms around me. She's telling me to not to leave her. I'm not going to leave her but . . . we can't just sit here forever with our arms around each other. Why isn't mother crying? Shouldn't she be crying? I want to cry. I need to scream – and scream – and scream.

You're mumbling again mother. You're asking me to call my sisters? Why? What'll I say to them? What do you expect them to do? They're far away from here mother because . . . it's your fault mother. You call them if . . . why am I calling them? Please mother. Mother needs you right now. You know that.

Why would I have to remember their phone number when . . . keep ringing phone. I'll leave a message. What'll you say if . . . someone just . . . quick – hang up. Why didn't you?

Guess I'd have that sound in my voice, too, if one of them called me on a Saturday morning. How do I tell them that . . . why are you telling her about the tree? The tree has nothing to do with . . . you need to tell her about papa. And like you telling her that you were going to go to the beach but . . . and that you're glad that you didn't go there because . . . just tell her. I can't tell her. She doesn't need to know. She'll want to know.

She had to be here to see how mother was okay with the tree being cut down. And why is that so hard to believe that I've been pulling braches to a branch eater. Why can't I remember what they called the thing?

What're you doing? Did you really need to tell her about the eclectic goofballs who cut down the tree? Why does everyone have to ask me if any of them are . . . don't go there with her about the youth pastor. The guy would be way too much of a project.

Quit stalling gal and . . . why doesn't she say something. Is she still there? Has she hung up?

Why is she on the phone? I wasn't talking to her. I was talking to . . . she's not making any sense. She got to believe that it's true that . . . she's got to stop telling me that isn't funny – that it's a horrible joke for me to call them up so early on a Saturday to tell them that papa has . . .

She's got to listen to me. My day has been spoiled, too. Why won't she get it that I'm at the house now because . . . what's wrong with me going to the house this morning? Why do they always have to accuse me about everything? They could've stayed around here. They didn't have to move halfway across the world to . . . just keep screaming at me.

Just hang up on her. She's out of control. Remember this morning gal when . . . okay – she isn't the only one who knows how to scream. Why couldn't mother have called them?

Did she just ask me does mother know? She needs to believe me that I'm with mother right now – and that mother asked me to give them a call. Mother is being mother – what else do I tell her. They know what I mean when I said that she's curled up in a fetal position on her bed. They've probably seen her like that as many times as I have.

How do I know what's going to happen next? Good question – where's dad? Is he still sitting in one of those chairs next to the lake? Is Tiny with him?

She's telling me to go get dad. Why? If dad really wanted to help mother, he would've – right? I really don't blame her for not believing me. I'm sitting on a bed with a corpse. Mother has gone to mother's world. Why does she always go there?

What did she just say? I can't concentrate. I don't have the answers. Tell them that you'll call them back later today. They can't make plans to come here. I can't stop them if they want to call Auntie. Maybe Auntie . . . maybe I should call Auntie back. What would I say to her?

Please don't look at me like that mother. Just keep hugging her. She's not going to let me go. Why didn't she hug me like this when I was little? You're going to have to just stay with her until . . . until when?

Why does mother get to have someone to . . . I really need to talk to someone. Why didn't you tell him not to leave? How could he have helped me? You just met him. You don't know him. For a guy though who looks like he's at the end of his rope . . . how come he has been so patient with me?

She isn't supposed to do this. She's fainting. Her eyes just rolled up and . . . guy – you've got to help me hold up your wife. Why is he walking away? Don't leave me guy with your wife. Why didn't I listen to that voice? I should've just told moneybags that . . . instead of . . . why doesn't he want to have anything to do with his wife? Look this way guy. Your wife is lying on the ground. She's totally out of it.

What should I do? What's Tiny doing? That was just a Jesus-hug. You made her totally disappear Tiny in that hug. Now what's he doing? Why does he have his head bowed like . . . he's praying? You need to wipe that incredulous look off your face gal. You probably have the same look on your face guy.

Where are the rest of the guys? Maybe they . . . what're they doing? They can't be? How can they be? They're not . . . now that's something I've never seen before. You're praying Possum with that lit cigarette bobbing up and down in your mouth as you . . . do you really think that God is listening to you? Why wouldn't He? Why can't Possum and his kid – and Paco, be Christ-followers? What has made me all of sudden remember the old toothless guy's name?

You do know Tiny that she really doesn't want to come this way. You're not giving her a choice are you Tiny. Tiny will know what to do when . . . you're just going to leave her with me while you . . .

Now that she's here, why don't you go join the threesome and . . . this huddling together and . . . how long have they been praying? When did they start praying? Do they really think that their prayers are really going to . . . praying sure hasn't helped me.

That's a whole lot of help Tiny. Just have moneybags sit down on one of those plastic chairs while you . . . and how long are you just going to stare out over the water? You needed to help me with . . . I don't know what to do. Thanks for sticking me with . . . she probably hasn't had to made a decision on her own in her whole life. Must be nice to have a father and a mother who you can . . . mom-mom was always there for me but . . . just because she didn't have to think about what she was going to do the next day or the next week or . . . I needed someone to talk to about so much. Those so-called advisors at the Bible school were a waste of time. How come no one cares about me? Why does everyone have to think of only themselves?

Is she wanting me to help her get her mother into the house? Good idea. This isn't working well. She's dead weight. Where did they come from? This is her bedroom? She lets her bedroom look like this when her Sunday school room is . . . you should talk guy. When is the last time that you've made your bed?

She's all yours gal. You should stay guy. What would you do if you stayed? Her mother needs her to be with her. Her mother needs her husband there with her, too. What's the matter with him anyway?

Whew – it's good to be outside again. The air feels so fresh. I've got to get away from this place. You can't leave. Who said that? Who told me that I can't leave? Where's everyone going?

Tiny and moneybags are . . . how long is Tiny going to just sit there with moneybags? Someone has to do something. How many times guys are you going to . . . what good does it do to just walk around?

Senior pastor needs to know. Call him. That old phone of his that . . . another thing that was his that he's making me pay the monthly payments so that he can have the latest model. Just get it from where you left it in the car. As many times as that uncaring pea brain has called me, I'm not going to have any trouble finding his number in the calls that I've gotten.

So what if senior pastor is still in that meeting that he said that he was having this morning with a couple of other area pastors. I sure would want to know that someone on my yes board has had someone die in his family. It's senior pastor's job to come out here to . . .

Come on senior pastor – answer your phone. What're you doing? About time. What's this who're you? He knows who am I. Come on senior pastor – stop acting like you've just gotten a crank call. Can he just stop for second what he's doing and . . . why does senior pastor always have to act like everything revolves around him? This is not a business call – this is me. Why doesn't he get it that I need to . . .

Who is the joker with anyway? Someone just yelled at him to hit the ball. He lied to me – again. This meeting . . . he’s on a golf course.

What’s this can I call you after . . . don’t let him hang up. Tell the arrogant dunce that you know that he’s not in a meeting – that he’s out on a golf course. Tell him why you called.

He couldn’t have just called me that name. What makes him think that he has the right to . . . he’s yelling at me. Okay – so he did tell me never to call him but . . . I hope whoever is with him isn’t anywhere near him right now as . . . that’s pure vulgarity that . . . he’s a preacher. Aren’t preachers supposed to be men of God? Maybe you accidentally called someone else. No – that’s senior pastor on the other end of the line. He can’t keep ranting forever.

I’m not what he just called me. That was really crude. I’ve done my very best to please that ignoramus and this is the thanks that I get from him? What – tonight’s lock-in has nothing to do with why I called him. Didn’t he hear me when I told him that moneybags father-in-law just . . . why is he accusing me now of being at moneybags house? Doesn’t he remember that he told me to . . . probably not.

He just told me to do what? Why can’t he come over here? Why do I have to . . . I don’t know what to do. What did he mean that’s an order that . . . he hung up.

What an oaf. You should talk. You’re no better than that supercilious numbskull. If you had just taken the time to check everything out, you wouldn’t be here today.

Would you really rather be back in . . . at least I’d have a job. Where would you be living? You know that after what happened to mom-mom that . . . there’s no way that you could stay in mom-mom’s house.

Why did I let the school make me go on that trip over spring break? I should’ve told mom-mom before I left not to . . . with the high school out on spring break, too, you knew that she’d probably go to the suburbs to see her family. But if I’d been home when she got home . . . it’s all my fault that mom-mom . . . why can’t I remember the last thing that I said to mom-mom before I left for the beach with the team from the school? How come mom-mom would never go anyplace with me? Why was mom-mom always so ready to help the streetwalkers who were always hanging out around our corner but . . . it would’ve been really nice mom-mom to have had a TV or a . . . in the house. This thing mom-mom about not having any frills when there’re hurting people everywhere . . . maybe mom-mom I was one of those hurting people.

Come on guy – you’ve got to stop thinking about mom-mom right now and . . . you know that each time that you think about mom-mom and what you should’ve done or what you wish that you’d done or why it couldn’t have been you who . . . when are You God going to take the awful pain away? What’re you punishing me for anyway? This letting my body be a living sacrifice for You . . . okay – I know – I’m not as holy as I know that I should be. Why is it so wrong to feel angry?

Talk about an angry person – if she’s still with her mother, the crazed gal has earned a medal. Did you really hope that she’d ask you to . . . are you wanting to see her again? She’s going to need someone to . . . why couldn’t there have been someone there for me when . . . who . . . okay – Mr. J was there but . . . you do know guy that everyone was okay with you. But I never felt like I could fit into their world mom-mom like you could. It was like you never ever noticed mom-mom that your skin was a different color.

Instead of just walking back and forth up moneybag’s drive, you need to say something to moneybags. You need to let him know that you called senior pastor and . . . senior pastor has absolutely no excuse for not showing up here. Guy – you’ve got to stop thinking ahead and . . . you don’t have any choice guy right now but to live in the moment. Just pull a mom-mom guy and . . .

How long are you going to sit there Tiny with . . . where did the other guys go? How long have they been sitting on the bench by the back door? Just go to where Tiny is sitting with . . . why am I always forgetting last names? I could call moneybags by his first name but . . . I can’t do that. Stop putting off going over there guy. He needs to know that you’re genuinely sorry for him that . . .

Why is Tiny waving for Po to come over to where he's sitting? Po's heading my way. Tiny must've told Po to hang out with me. Where did Tiny have that cell phone hidden? Like that bibbed pants thing that that oversized dude has on doesn't have at least seventeen pockets in it. Who is he calling?

Po's got a smile on his face. Why? There's nothing to be happy about around here right now.

What's Po getting from his dad? Po wants me to go with him. Where? Why? We're going to Po's house? I need to drive Possum's pickup because his kid doesn't have a license yet? And we're going to go there because . . . we're going to get who and what? Just what this place needs right now – more bodies. And what did Po say that we're going to take back here?

I can't leave now. What if she . . . why guy are you so worried about her. She's a big girl. She can take care of herself.

I'm going to get to drive this pickup? This would make my day if . . . okay – the key goes there and . . . what just happened? Why did Possum's pickup jump forward like something ran into the back of it? You're looking at me Po like . . . what's a clutch? What does he mean did I push in the clutch when I turned the ignition key? This is a . . . what's a stick? Doesn't this thing have park and . . . where's drive?

You're going to have to tell Po that . . . you just know that he'll make sure that you'll never live it down that . . . what's this he'll turn around his dad's pickup and then he'll teach me how to drive a stick?

Why doesn't the kid just drive his dad's pickup home instead of . . . do I have to learn how to drive a stick thing now? Po really does believe that it'd be wrong for him to drive out on the highway because he doesn't have a driver's license. Like I'm going to be any better though than him driving on the highway?

He's being too kind to me. That was the third time that . . . hey – we're moving. Now what? Push in the clutch again. Yah – now I'm supposed to move this lever here into another notch? I'm listening – slowly let out the clutch and . . . he wants me to stop. Why – we're moving. He wants me to practice. Like we've all the time in the world to practice?

How many times is Po going to have me start up, shift and stop? At least I'm hardly making this thing jerk anymore when I . . . okay – this time I'm to shift from second to third. Third what? How about that – we're still moving. Now what? I've got to stop at the stop sign. That's the main highway. I don't want to go out on the main highway. What's this that I'm doing great – that I'm a fast learner? You really do mean that don't you Po.

Okay – here goes. We're going to go now just a little ways and then we'll turn off to the left? Okay. Just let Po do all the talking – you don't even have to think. There has to be a way for you to get Po into the youth group at the church. And what makes you think that Po knows what the inside of a church looks like? Even if I could get him to come to church and the youth group, Po would have to pass senior pastor's approval before . . . if I hear one more I from senior pastor – and who just said I? Why couldn't I have gone to a place where we is used to describe everything that's done. And I thought megalomaniacs were just a Bible school phenomena. Okay guy – why are you suddenly so hard on your former teachers. You used to like them – a lot.

You need to pay better attention to what Po is telling you. I'm to get ready to turn left? I know that I need to turn the left blinker on but . . . oh – I should've known that that was the blinker thing.

We made it. Yeh. We're off the main road. Now where are we going? Sure hope that Po knows where he's going because . . . hope that Po's dad won't mind that his pickup was driven down a gravel lane or whatever kind of road this is.

What? I would never ever have guessed that . . . what's this place? Just keep following Po's directions. Where's he taking me? How big is this place anyway? I thought places like this were supposed to be trashy. This place looks like moneybag's wife has been everywhere around here with her green thumb.

Okay God – how long are You going to make me sit here with mother? Why did You have to make her my mother? Why couldn't You have made someone else be my mother instead of this inert body? Why did You have me be born to someone who hates me so much? What did I do to her?

I really don't want to stay here with mother. I really don't want to stay here with mother. Have You heard me God, I really don't want to stay here with mother.

Where's dad? Why can't dad stay here with mother? Why is it always me who . . .

Stop gal – think. Papa just died. Papa hasn't just died. Papa was here a week ago. How many times did you come over here to spend time with papa and mama when they were here this time? I always come over here at least once when papa and mama visited dad and mother. I didn't say good-bye to papa. It's his fault. The self-observed fool always had an excuse why he couldn't come over here with me. Just because you wanted to show him off to . . . you could've found time to come here without him you know.

I've got to move. I can't keep sitting on the bed like this. How can I get mother to let go of me? You've got to let her know that you're not going to leave her – that you just need to move.

Come on clock – move faster. It has to be longer than ten minutes since . . . it sure feels like I've been here with mother for hours. Ask mother if it's okay if I can leave her for a moment to get dad.

What's that look for mother? You're really scaring me. If only she'd take the time to look at her face in a mirror when . . . why is she squeezing my arm so hard? It hurts. Tell her that it hurts. You don't want her gal to get any madder than what she looks right now. You should know by now that . . .

Here we go again. This never wanting to see dad again because . . . eh – where did that come from? It's my fault that she didn't go. It's my fault that she had to stay home. It's my fault that dad . . . what's she saying? Has she forgotten that her father just died?

Now what? Why isn't mother crying? Does she want me to stay or does she want me to leave? Someone please come. I can't do this. Where are you God?

If I had my phone, I'd . . . who'd I call? Mother doesn't have any friends. If Auntie was here . . . if Auntie hadn't moved with her family to . . . then papa and mama would still be living here and papa would still be alive. Why did you have to move Auntie? It's your fault that papa is dead. Why gal do you always blame someone else when . . . why do you always have to have things go your way?

Maybe that youth pastor is sitting on the bench right outside the back door. And what would an overage high school kid do with your mother that you can't do? Mother hasn't let you go since . . . but she knows him. Maybe he can . . . and how do you know that he's not good at being a youth pastor?

Why would anyone in their right mind want to be a youth pastor at the church? There's no way that I'm ever going to walk through the church's doors again to hear that pompous dork pretend like he's some kind of Biblical scholar. The guy must be blind. Half of the pews anymore are empty on a Sunday morning.

There's no way that I'm going to show up for another Sunday School class that's for sure. And what're you going to tell best bud? Maybe we can find another singles Sunday School class in another church?

Is it that important to you gal that you . . . papa would be really disappointed if he knew that you weren't going to church anymore. Papa must've known that you aren't going to church. He and mama had to have gone to church last Sunday with dad and mother. Senior pastor better be really glad that papa and mama had moved from here before he . . . if papa hadn't moved to where Auntie lived, papa would've . . .

Senior pastor has to know that it was papa and mama who . . . going to church when I was little . . . it really was something that us girls all looked forward to doing each Sunday. You'd fix us up mother like little dolls. We were always the best dressed kids in church.

How can mother turn it on to be happy when she's getting ready to go to church and when she's in church? Why is it mother that the only other time when you're happy around here is when you're working in your garden or out in the yard? Why don't you ever keep the inside of your house clean? Why does this place – except when papa and mama are here, always look like a pigsty?

Do you have any clue mother how mad that you make me? When's the last time that you said something nice to me? It's your fault mother that papa moved away. You know that don't you. Why doesn't mother say something? Do you really want her to start ranting at you again? You're going to have to just keep on holding on to her. She's not going to let you go.

Now what does mother want? What's she pointing at? That's her Bible. Why does she want her Bible? Looking at your Bible like you want to burn the thing isn't going to help. Don't hand it to me. I don't want it. What am I going to do with it? It's her Bible. When is the last time that you opened your Bible gal? Do you remember where it is?

How did mother learn so much about the Bible? Ask her. You've left me again haven't you mother? You're back in mother's world. Why do you go there? How come mother is able to escape . . . gal – papa just died. Remember. What am I going to do? What're dad and mother going to do? I can't leave work.

I need to do something. I can't sit here for the rest of my life. Mother has to understand. Someone has to do something. Where's dad? I've got to find dad. Then I'll call up best bud and we'll head for the beach.

I've got to get out of here. I've got to think. I need to talk to someone. Why do I have to be stuck alone here with this person who doesn't know how to be a mother let alone being a wife?

It'd have to fall on the floor. Come on mother – why does she have to turn everything into a . . . all I was doing mother was picking up the Bible off the floor. She acted like I was about ready to abandon her. What's it going to take for her to . . . this pushing me away one moment and then not wanting me to leave the next moment is . . . how can someone always be so irrational?

Where do I put this thing? What good is a Bible when . . . papa and mama always read the Bible. Why? Why would they want to read something from the Bible after every meal? Then every morning . . . how many times does someone have to read the Bible before . . . papa didn't say good-bye to me. I need to say good-bye to papa. How am I going to do that?

What's this? It's one of those little devotional books that papa and mama always read after meals. It was always first read something from the Bible and then . . . it sure used to be a big deal when papa would ask one of us gals to read the Bible. Why was it always so important papa that you had to read the devotional? Why didn't papa ever ask dad to pray? Why did papa always ask us girls to pray?

Papa can't be gone. Auntie didn't call. She couldn't have called. Why am I sitting here with mother? Tell mother to stop clinging to me. I've got to call 911. Why isn't there someone around here who can tell me what to do? Why did that hopeless looking hobo run off when I needed him? He's got to be still around here someplace. Scream – maybe he'll . . . where's dad? Has dad forgotten that mother is his wife and that I'm his . . . get in here dad and . . . you've got to be a whole lot stronger gal. This can't be happening. It can't be. Oh God – please help me.

Mother has to be reading from this devotional thing. Why else would it be folded to today's date? I might as well read what today says. There's nothing else to do.

Okay – first I've got to find where the verses are. Where's Matthew in this thing? Isn't Matthew the first book in the New Testament? If papa knew that I've forgotten the names of the books of the Bible . . . it'd be so embarrassing. What was that song that papa taught us gals to sing that helped us gals remember the books of the Bible? Here it is. Now to Matthew 7. Where is verse 24? Okay – I'm supposed to read from here to the end of the chapter. It's only a couple of verses. Why did it seem that when papa asked me to read the Bible verses that it seemed like I had to read the whole Bible?

It says above the verse the wise and foolish builders. Wise and foolish builders – who're they? The words are red. Isn't it if the words are in red that it means that it's something that Jesus said? Papa – you used to be so good at explaining to us girls what the Bible said. Did papa teach mother to be such a good teacher? Everyone liked being in mother's Sunday School class.

A wise man is someone who after he listened to what Jesus said built his house on a rock. The wise man's house will not fall when the rains come down and when the streams fill up with water and when the wind blows because the guy has his house's foundation on a rock. So . . . okay – now a foolish man doesn't do what Jesus has told him to do. A foolish man built his house on the sand. Because the foolish man built his house on the sand, it'll fall down when the rains come down and when the streams fill up with water and when the wind blows because the guy has built his house's foundation on sand. And what Jesus said made sense per the last couple verses to everyone listening to Him. Those people sure must've been smarter than me as what I just read sure doesn't make any sense to me.

Now what does the devotional thing say? No – I've never built a house. Everyone knows that a house has to have a solid foundation. Why does a house have to have a foundation? Good question. That makes sense – if there wasn't something solid for a house to sit on, the house could shift if . . . what – a house in this parable is representative of my life. A parable – I need to find out what a parable is. If the rock is representative of Jesus, what does the sand represent? Okay – I think I get it. If I build my life on Jesus, Jesus will help me to not fall when the rains come, when the streams fill up with water and when the winds blow. If I build my life on sand, I'm building my life on the things that I want to do which means that . . . you do know gal that you've been building your life on sand don't you?

No wonder Jesus doesn't want to help me now. But . . . remember papa when . . . you can't have died. I need you to help me remember when you and mama . . . how old was I? I was already in school. It was at Easter. I asked you and mama why everyone had to get together in the park real early in the morning before going to church. You told me it because everyone was celebrating Jesus coming back to life which meant that . . . you kept answering me when I asked you why Jesus had to die, why He had to come back to life, why He went to heaven instead of staying here on the earth, why, why, why . . . you were always so patient with us girls.

I really believed what you said papa when you . . . then you asked me if I wanted to thank Jesus for dying for my sins. You helped me pray papa. I still believe what you told me papa – I just haven't been building my life on Jesus. I promise I'll do that papa if . . . you're not going to come back are you papa? It's all my fault. That's what mother always tells me. Why does she always tell me that it's always my fault?

This has been the longest seventeen minutes in my life. Why gal do numbers stick in your mind and names don't? Just turn the clock around if . . .

Papa dies and mother goes to sleep. My chest feels like it's going to explode. I've never felt so helpless. There has to be something that I can do. If I could only get mother to let go of my arm . . .

Please God – show me what to do. I promise that I'll . . . how many times gal have you promised that you'll do something and then . . . how many times have you promised best bud that you won't head for the bathroom after you've eaten something and . . . maybe if you promise God that you'll read the Bible more or that you'll stop using some of those words that you know that you shouldn't use or . . . why didn't you teach me to pray papa? How do I know papa when God is listening to me?

No day can ever be any worse than what this day has been so far. And it isn't even lunchtime yet. Why don't you see if there isn't something around here to eat? If the guys are still around, they've got to be hungry. Those clowns aren't going to still be around here. Why would they want to stay? If they were here, they'd be cutting up that dead tree and . . . I don't remember hearing a thing since . . .

If I can just get mother to . . . how will you feel when dad and mother . . . don't go there gal.

What was that? Someone is in the house. Let whoever it is know where you are. Finally . . .

So this is what a mobile home park looks like. There're one hundred and seventeen units here? Wow. This place looks like a bunch of overgrown cracker tins that're lying on their sides. Of all the things that mom-mom gave away, why would mom-mom want to keep cracker tins?

This place cannot be real. This whole morning has been surreal. You know guy that you're having a dream. There's no way that it's plausible that . . . you need to wake up. You need to deal with reality. You're trapped in a place that if you'd just . . . you know that there was no way that you could ever spend another night in mom-mom's house with how mom-mom was . . .

Pay attention guy. Where did all the kids come from? Is Po going to . . . I'm not going to begin to remember their names. Let Po do his thing guy – it's important to him.

I hope that I don't stall Possum's pickup right in front of everyone. I'll try to keep this thing moving in first – even if it takes all day to get to where Po is taking us. I hope it's okay that some of the kids are jumping in the back of the pickup. This is crazy. Someone could get hurt.

Everyone sure seems glad to see Po. Why? Who is he to everyone here? By all the different shades of color of those kids . . . hey – there's a ballfield over there. That's a cement basketball court, too. I haven't seen one of those since . . . like you've ever been on one? You know that you're as spastic as they come.

This is Po's place? It looks just like every other place. Just park the pickup in the driveway guy and . . . I can breathe again. That was really intense.

Why did I come here with Po? I should've stayed at moneybag's place. Why guy are you all of sudden thinking of . . . and how would you be helping her if . . .

Po just introduced you as saltine to everyone. You need to tell Po that's not your real name. Is everyone going to give me a fist bump? Guess I'm their entertainment for today. They probably don't have that much to do to pass time around here.

It's sure weird to hear everyone calling me saltine again. I can go with it. What's this question asking thing that everyone has around here? If they've the time to hear my life story . . . what – there's something buzzing in my pants pocket. I'm never going to live that down. You guys can stop laughing like . . . so I forgot that I'd put her cell phone in my front pocket.

You need to answer it guy before . . . it's not my phone. I can't believe that . . . did whoever it was hang up before . . . I must've waited too long before . . . okay – you're going to have to tell whoever called that she didn't call the wrong number. Whoever is on the line will want to know why you have her cell phone.

Just tell the gal that you'd been at her father's house when . . . at least she knows who Auntie is. She's asking you again what you just said. Tell her again. Everyone is staring at me like . . . do the kids here know the gal's grandfather? That was an oh no . . . she's that crazy gal's best bud? Why is she crying? Did she know . . . I don't want to cry, too. You can't cry in front of everyone. Why doesn't everyone just go away? I've got to get away from here before . . . who grabbed my hand? She's got to be related to Po.

What did the gal on the phone just say to you? Get a hold of yourself guy. You're making a real fool of yourself by the way that . . . you're making a great impression on everyone aren't you guy?

She just asked you if . . . tell her that it'd really be good if she'd go over there. And tell her to tell that lunatic that you're sorry that you didn't give her her phone back to her. She's going to head right over there? That's great. She sounds like a really sweet, levelheaded gal.

She's Po's little sister. Poor little thing. What a cutie for someone who looks like a little mouse. She's not going to let go of my fingers is she? Where's she wanting to take me? Guess we're going to go inside the mobile home. So this is what the inside of a mobile home looks like. This place is sure a whole lot neater looking than . . . where's her mother?

She's her mother? She's at least four times bigger than Possum. Good grief she's . . . Po just said that her name is Miss Deedee. Why didn't Po call her mother or ma or . . .

Here goes Po again. What's he going to tell me this time? Miss Deedee used to live by herself in the trailer two trailers to the east. Her husband left her because . . . maybe you're giving me Po more information than I need to know in front of . . . it doesn't seem to bother Miss Deedee that . . . why would a guy just walk away from someone who obviously does such a good job keeping a place really nice?

Po's mother is in jail? She's on her third strike which means that . . . he's glad that she's in jail? She's glad that she's in jail? How can a kid be happy that his mother is in jail? She's really pretty? Is Po saying that his mother wasn't pretty before . . . meth had really messed up her face? She had tried to stop but . . . going through rehab didn't help? Her meth addiction had her . . . how can Po be so matter of fact about his mother? Po knows that . . . everyone knows including his mother that the best place for her right now is jail because . . . she's taking classes? She's going to finish her GED and then . . . how can everyone hope that she doesn't get out of jail early? I'd think that it'd be really awful to be locked up in a jail.

Why did Po just say that we're going to have to wait for about ten minutes or so before . . . we're going to wait another ten minutes or so for what? Why did we come here?

Guess I'm going to get a tour of Po's place while we wait. So these two back rooms are the two bedrooms in this place. Why do both of these rooms have bunk beds? So Po sleeps on the upper bunk in the back bedroom while his pa sleeps on the lower bunk and his little sis sleeps on the top bunk in the middle room while Miss Deedee sleeps on the bottom bunk. It sure is a good thing that Miss Deedee sleeps on the bottom bunk as . . . how did Po know that I was thinking that?

You better be happy Po that Miss Deedee didn't take what you said seriously. I sure wouldn't be laughing like it was the funniest thing that I've ever heard if someone said something about me being a beanpole or something. If she had decided to sit on you Po . . . everyone around here seems to think that they're in a real life comedy or something.

And this is the kitchen and the sitting area. This place is sure a lot larger inside than what it looks like it could be from the outside. That's a Bible on the counter. Why is there a Bible on the counter? This sure doesn't seem like a place where . . .

Now where's Po taking me? Is his little sis going to hold on to my fingers the whole time that I'm here? Would mother have had more kids if . . . where did everyone go? Did they leave because I . . . guess Po is going to show me what's inside this shed. It sure didn't look this big when . . .

You need to help Po first with that piece of limb that he's trying to lift out of the back of the pickup. What's Po planning to do with it? Guess Po wants to put it in the shed. For a piece that isn't all that long, it sure is heavy. Po is going to need to turn on a light or something as . . . wow – what's all this?

That's a really nice table saw. That's a nicer table saw than the table saw at the Bible school. What does Possum do with it? He sure has put enough overhead lights inside this shed.

Those are crosses hanging on the wall. Why are there so many crosses . . . so Po's pa uses his table saw to make the crosses. That's a really good idea to saw them from limbs or from trunks at an angle so that there's some bark on the bottom, on the top and on both ends of the cross.

Possum probably sells crosses to . . . they're really well done. I've never seen anything like them before. There's something written on them. There's a verse or verses on each cross. Possum must really have a steady hand to . . . Po is who puts those verses on each cross? What can't this kid do?

I can't believe what I'm seeing. That's serious painting. Those are landscapes. Po painted them? That's impossible. He has to be barely in high school. Possum will cut a cross out of that log that we just took here from moneybag's house and . . . it's amazing how Po makes a cross look like a complete painting.

Where does Po get the paint to . . . so a couple of the guys who live in this mobile home park work on garbage trucks. Okay – so when someone leaves a paint can in the garbage that still has paint in it, they save it for Po who . . . no one can paint like that using just plain old house paint. How many Bible school rooms did you paint during those four years that you . . . no one is ever going to make me paint another room. Always that white paint that already looked like . . . did that place ever buy something that wasn't the cheapest that they could find?

He has already visualized what the scene will look like that he's going to paint? How does Po know what the tree looked like when . . . if he can pull that off, that cross is going to be beautiful with the lake as a backdrop along with . . . he's going to have in the painting flowers and bushes and birds and . . . what's polyurethane? He'll cover the cross with the stuff once the paint is dry . . . is that why all the crosses look so glossy? And once the cross is finished, he'll give the cross to . . . I wish that I could be there when . . .

He's already decided what verses he's going to put on the cross that his pa . . . Psalm 1:1-3 – how are those verses written in the Good News Bible? Okay Po – now you're showing off quoting those verses by heart. Ask him why he doesn't want to use the same verses out of the King James. That was a curious look.

Okay – he likes the Good News translation of these verses better than the King James. Now that he's read them from both versions . . . how many different kinds of Bibles does he have around here?

How does Po know what these verses mean? He has got to be a . . . he definitely has given me the impression that he's a really good kid who . . . using a verse that has a tree in it is really a good idea.

Now what's Po looking for in the Bible? Why is he going to Romans? Why is that goofy kid reading me Romans 3:23? I know what the verse says? Of course I know that everyone is born a sinner and that . . . now he's reading Romans 6:23. Is he using the Roman Road on me? He thinks that . . . you need to tell him that you're a Bible school graduate and that you're a youth pastor and that you've used these very same verses about four months ago when . . . like anyone listened to you when you tried to use those verses? Everyone just wanted to party. Even the two dummkopfs who had been assigned by the school to be our team leaders spent the majority of their time at the beach doing things that I'd never ever think about doing. Talk about living a double standard. What would the Bible school do if they found out that drinking, looking for parties, looking for girls was the norm instead of . . . then to be the laughingstock of the trip because I . . . only to come home to find out that mom-mom . . .

Why is Po staring at me like . . . what did he say? Did he just ask me if I knew that because of my sins that I wasn't going to have eternal life in heaven? I hope that I don't look as mad as I feel right now. Who does Po think he is that . . . and who did you think that you were each time that you tried to share your faith with someone? At least the kids in my neighborhood never laughed at me when . . . Po must think that I've never made a decision of faith. That was one of the few upsides of having a grandmother who was known as being both a literal and a figurative saint to everyone who knew her or knew about her.

Just let him do what he wants to do. Bet the next verse is Romans 5:8 that he'll . . . yep – you're starting to become real predictable Po. I'm going to put a rope on you Po and take you home with me. You'd make a really good pet. This isn't a good time to smirk guy. Get serious. Just because he's still a kid, you need to respect him. Tell him that you know that Christ died for your sins – that you made a profession of faith after your mom-mom read you the story of Paul's conversion.

That's a surprised look Po. Did it surprise him that I'm . . . you don't have to yell so loud Po. Everyone in this place doesn't need to know right now that saltine is a Jesus-follower. Po really is happy that . . . glad that I could make his day.

Do I want a cross? What would I do with a cross? Where did all those little crosses come from? How many are there? These here can be hung around someone's neck like a necklace? Where does Po get the time to put a verse on one side and to paint a scene on the other side? I like this one of that eagle soaring in a really bright blue sky over a really rugged looking cliff. What's the verse? Isaiah 40:31. I've seen that verse. It's the verse that's on the back of the wedding photo of father and mother that mom-mom had . . .

I sure hope that it's dad who is in the house. Who else would it be?

It's best bud. It can't be best bud. She's crying. Why is she crying? She doesn't know that papa . . . I'm crying. When did I start crying? I'm never going to stop crying. I'm so glad that best bud is here.

How can mother just lie there on the bed like . . . what can I do? Maybe best bud can help me know what to do. Where would I be today if . . . don't let her leave. She's promising that she won't leave. She won't leave. You know that best bud always does what she says that she's going to do.

What do I know about what happened to papa? She has to believe that I don't know anything other than that Auntie called and . . . you've got to stop blubbing gal.

Just tell her that one of the guys who was here talked to Auntie. Why did that irresponsible bum leave me alone with mother? So help me when I see him again. He makes so mad. If he was here, I'd scream so loud at him. And if he gets close to me again . . . everything would be different right now if that skinny geek hadn't showed here today. I just know.

How did she know that it was the youth pastor who . . . he told her? He also told her to tell me that he's sorry for walking off with my phone? He better be sorry. Why am I yelling at best bud? Why am I saying what I'm saying about . . . it's not okay that . . . what does she mean that she wants me to cry? I've reason to cry. My grandfather just died. I'm never ever going to see him alive again. Why didn't I . . .

How does best bud know what I'm wishing? Who does she think she is saying that she knows that . . . why is she always telling me how to live my life? She's worse than mother. Tell her to go away – that you don't need her – that you don't want to ever see her again. Why is she hugging me instead of leaving?

Why did I have to hurt her like that? You didn't want to hurt her. She has to know that you didn't really mean what you said. You really don't want her to leave. When are you going to learn to think before . . .

Why is best bud asking me again what I know about what happened to papa? Why doesn't she get it that all I know is that papa had an apparent heart attack and . . . how did that doofus get my phone?

I wish she hadn't asked me that. Why did she ask me that? It's unconscionable that I didn't come over to see papa and mama when they were here last week. Please don't ask me why I didn't come over here to see them. Please don't ask me. Okay – I did talk to him on the phone but . . . I was planning to come over here with that egotistical self-promoter but . . . why didn't he want to meet papa anyway? Those were just excuses and you fell for them all didn't you – you gullible lamebrain.

Did she just ask me if I was okay with leaving mother alone here in her bedroom while we . . . hey – if she thinks it's okay to leave mother alone, I'm out of here. Mother is still definitely in wa-wa land. Has she moved any at all since best bud . . . I don't remember that she has.

Why does she want me to show her what we were doing this morning with the tree before . . . I wouldn't believe me either if . . . I really did help with the branches. Yah – I wish that she had come over here, too, when I told her what was happening. It does look like a different world out here in the backyard. That tree really did block off the view to east. It's sure nice to be able to look out at the lake. Apparently dad and Tiny are going to spend the rest of their lives sitting in those two chairs staring out of the lake. At least they're talking now. Maybe dad would talk with me if . . .

What're those guys still doing here? They sure haven't been sitting around. Piling up the cut up branches next to that . . . where's Po and that nerd? Possum's pickup is gone. How come I didn't hear it leave? You were stuck with mother – remember?

Why does she want to meet the guys? She didn't have to laugh like that in front of Possum when I told her his name. This thing Possum you know about having an unlit cigarette dangling from your mouth is . . . you should know Possum that best bud is making it her life vocation to outlaw smoking before she . . .

Why can't you remember Paco? Paco sounds like a good old Hispanic name – for a kid. It sure doesn't fit this wizened, tooth challenged old drunk. And how do you know that Paco drinks? Just because . . . when are you going to stop gal leaning on stereotypes that you've created in your own mind?

If she wants to go over and check on dad first before helping Possum and Paco, then go ahead and do it; I'm going to . . . and what was that nod about Possum? Is he suggesting that I should go over to where dad is sitting and . . . I probably should. I sure don't want to though. Dad abandoning me like he did – leaving me with mother . . . that wasn't cool at all.

Dad you better not . . . good grief – dad doesn't look any better than mother. Doesn't dad know that he's supposed to be the strong one for his family? It wasn't dad's father who died. What do I say to him?

Just like best bud to try to hug him. Dad you're . . . you never let anyone hug you. You don't even hug mother. Why does dad look like the world has come to an end for him?

He's looking at me. What do I do? You're coming towards me dad. What would you do dad if I tried to hug you? How come you never . . . you're hugging me dad. Dad's thanking me for staying with mother. What's he mean that she wouldn't have let him do anything for her? How does he know that? She was just helping him pile up logs. She had to have wanted to help dad pile up those logs otherwise . . .

What do I tell him about mother? I think that she was just sleeping – and not passed out. I know that she was breathing when best bud and I left the house. Why doesn't he go in and check on her?

Who . . . it's Tiny. Does he have any idea at all how much he scared me? The corners of your eyes guy are giving you away. I must've jumped a mile when . . . a guy shouldn't have such kind eyes. You're staring at my best bud like . . . okay – you know I'm not a hugger but . . . his arms sure feel awfully strong.

That was really good what you did with your mother? Is that what Tiny just said to me? Tiny thinks that letting her sleep for now is good as . . . you could've finished that sentence Tiny. What does he know that I don't know? Is Tiny wanting to help?

Why is Tiny taking two more chairs to the lake? Why is he motioning me to come over to where he is? Guess he wants both of us to walk over. What's Tiny up to anyway?

He wants to pray for us? If Tiny wants to pray for us . . . sure, why not. I sure need prayer right now that's for sure. Yah Tiny – this was a glorious day that God had made before He . . . this isn't still a glorious day. And what makes you think Tiny that papa dying was in God's perfect plan that He made before He ever created planet Earth. Now Tiny you're calling God merciful and loving and . . . that's over the top Tiny. No merciful, loving, kind and whatever else you called Him Tiny would never – ever – ever – ever cause such misery that He's causing right now. Aren't you supposed to be praying for me Tiny that God will . . .

Take a real deep breath gal. There're birds chirping everywhere. Listen to them. Listen to the waves as they lap against the shore. Listen to the leaves as the wind blows through them. Listen to that voice . . . that's not Tiny's voice. Why is that voice speaking to me? Why can't I understand what . . . why do I feel like I'm floating. Why is everything okay. Papa's here. I know that he's here.

Why is everyone staring at me? Why did best bud ask me why I said that papa is here? How do I explain to everyone that . . . why is Possum pointing over there? That's a deer. That's a little spike buck. Deer don't come out in the middle of the day to . . . where's the camera? How did Possum know that I'd want the camera? I must've left it on the table with the water.

Please don't get spooked. That young buck is just letting me get closer and closer. Just keep on taking shots. If you get any closer gal, you're going to be able to . . . the thing isn't at all scared of me. Just keep on eating that grass while I . . . and what was that little flip of your head all about – like . . . papa – papa you sent him here didn't he? You loved to watch wild animals. You sent him here didn't you papa to let us know that everything is just fine with you. Thanks papa.

Does dad think that, too? There's life back in his eyes. Was I able to get lots of photos of that deer? I sure did. I can't wait to show them to . . . where did that come from? If I never see him again . . . you want to see him again – you know that gal. Why?

They really believed me when I said that papa sent that deer as a sign that . . . okay God – thank you for sending that deer to let us know that papa is enjoying being there with you. He was always telling us that he was looking forward to his eternal reward. Papa really knew that You loved him God. Thanks for having him be my papa. Tell papa God that I'm really sorry that I didn't take the time to visit with him and with mama when they were just here. I sure wish that I had. Will you make me God like papa was?

Why is everyone standing around dad? Dad's crying. He's bawling. Why? Just a few moments ago, he looked like he . . . where did she come from? How long has she been standing there? Where did the deer go? It was just there. Mother needed to see the deer. Maybe she did see it before . . .

Where's she going? What's she going to do with the log? Oh mother – going back to what you were doing before Auntie's called isn't going to . . . you need to stop her. Get best bud. There're more than enough guys to do whatever to help dad now . . . the last thing that I need right now God is for you to push dad over the deep end. Don't you think that you've done enough God already today to mess up this day? And what about the young buck? What about . . . why do you keep putting him back in my thoughts God? I don't want anything to do with him. I don't want to ever know why he has such a traumatized look. I don't need any more nor do I want any more drama in my life. You know that.

Why are my feet taking me towards mother? Just let her stay in denial. Dad should've taken mother a long time ago to get psychological help. Mother has been a basket case ever since . . . since I was born. That makes it all my fault that she's a nutcase. She has been doing a really good job of making me one, too, to get back at me for . . . she could at least tell me why she can't stand me.

You need to go to her. You know that she doesn't hate you. You know that in her own unique way that she really does like her girls. Why didn't dad encourage mother to be a teacher? She would've been really good and really liked. When you were teaching us mother to bake something or to tat something or to embroidery something or to plant something or to . . . you were always so patient – none of us ever made mistakes. A mistake to you mother when you were in your teaching mode was something that one of us girls did which you'd always tell us was teaching us to do differently whatever it was that we were doing so that . . . why didn't you always stay in your teaching world mother instead of . . .

Just have her sit on the bench with you. A wet mop has more going for it than you do right now mother. Are we going to go back to hanging on to me like . . . thank goodness. Best bud to the rescue. Now what?

Here comes the chairs. Is Tiny going to start praying again? That'd be fine with me. At least dad seems to have gotten himself under control. That was another thanks smile wasn't it dad? Why is dad looking at mother with that look? He looks like he's really scared of something. We've been just as intimidated by mother as he has been over the years but . . . I've got to give him kudos for hanging in there with her since I was born. He can't be thinking that with papa dying that he's going to . . . he'll stay with mother for mama's sake. He has to. I'll make him if . . .

Why is Tiny . . . who does he think he is? What does anyone know other than that papa has just died? Why are Possum and that – that – whoever he is, sitting here while we talk about family stuff? Is there anyone in town who mother would want to tell about papa having passed away? That's a no Tiny. Didn't you see both dad and me shaking our heads no? What about the pastor of our church, shouldn't he be called? Don't go there Tiny. If you knew what kind of pastor that guy is . . . you'd have to go ahead dad and tell Tiny senior pastor's name. What? How does Tiny know him? Was that shoulder shrug Tiny mean that you know what kind of guy senior pastor really is and . . . what about calling Auntie back? That's a good idea. If she hasn't called us by lunchtime, dad will give her a call. Now what . . . I wonder how long papa has known Tiny? You're starting to shake Tiny. Guy – how can you find this time that hilariously funny?

Why did best bud grab my arm? I didn't hear a car? He doesn't belong here. Get me out of here.

If I'd known what you had in that cedar chest mom-mom . . . why didn't you ever want me mom-mom to know that you had a wedding photo of father and mother. Why didn't I ever ask mom-mom if . . . you just assumed guy that because she didn't have any photos of anyone sitting anywhere in the house that there weren't any photos – even photos of her husband.

Why did you keep your wedding dress mom-mom? What happened mom-mom to mother's wedding dress? There was just your wedding dress, grandfather's medals, those letters and that one photo in your cedar chest. I'm really glad now that I wasn't able to take your cedar chest with me mom-mom because . . . Mr. J will take good care of your cedar chest. You know guy – you could call Mr. J and ask him to send you some money if . . . like Mr. J has extra money – especially compared to everyone who lives around these parts.

Did you mom-mom give mother's wedding dress away just like you . . . having just enough was always just enough for you wasn't it? The kids at the high school, the people in the church that you went to down the street, the homeless trying to survive on the street – that's who you lived for didn't you mom-mom? The past was the past to you wasn't it? You were mom-mom always wanting to just live in the present. Has it really been helping you guy to live in the past?

That was a question Po just asked me wasn't it? You've got to do a better job guy listening to that little dude. Sure wish that I had a handle on life like he does. I better put this thing around my neck or . . .

Why does he want to know if I want to take a cross necklace for . . . that little troublemaker. Is he asking to have his neck rung? He's serious. Does he think that I know her? You need to tell him that . . .

How would I know if she'd like that one? Why would Po think that I'd know? I don't know her. What's the verse on the back? Psalm 37:4. That's the same verse that I claimed my first year at Bible school. It was the last night of the school's annual Bible Focus Week. Like that verse has really helped.

You know guy if you give her that necklace that she'll . . . she's going to think that I'm preaching at her. Like I'm going to tell her to delight in the Lord and He'll give her the desire of her heart? Like she's going to stop for a moment to . . . you'll get your eyes scratched out guy if . . . she sure seems to do out of control without any trouble. How often have you wanted to just scream?

Maybe I don't want to take it for her you little wiseacre. Take it guy. Can't you tell that the kid doesn't have a nefarious bone in his body? You probably won't get the chance to give it to her anyway. And even if you do get the chance, you know that she won't like it.

We're going to go where now? Who is doña? Guess we're heading for doña's place.

That mobile home is Miss Deedee's place? Okay – if that's Miss Deedee's place, why is she sleeping at Po's place? There's someone living in Miss Deedee's place? They can't be Miss Deedee's family as . . . sure cute little kids. The reverend has an unwed mother – who had three little kids, who is a member of his church. She was at her wits end so a couple of years ago when the reverend asked if anyone had room in their place for her and for her kids to stay, Miss Deedee . . .

Okay Po – you're giving me a lot of information again that a couple of details sure would help me out a lot. Okay – so when Po's dad heard that Miss Deedee was going to let the mother and her three little kids stay in her place, Possum suggested to Miss Deedee that she move into his trailer home so that she could be like a mother to Po and to his little sister. Because Po's dad can't cook and doesn't like to clean and because Miss Deedee is a really good cook and because she likes to keep a place really clean and neat and . . . it makes sense that Po would be really glad that Miss Deedee decided to . . .

You need to ask Po about who the reverend is before . . . apparently I'm to get the lowdown on whoever lives in each cracker box that we walk pass in this place.

That's her phone buzzing again against my leg. At least this time . . . maybe it's her friend. It's a guy.

What's a guy doing calling her? And why wouldn't she have a guy calling her? He doesn't sound convinced at all that this is her phone. What do I have to say to him to make it clear to him that . . . will you just get it guy that I didn't mean to walk off with her phone – that . . .

You were just called a creep. He just called her a two timing . . . that when he catches up with me that he's going to . . . tell the guy on the phone to look in the mirror as he's the . . . like that's going to help. Maybe you should tell him that he needs to do anger management.

What's this that because she asked him to go to the beach with him that she has to go to the beach with him or . . . does the guy really think that he can make her do something? Just shut off the phone. No one has the right to go on that kind of tirade.

What more can I tell Po? I sure don't want to have anything to do with that guy. If he's one of her friends, she sure could do a whole lot better I would think.

So this is the doña's place? It looks just like every other place. Is Po saying la – not the? It's la. Why is Po saying la? La doña is what – did Po just say that she's don Paco's wife? Is Po saying that that old Hispanic at the house is . . . he can't be – maybe he is? I thought his first name was Paco not Don.

Where's that smell coming from? There's something cooking here that really smells good. She's la doña? She's hardly any bigger than Po. She barely comes to my waist. Just hug her back. Why does she seem so happy to see me? I'm a complete stranger to her.

Am I hungry? Is that what she just asked me? Guess I'm hungry because . . . what's that? It sure smells good but . . . what's a chili relleno or whatever it is? Okay – la doña could use bell peppers to make her chili things but she uses poblano peppers instead because poblano peppers have a little heat – and she stuffs spiced up meat and a rice mixture inside of the things? And now that tomato sauce that she's pouring over the chili things she made herself? The things must really be good by how animated Po is about explaining them to me. They sure do smell good. They sure look good, too.

It's food. Oh boy – they're really, really good. Don't look at me like you're surprised – they really aren't too hot for me. The sauce – everything, I've never tasted anything so good. Do I want a couple more? But no one else is eating them. She really does want me to eat a couple more if . . . there's no way that I'm going to refuse a couple more if . . . I wish I could understand what she's saying to me. Glad that Po . . .

La doña makes these chili things and sells them here in the park to . . . and she also sells corn tamales that she makes using banana leaves that Po's dad buys for la doña at the store where the Hispanics hang out? We're waiting because the batch of corn tamales that la doña is making have a few more minutes to steam before . . . I'm sure that they're really good, too – especially if la doña puts a piece of chicken in each tamale along with just enough spicy sauce to . . . Po has a future as a sports announcer the way that . . .

So this is a photo of la doña with Paco and with . . . that beautiful young lady in the photo is don Paco's and la doña's daughter? Really? Her name is Dr. Gloria. She's a doctor's assistant now but she's going to be a real doctor when . . . Paco has a daughter who is going to be a doctor? That can't be true. The guy is obviously really poor plus he sure looks like he has a drinking problem.

And Dr. Gloria comes back here at least four times a year to . . . this is how she thanks everyone for helping her to go to medical school. What am I missing here? These kinds of things just don't happen – do they?

You're going to tell me Paco's and la doña's story aren't you Po? Guess that I need to know that they're from a small Central American village and that their first two kids died because they were really poor. Okay – then when la doña's oldest bro – who had snuck into the U.S., found out that la doña was pregnant with Gloria, the bro sent enough money to don Paco for him and for la doña to cross through Mexico and into the U.S. where he got don Paco a job at the chicken processing plant outside town. You need to tell Po that he really didn't need to tell you that don Paco would've been deported if he'd been working on the shift that night when . . . what doesn't Po know about what's going on around this place?

This may not be a good time to ask Po if Paco and his wife are here in the U.S. legally. They probably aren't. How does Po know that when their daughter was born with the help of a midwife that don Paco was able to get someone at the local hospital to make up for them a birth certificate for Gloria? Is Po saying that because Gloria has a birth certificate that says that she was born in the U.S. that . . .

Why did Paco or Don after the raid at the plant stop working there? If I was here illegally, I probably wouldn't have gone back there either. So Po is saying that when Paco and la doña ended up moving in with a friend that they knew here in this trailer park and in order to help their friend – which was before the reverend starting coming here, la doña made and sold typical food that she used to make back in . . .

Am I in a time warp? Aren't I supposed to be getting ready for a lock-in at the church? I shouldn't be sitting here at this table stuffing my face with the tastiest food that I've ever eaten.

Did mom-mom ever prepare a meal? Okay – she tried during the summer breaks but . . . a guy can only eat so many sandwiches. Whoever dreams up cafeteria food must have it in for kids. How bland can food be made to taste? This taking home leftover cafeteria food mom-mom for me to eat . . . okay – it sure saved on our food bill plus per you, the high school was happy that they had a place willing to take the leftover food off their hands. You were sure good at finding enough street kids, streetwalkers, has-beens to . . .

Now what's Po talking about – that when the reverend showed up here eight years ago – on May 18th at 9:30 in the morning . . . how did the reverend start helping . . . what was this place like before the reverend began to . . . and Po's mother was making the meth that was sold here before the reverend . . .

It's a miracle. You got in a question. Okay – the reverend just showed up. He came with his kids. Do I remember that big tree near the entrance? Does the guy know how many trees there are here? The reverend first went around with his kids inviting everyone to meet him under the tree? So it didn't bother the reverend at all that just a few kids – including you, showed up the first time. What did the reverend expect? But each time the reverend came back, more kids and then some adults started going to where he preached. I guess that's something that I needed to know. So the reverend sometimes shows up with just his wife, at other times with his kids again and sometimes with guys or women from his church – so . . .

You'd like to meet the reverend wouldn't you? He sounds like he's quite a guy. This just showing up whenever to preach – I've never heard of anyone doing that. And then when the reverend started finding jobs for whoever was willing to work, things really changed around here. The reverend then helped to set up a community advisory committee that . . . I could've guessed that Possum would be on that . . . so he's the fix it guy around here. He knows how to fix cars, appliances . . . anything that has any kind of motor Possum can fix. Maybe I should ask him to look at my car.

And now I'm to believe you Po that with the help of the advisory committee, the reverend was able to stop drugs being sold here? The reverend must really be . . . some of the homes became empty because . . . and Po's mother at this time ended up in jail for a third time. Is it really true what Po just said – that because this is now such a good place to live that everyone single one of the homes is now occupied?

Is Po saying the reverend has started businesses – like the one that's on the corner, where the guys here can earn extra money? What corner? Ask Po. Haven't I seen a place nearby selling firewood? There's a place around here that sells firewood? Sorry guy – please don't look so disappointed that I haven't seen a place around here that . . .

Did Po just say that the reverend often asks his dad to help him cut down a tree that . . . and that he usually asks Paco to go with him, too? If the reverend usually takes Possum and Paco with him to . . . no way that it's . . . isTiny the . . . he can't be – can he?

Now what? He's going to get the pickup and then we're going to take all this food in the pickup over to moneybag's house so that . . . isn't la doña's going to sell those pepper things and those other things that she's . . . why does Po want to take food to moneybag's house? I'm sure that moneybags has more than enough money to . . .

He's scaring me. Why is he yelling at me? What did I do to him? Explain to him that your grandfather just died. Did he just say that he doesn't care that my grandfather just died that . . . and that he can't let me stay here with my loony family. Where did this guy come from anyway? Gal – this is the guy that you've been dating for the last couple of months. I know that he has a temper but . . .

What does he mean that he's not going to let anyone two time him? What's he talking about? Standing him up for that . . . why does he need to know who has my phone? This is awful. Doesn't he know that his voice carries – that that filth that's coming out of his mouth is being broadcasted all over the place?

Did he just say that I owe him? He really does think that he's a gal's answer to all her dreams. It's the motel room that . . . if he thinks that I'm going to go with him to the beach and to the motel because . . . in his dreams. He needs to get back into that tank of his and . . .

What's dad doing? Where did he come from? Like he's going to listen to you dad as mad as he is right now? He's got at least four inches on you dad. He'll . . .

You've got to stop dad otherwise . . . if that red faced, narcissistic buffoon listens to you dad, that'll be a first. He never ever listened to me. Everything had to be his way or . . . why are you always falling for guys who . . .

That was in his face dad – like I'm going to tell you this one time to leave otherwise . . . I sure didn't get the ability to yell from you did I dad? How can dad remain so calm in front of a guy who is staring bullets at him? Oh no – what's dad going to do now? Did he just hear that he was told by that conceited bully to get out of my way old man or . . . why can't I run. Scream. Do something.

Don't stand there dad. He's going to . . . just tell the fool that you'll . . . did that loudmouth bore just ask dad who was going to help him to stop him from . . . where did they come from? How could I've forgotten that they were here? They must've gone around the house when . . . what're they going to do?

That was . . . you can't laugh. Dad's cracking up. I can't . . . dad's crying. No – he's laughing. Dad's laughing so hard he has tears running down his face. What're you doing now dad? You're hugging me like . . . you've got tears running down your face, too, gal.

Did I see his face when he turned around after Tiny touched him on the shoulder? I'll never ever forget that look. If it had been me who had turned around to find Tiny standing there looking down at me like he'd just love to pick me up and throw me in the lake, I would've . . . yah gal – you'd still be standing here with your mouth wide open and your legs cemented to the ground.

Did I see how fast my friend got into that box that he drives? Dad better know better to think that the guy is still my friend. There's no way in the world that . . . I'm going to have to put Tiny's phone number in my cell phone so that . . .

Does dad know how hard he's shaking? Has dad ever laughed like this before in his life?

That has sure made the day for that gang of goofballs. I'm sure that I can guess what they're talking about there by the lake. You can't even stand up can you Tiny? He looks like a big hunk of jello the way that . . . and what do you think that you and your dad look like right now? I don't want to ever stop laughing. It feels so good.

Why don't you tell dad that you're going to go to check on mother. Okay – that was the funniest thing that you've ever seen dad but . . . dad couldn't have known that Tiny was going to come up behind that bozo and . . . dad just thanked me for being his daughter. Where did that come from? Why did he say that? He's hugging me again. If you had just been there dad, you would know that I've always been your daughter. Why are you . . . give dad a hug. Tell him that you love him. I don't want you to cry dad.

Why did papa have to die today? This day would be the best day of my life if . . .

I've forgotten about best bud being here. She must've stayed with mother. That'd be just like best bud to do. You could learn so much from her gal.

You're smirking best bud. Okay – that nod tells me that you want me to . . . does mother know where she is? She looks totally bewildered. Did she recognize me when she looked at me?

It probably would be a good idea to get her back inside again. Where to – the bedroom or the couch? Guess she wants the couch. Yah – I could've told you that best bud that mother would go into her pet fetal ball and . . . did she just wave her hand like she wanted us to go away? Guess she did.

It probably would be good to find dad and . . . dad's probably still out there rolling on the ground. When you see him again . . . and do you really think that you're going to see that youth pastor again? Why would you want to see him again? Just how you want to be seen – driving down the street with him in that . . . his car was still there when . . . he probably will be coming back here. Why did he leave? Where did he go?

What're you going to tell best bud when she asks you why we're heading to the front of the house? Just because I want to make certain that I saw his car . . . you know that she's going to ask you whose car that is and then . . . are you wanting to talk to her about him? What would you tell her? You don't even know him. Besides – when she sees him, she's going to pull a Tiny and . . .

That was dad calling for me wasn't it. Thanks for saving me again dad. Did best bud just say that dad is standing by the lake with Tiny and his two henchmen? What I would give best bud for that wicked grin.

What time is it? It has to be getting late – right? When did we eat lunch? It can't be still morning. There's no way that . . . and this was going to be a peaceful, quiet day at the beach.

Do I have my cell phone on me? Why does dad want my phone for anyway? Dad wants to call Auntie? Dad call Auntie? Dad has never called Auntie. What was that look about dad when I told you that what's his name has my phone? Mother will have Auntie's phone number. Probably would be good not to bother her right now. She should rest.

That's a good idea. Hope that he's got enough smarts to . . . Tiny probably has a whole lot more than a pen stuck in the pockets of that thing that he's wearing. Yep – and here comes a pad of paper, too. He'll probably pull out next a desk. Why did I have to think of that? You've got to stop it gal – you're giggling like a . . . I can't stop. I know that I'm laughing so hard that I've tears running down my face but . . . it's just seemed so comical to me when . . . sure hope that Tiny thinks it funny. Oh no – he coming towards me. I don't like that look on his face. What's he doing? Here we go again. And you thought . . . Tiny can hug me anytime. How can he make someone feel so special?

He has answered best bud's call. Why is she looking at me? Why isn't she talking? About time. Now what? Don't you start laughing best bud. Give the guy a break. Just because he's socially challenged . . . how in the world did he become a youth pastor? You're making a mind list of questions about him aren't you best bud?

She just turned up her nose like . . . must be the number for Auntie that she's writing down on Tiny's pad of paper. She wants to know who Po is – that he was the one who was able to find that number to give to her as . . . like she's going to believe me that Po is the backwards whatever's shadow and that . . . like telling best bud that Po is Possum's kid really isn't flying with her is it? Po does act like he has the maturity of a twenty-five year old while . . .

Why does dad want to call Auntie? This having to say twice who you are . . . I can just see Auntie standing in her kitchen looking at her phone like . . . dad and Auntie were okay with each other – weren't they? It was mother who always brought the stressors into every single family activity. It was invariably dad who mother would make the fall guy – and Auntie for . . . and me for having been born and . . .

You're talking dad like . . . it'd be like dad to think of how mama is doing.

You're doing a lot of listening there dad. Auntie must be . . . okay – mama is doing okay – that she's . . . dad – how could you've just told Auntie that mother is handling everything well here. Yah – she's resting right now but . . . you could've dad told Auntie that mother has gone to mother's world. Auntie would know exactly what you're saying.

Why did dad just ask Auntie if papa had ever told her about where he wanted to be buried? Guess that good and dad's head nods must mean that papa must've talked with her about where he wanted to be buried. Ask dad to ask Auntie how soon papa's body . . .

Dad couldn't have just said that papa had talked to him also about . . . papa has to be buried here. Why would papa tell dad where he wanted to be buried? Was papa dying? If papa knew that he was going to die, he would've . . . papa knew that he was going to die and he didn't even try to see me when he was here last week? Papa didn't care about me. I'm not going to go to your funeral papa.

What's best bud's problem anyway? Why is she pulling on my arm? Where's she taking me? You're looking at me best bud like . . .

She's got to understand. Why won't she understand? Papa had no right leaving here last week without talking with me. If papa knew that he was going to die . . . how does best bud know that papa didn't know that he was going to die? Why would he talk to dad about dying if he wasn't going to die? Did mother know that papa . . . if mother knew, you know that she wouldn't have let papa leave here.

Why does best bud always have to tell me that she understands? There's no way that she understands. How'd she like it if . . . how could mama be just fine when . . . I don't understand. I don't.

Why can't I make this just end? I don't want to be here? I don't want to know that papa died this morning. Tell best bud that it really didn't happen that . . . ask best bud why God is being so mean to me. You know why gal. You know why God is punishing you. When is the last time that you've wanted to have something to do with God? If you don't want to have anything to do with God, why would He want to have something to do with you? Maybe if you ask God to . . . like God is going to make everything right just like that.

How can God put up with mother? Mother sure does a good job making hypocrite a real word. What's her beef with dad anyway – and with me? How can she be so nice to dad – and to me, on Sundays and then the next day . . . papa dying is going to . . . you're long overdue dad getting mother the kind of help that she needs. It's bad enough being her daughter; it must be a real horror being her husband.

Is best bud just going to sit there and stare at me? Is she serious? Does she really want to know what I'm thinking? Like telling her what I'm thinking is going to help anything. When I tell her that I'm really mad at papa for not seeing me when he was here last week, she's going to tell me that . . . why doesn't she just tell me that it's wrong for me to get mad instead of this I understand stuff. She can't understand how I feel. How do I make her understand that?

This always ending up making best bud look sad . . . I know that she really wants to help me but . . . just thank her for putting up with me. That's a really relieved look.

She's right – the tree did block the view to the lake. Why won't God open up my view to see why He . . .

What does the tree have to do with now? It's a nothing now. I hate you tree. I really hate you for . . . if it wasn't for you tree . . . like it's the tree's fault that papa died? Maybe the tree didn't want to die? Why did the tree die? I hadn't notice anything wrong with it. When was the last time that I was in the backyard? It has to be last year because . . . how many times have you come over here since you moved into your own place? I would've come over last week but . . .

What? What in the world is that coming down our drive? That's Possum's pickup. What's that skinny birdbrain doing driving Possum's pickup? Who is that in the pickup with him? That wasn't a smooth stop. Tell best bud to stop staring.

What does she want me to do? What's she saying? Doesn't she know any English? Okay – she's telling me to sit down. Why? Why do I feel like I'm one of her kids – or is it that I'm wishing that I'm one of her kids. Her name shouldn't be la doña; it should be mercy or grace or something like that the way that . . .

Where's she going? Guess I just sit here and . . . that didn't take long. She changed her clothes. What's that that she's wearing? That's a really pretty top with all those flowers on it. It's something guy that you've never ever seen before. And that skirt . . . does la doña like to look different or what? Mom-mom sure would like that fancy apron that she's wearing.

Should I help her or . . . she seems to know what she's doing. Those must be the tamales that Po . . . how many are there anyway? She's taking them all. Is she going to take those other things, too? I sure hope so.

You could stop time right now. It's so quiet and warm and peaceful here. No noise. Po – you're a really great kid but . . . your constant jabbering is wearing me down. Alone time – that's what I need right now.

Do I want a drink? Like you had a choice whether or not . . . just take the glass. This sure can't be milk. What's she trying to tell me? What did she call it? Hey – this stuff is delicious. What's she doing now? Okay – that point from the paper to my glass must mean that what she wrote on that piece of paper is the name of the stuff. I need to ask Po where I can find horchata around here.

Speaking of thinking of Po, that sounds like a pickup. What's Po doing? Always thinking aren't you Po. Backing the pickup up la doña's driveway will make it easier to . . . are those jugs of horchata that she's going to take, too?

Why did you want our house to look so empty all the time mom-mom? Why didn't you want to make your house feel warm and light and cozy like la doña has made her place? You sure knew how to make a kid feel good mom-mom when you hugged them but . . . did you ever think about yourself mom-mom? I know you loved me mom-mom but . . . the way that la doña waits on me and smiles at me – it's like she has all the time in the world just for me. I miss your Jesus-hugs mom-mom but . . . you always found time to talk to everyone else mom-mom so why didn't you . . . why did you want to make your world – and my world, too, mom-mom so small.

I don't want to get up off this couch. I don't want to go back to moneybag's house. I don't want to go back to being in constant turmoil. If I see that gal go into conniptions one more time . . . why does she always have to act like a spoiled baby? She has to be at least as old as I am.

Po is going to have everything in the back of the pickup before . . . you need to help him guy. You can't keep running from . . . mom-mom is dead and you need to start living your life. Like how does someone who has spent his whole life living in a large city's rundown section begin to live a life? Then when I did leave the big city for a week to . . . I knew better than to . . .

Guy – move on with life. Help Po. Okay – I'll take out these jugs to the pickup. Now what? Okay – we're going to stop by Po's place to pick up Miss Deedee and then we're . . . come on pickup – cooperate. Po is sure making me look like a fool by making me drive his dad's pickup.

I sure hope this thing will move with Miss Deedee in it. I sure hope that she doesn't squash la doña? How am I going to shift this thing with . . . stop complaining guy. Yah mom-mom – that was one of your life mantras – a complainer wants to make someone else miserable so that . . . it would've been really nice mom-mom if you would've let me vent once in awhile. It sure would be nice right now to have someone who is always there who'll always listen to me.

Hope that it's legal around here for someone to ride in the back of a pickup on the open road. I sure don't want to get stopped driving this thing on the main road. I need to get out of this mobile home maze first.

Wouldn't you know it – I get this pickup moving good down this lane and her phone has to start buzzing against my leg. I don't want to stop. Why won't it stop buzzing? I better stop.

Hope no one comes down this road about now as . . . that gal must have more friends than I'd ever guess that she'd ever have. Who did she say she was? Guy – remember – you talked to her not that long ago. What is it that she wants? If she thinks that I know how to find Auntie's phone number on this phone, she's doesn't know how technically challenged that I am.

Maybe Po can help me. He seems to know how to do everything. That shouldn't have been that easy.

Please don't ring again phone – at least for the next five or so minutes until we get to moneybag's place. How long were we away anyway? It has to have been close to forty-five minutes.

We made it. That wasn't so bad. So the thing kind of came to a stuttering stop – and she just had to be standing where . . . she had to have seen me. Just what I need – something else for her to . . . that must be her friend with her. At least she looks like she has her head screwed on really well.

Why are the two of them staring at us like . . . okay – Miss Deedee and la doña probably do make a rather odd looking pair. Here comes the guys. It looks like they didn't do all that much during the time that Po and I were gone. And what've you been doing guy? I sure could crash right now. Will my body ever stop aching? How in the world am I going to go through with that lock-in tonight? You have to do it guy otherwise . . . nothing like living under the gun all the time guy. It was so much easier staying out of the gang's way – like they would've hurt me? They protected me.

Just help them carry the stuff inside guy. Where are they going to put the stuff? I would've thought that moneybag's wife would be a whole lot better housekeeper than the way that this place looks. Why don't you just go outside guy and get out of everyone's way.

That poor lady really looks like the world has ended for her the way that she's slouched there on the couch. Why isn't anyone . . . it would be just like la doña to go over to her and . . .

What did la doña just say to her? She's looking at la doña like . . . she's touching la doña's top like . . . where did those tears come from all of a sudden? They're just streaming down her face. I don't hear her crying. You probably should leave guy. It looks like everyone has the same idea.

Now what're we going to do? It looks like you're getting company guy. Why do I have to look like such a bum? Where are you Po when I need you?

Her friend does seem to be really nice. She doesn't begin to act like she's as loopy as . . . why does she want me to sit down now on the bench? She wants to know about la doña? Okay . . .

Did she just say that papa was here? How could her grandfather . . . she and her father and . . . they were all talking when a spike buck was suddenly standing over there near the water munching grass? No one saw the deer coming out of the trees? She couldn't have done that – could she – like to go almost right up to the deer while all the time taking pictures of it? I sure do want to see the pictures when . . .

Would you really do that God – like send a deer someplace just to let everyone know who sees the deer that someone you've taken home to be with You is okay? Why didn't you send me something to let me know that mom-mom . . .

Let her know guy that you really do believe that the deer was a sign from God – that . . . you need to stop thinking about mom-mom. Just because you know that if . . .

Maybe another deer will come out right now. That'd really be neat to see a wild deer.

Does she know how animated she can get? It's dangerous sitting next to her the way that she's constantly flinging her skinny arms around. That deer obviously really did make her day.

Ask her how her mother is doing. Okay – I did see her mother but . . . you could tell her about mom-mom.

Why is she asking me about the guy who called on her phone? Why did she want to know what he said to me? Like I'm going to tell her exactly what he told me? If that guy is her friend . . .

Just tell her what you told him – that you had her phone and that she was here at your parent's home. You probably don't need to tell her that the guy . . . okay – you gals would have to go into hysterics. What did I miss? Did I say something that . . . they're not laughing at me. Something funny must've happened here while I was gone.

If you weren't laughing so hard gal, I'd be able to understand what you're saying. Okay – I get it that that guy who called on her cell phone came here and . . . after he demanded that she go with him or else, her father calmly went up to him and told him that he was to leave which . . . the guy didn't know that Tiny had gone around to the front of the house. Was the guy really going to do something to her father? He wouldn't have dared to do that where I grew up as . . .

I'm getting the picture. The guy felt a tap on his shoulder, turned around and had to look up into Tiny's face. It was like one second the dupe thought that . . . and the next second he's in his tank backing it up the lane like . . . why do I always miss all the excitement?

It must've been really hilarious to see the way the gals are still laughing and hanging on to each other. I sure hope that she knows that . . . like domestic violence is a way of life with a lot of people who live near where I used to live.

Now what's she doing? I should've . . . I never wear anything around my neck. Let her see the thing. She's looking at it like she really likes it. Why won't she believe me that Po painted it? How do I know that Po painted it? How do I know where Po lives? You're looking at me gal like you really don't believe me that I was over to Po's place and that . . . how could she not know that there's a mobile home park not that far from here? You wouldn't have known that either guy if . . .

She was wondering where I'd gone? Did you just hear her right – that she wished that you had stayed with her with her mother? And how would I've been able to help her with her mother if I had stayed?

Had I ever driven a pickup before? She definitely noticed that . . . just be honest with her. Why did she have to ask me that if Po has made a lot of little crosses, why did I choose the cross that I chose? Was there something about the verse that made me . . . you've got to get her guy to change the subject. There's no way that you're going to be able to explain to her about that wedding photo of your mother and father that mom-mom had in her cedar chest. She's not going to believe you that you had never seen that photo before until . . . I need to get away from them. If I don't . . . she's facing enough tough stuff right now, you don't need to dump your story on her. Besides . . . the last thing that I'm going to do is to start bawling like a baby in front of her. And that's exactly what I feel like doing right now.

Why did she just take my hand? What does she want me to do?

Where did the guys come from? Why are they heading for the front of the house? Why is she smiling at me like . . . she wants me to go with her? Guess we're heading to the front of the house, too. Do I let go of her hand or . . . she isn't letting go of my hand. Why am I letting her embarrass me?

Whose car is that? When did it get here? The thing looks like an upside down boat. Tiny knows her. Of course Tiny knows her, he probably knows everyone. Are those Tiny's kid getting out of the backseat? They have to be. They look like almost miniatures of Tiny. Are they the kids who everyone is saying are going to make this year's high school football team a really good team? They're bruisers.

You're no longer in charge are you Tiny. First you need to get whatever it is out of that car's trunk and then . . . that's a tree. Why was there a tree in the car's trunk? Okay – he's going to plant the tree to replace the tree that . . . I'm glad that her father is okay with Tiny planting the tree next to where her mother has her garden. Why is Tiny doing this? If Tiny is really the reverend . . . maybe he knows of a church around here that seriously needs a youth pastor. You need to talk with Tiny before . . .

I can't be seeing what I'm seeing. Don't look at best bud. You know if you look at best bud, you'll both start cracking up and . . . how did she get herself into the passenger side of the pickup?

Where did she come from? She must've been stuck between saltine and . . . you can't tell best bud that the guy says that his name is saltine. Where has he been? Why are those two women with him? Po must've been riding in the back of the pickup.

Why is that tiny woman dressed up in that strange looking outfit? Who is she?

The troops have arrived. Where had they disappeared to anyway? They were probably hanging out by the lake again.

Why are they taking out those big pots from the back of the pickup? What's in them? Was that a food smell? Why jugs of milk? Why are you letting them take that stuff into the house dad? You know that the kitchen is a real mess. You should've cleaned it gal when you had the chance.

Just go in the house and clean off a space on the table for them to put the stuff. That has to be food. Whatever it is, it sure smells good. You need to eat some of it gal if . . . I'm going to throw up just thinking about eating something.

If you only knew how pathetic you look mother scrunched up on the couch like a wet rag. You don't even see us do you mother? You're past helping mother – you know that.

Who does she think she is? Does she know mother? She can't know mother. How would mother know her? Mother is touching those flowers on her top . . . what did the lady just say to mother? Those can't be tears that're streaming down mother's cheeks? When mother cries . . . the whole world knows when mother is crying.

What was that nod for dad? Does he want me to leave? Why? I guess we're all to leave mother alone with . . . who is she? Why don't you ask him? He's standing right over there. You're going to come with me aren't you best bud. Oh well. The three of us can fit on this bench.

La doña is who? She's Paco's wife? No. That toothless looking derelict has a wife? They're from where? Maybe the clothes that she has on are what she'd wear in that town in Central America where she's from? She and Paco have a daughter who is a what? A physician's assistant? And Doctor Gloria visits her folks at least every three months and while she's with her folks, she checks on everyone in the mobile home park? The people in the park are helping la doña and don Paco get their daughter through medical school? La doña makes typical food that the people in the park buy which . . . did he just say don Paco? Aren't doña and don titles of respect in Spanish for a gal and for a guy?

Why are you telling him that papa was here? You could've asked him about the . . . he's genuinely interested in what I'm saying. He's listening to me. He really does believe me that papa was here. You'll have to show him the photos that you took. You don't have to look so disappointed guy that you didn't get to see the spike buck. More often than not guy you'll see a deer in the evening when you're here. And what would ever bring him here in the evenings?

Ask him if a guy called him on my phone while he was at that mobile home park. A guy did call him. Ask him what the guy said to him. He's not telling me everything – I can tell. Does he know that he isn't very good at hiding his feelings?

And what good is it to tell him what happened when that supercilious moron showed up here to try to make me go with him? I can feel your body starting to shake best bud. Don't start best bud. You know that we won't be able to stop best bud if . . . you're doing it again gal. The guy is looking at you like you're some kind of silly ninny. Why do you have to always have such a lamebrain look guy? It really was funny.

He wasn't wearing that necklace before. Where did he get that? It's beautiful. Po painted it? No way.

Po's dad has a workshop at the end of his drive where . . . Possum cuts out crosses that Po paints? I've got to see this. There's no way that a little juvenile delinquent like Po can have that kind of talent. No way.

You had to ask him why he chose that cross. Why did you do that? He looks like you just socked him in the stomach. You totally deflated him. Why? What did he do to you? What's that verse to him? He sure looks like he's about ready to cry. Change the subject or something. Why did you just grab his hand? What's he going to think? What if thinks that . . . no way that's going to happen. And what you just did isn't going to lead him on thinking that . . .

That'll work. We'll follow the guys to where they're going. Did they finally get tired of sitting there in those chairs by the lake and . . . why are they heading to the front of the house? Get him to go with you to the front of the house. Don't let him stay sitting there.

What's that thing? How could I have not heard that thing coming up the drive?

Why would that woman be showing up at our house? Whoever she is, she sure knows how to make Tiny jump. Where did those two big brutes come from? Were they in the car, too? Did I just hear one of them refer to Tiny as . . . what? Those are Tiny's boys? Those two big kids are the best players on the high school football team. What're they doing here?

What's Tiny taking out of the trunk of that mini wannabe limo? That's a sapling. Why would he have a sapling in his trunk? Did Tiny just tell dad that he's going to plant that sapling next to mother's garden if it's okay with him? Why would Tiny want to do that? That's nice of him – always planting another tree after he has had to cut down a tree that clearly has been part of a family's life for years. Maybe Tiny can come up with another body to replace papa who . . . gal – papa is gone and there's no way that anyone is going to replace him so . . .

Did I just hear time to eat? Food would taste so good but . . . maybe just a small piece of something.

How did this happen? This has to be a mirage. Just minutes ago there were dirty dishes everywhere. Where did they go? Did mother put all those dirty dishes in the dishwasher and in the stove and in the . . . to hide them like she sometimes does?

Mother is drying dishes? Now I know that I'm dreaming. Miss Deedee obviously has washed dishes before by the way that she's . . . what did mother just say to la doña? That wasn't English. Mother doesn't know Spanish. Maybe mother does know Spanish. She had to have spoken Spanish when . . . she and la doña sure seem to be enjoying each other's company.

Of course Tiny's wife would go over there to give mother a hug. Is that how it works – a long tight hug, a sad smile, another hug and a honey – with God's help we're going to make this all work out for you for His glory. You just hugged her back mother. She's twice around as you. And then there's Miss Deedee. Who is Miss Deedee to everyone? Ask him. Maybe it'll get him to close his mouth. He's as shocked as I am that this place can look so different in just a . . .

Am I hearing him right that Miss Deedee lives with Possum and Po – that Po has a little sis who is really cute for a kid who looks like a what . . . a mouse, and that she has her own trailer but a single mother from the reverend's church is living in it with her three kids? What – Po's mother is in jail? Ask him why. That's sad – becoming an addict. How often have you seen addictions mess up families? Way too often. Po's okay with his mother being in jail because . . . that's good that she's getting the help that she needs – and that she wants to make something of her life. No matter how far she's come, she's still got a long rough road ahead of her before . . . it's sad that those desires to . . . will always be hanging over her head.

Does that food smell good. What is it? Peppers with a tomato sauce? Something wrapped in some kind of leaves? Did he just say that he already has had three of those peppers and that they're really good?

We're going to pray? Who is going to pray? Who is that praying? That's dad. Dad praying?

Mother is always who prays before meals. Why is dad praying? You're thanking God for today dad? And what's there to thank God for about today? Thanking God for papa and for how he blessed so many people for His sake for all eternity – yah, but thanking God for taking papa home to be with You, that's past the pale dad. Dad – can't you just tell God thank you for the food and . . . it sure has gotten real quiet. Who just took my hand? Mother? You just squeezed my hand mother. What're you trying to say to me?

That was a . . . when did dad learn to pray like that? They don't have to wait for us to eat. Just go ahead everyone and . . . he's getting me one of those peppers. How am I going to tell him that I'm not going to eat it? Okay – just one bite. Please don't watch me mother. He's right. That thing is really tasty. I think that I can get through this one okay.

What's mother eating? That's one of those leaf wrapped things. Do I want a bite? Sure – why not – I don't want to hurt her feelings? They're okay but . . . this pepper thing is so good. Would I like to have something to drink? Sure. What's this? Rice milk? That sounds horrible. This stuff has a really good taste, too. La doña makes it from scratch? La doña made all this food from scratch? Where has she been?

Do I want another pepper thing? I need to know what they're called. That was a Spanish word that means filled. I knew that. Where did best bud go? Is she still here? I need to find her so that I can eat more of those things. You know that you need to be careful as . . .

It has been years since there have been so many people in this house. Did mother go blind or something? Did she just pull out a chair for one of Tiny's boys to sit? Has there ever been anyone like Tiny in this house – let alone . . . mother sure would make my life a whole lot easier – and dad's too, if she would act like she's acting right now. She's walking around the house like . . . where has this person been hiding?

That was my second one. Don't look so happy best bud. You didn't have to go tell mother how many that I've eaten. Why did you do that mother? You've never walked over to me and given me a hug. You could thank mother for not getting on your case about your eating habits. Where has mother kept that smile hidden? It's a really nice, pleasant smile. If she had that smile when dad met her . . .

Why is she telling me that I should go outside – that . . . there's enough people in the house – that I should show saltine the lake or something? What? The nerve of best bud to tell me that I . . . if there weren't so many bodies around right now, I'd . . . and what would you do to your best friend?

Okay – where's that . . . he looks like he could fall asleep. Maybe I should just leave him sitting in that easy chair. You're making a scene best bud with all that sideways head nodding.

Is the guy scared of girls? You might've thought I had told him that we're going to walk to the lake so that I can shoot him by the way that he . . . why the suspicious look anyway? I'm not going to hurt him. Just pull him out of the chair and . . . talk about turning beet red. Oh no – everyone saw me trying to get him out of the chair. The minute that we get outside they're going to . . .

So – now what? The only way that he's going to start a conversation is if I go into one of my screaming fits. Now is probably not a good time to . . . ask him why he wants to be called saltine. If that sends him into a downer . . .

Saltine is what the kids always called him back home? That's kind of mean to call someone saltine. He was the only . . . what? Where did he live? In a house just on the edge of the projects? I've heard about the projects? Aren't they in . . . is that where he's from? What's he doing way out here?

I sure would've been scared growing up where . . . he never really had any trouble with anyone because of mom-mom? Mom-mom? Okay – she was his grandmother. He lived with his grandmother all his life? What happened to his parents? So – mom-mom worked all her life in the cafeteria of the high school that's located a couple of blocks from mom-mom's house. He'd go with his mom-mom to the church that was right down the street? She was the only white person in the choir? Even though mom-mom didn't sing very well, she really liked to sing so . . . everyone really . . . why would he say that he misses her so much?

Where are we going? Guess we're going into the house. Hope there're still some of those pepper things left after Tiny's boys . . . what? What happened to this place? It has been . . . there were dirty dishes stacked up everywhere. It has to have been Miss Deedee. She's probably a cleaning machine.

Hope that it's okay that I plop down here. I'm sure not going to get in the way of Miss Deedee. She even has moneybag's wife helping her do the dishes. She sure looks like she's enjoying herself. I know exactly how she feels having la doña looking up at her like she's her favorite daughter.

Where did moneybag's wife learn Spanish? That has to be Spanish that she and la doña are speaking. It sure isn't English.

Did I doze off? The food . . . here comes trouble. I can tell. I know that I was staring but . . . what does she want? She's pulling me out of the chair like . . . everyone is looking at us. That was wrong what she just did. Maybe I don't want to go with her? Do I have any choice? I'm never going to live this down.

Where's she taking me? Maybe I don't want to sit on this chair by the water. Maybe I don't . . . don't kid yourself guy – you're glad. She's got so much life. She's so random. She's . . .

Why does she want to know why I want to be called saltine? Okay – you asked gal. She had absolutely no idea that you weren't from around here. She was probably thinking that I was one of the locals. The way that I look right now – I'd fit into some of those old bubba places around here.

Am I impressing her or . . . am I the first person who she has ever met who has lived in a large city's ghetto area? Why does it seem so important to her that I lived in the slums? She wouldn't last an hour walking around where I lived.

Why did I start telling her about mom-mom? I don't want to talk about mom-mom. You're proud of her aren't you? She really was well liked. Stop thinking about mom-mom. You're starting to lose it guy. You have to hold it in. You have to. She'll just get up and leave you sitting here alone if . . .

She's rubbing my back. Why is she being so nice to me? Tell her to go away.

What's that sound? The guy's are back working. I'll go help them. Why won't she let me get up? I can't stay here. If I start to bawl again . . . how can I tell her what happened? It was my fault that I wasn't home.

She's figured it out that mom-mom is dead. What do I tell her? Ask her if there's someplace where we can go where there isn't so much noise. Those chainsaws . . . guess we're going to the front of the house. How come I don't remember seeing this porch? This will work.

All she needs to know is that mom-mom was really liked by everyone in the neighborhood. Why does she want to know how many people showed up for her wake? I'll have to count the number of names someday that're in the two guest books that the funeral home had to put out for people to sign. Did I know the people who came? How would I know them? She had to know mom-mom to know that some who showed up were kids or had been kids who mom-mom befriended during the years that she worked in the cafeteria at the high school – that some were from the church – and that a lot of them were just complete strangers who mom-mom had helped or were helping in one way or another.

I don't know why the church thought that they had to have a memorial service for mom-mom. How do I know how many showed up for mom-mom's memorial service? Why did she look so surprised that the pastor told me that there had to have been at least well over a thousand people who showed up to remember mom-mom. Please don't ask me gal how mom-mom died as . . . and please don't ask me anything else about mom-mom as . . . I want to remember mom-mom for all the good things that she did.

Ask her what she does. She's a what? A social worker? She a social worker? She's not kidding. She obviously is really enjoying getting to know her cases that she has been assigned. She has only been a social worker since . . . that's about the time that I showed up here.

Guess I needed to know that she doesn't live here at home. Why did she move into her own place when she got the job doing what she's doing? Why wouldn't she want to stay home with her folks? I really like her mother. She doesn't seem to be on the same page with her mother. Why? There sure seems to be a lot of tension sometimes around here.

Do I know anything about her grandfather? How would I . . . her grandfather had this house built for her mother and father as a wedding gift? Her grandfather must've had some money. Her dad – even before she was born, has been the accountant for the business that her grandfather started? Doesn't moneybags work at . . . that's her grandfather's business? That place is a really deep pocket per senior pastor.

What did she just say about her grandfather and the church? Did she say that her grandfather was one of the couples who started the church as a house church? Is she saying that it was her grandfather who put up the money to build that church where . . .

Do I or don't I tell her that I called senior pastor to tell him about her grandfather? Probably not a good idea to tell her. She'd probably want to know what senior pastor said. What would I tell her? Who knows how she would react if I . . . better not say anything.

What am I thinking about? Just tell her that you're really glad that you've gotten the chance to get to know her – that you've found her very entertaining and . . . entertaining probably wasn't a good word to use guy. She's going to . . . why do I feel like I'm putting my life in my hands when I'm with her?

Her grandfather must've been really quite a guy. Ask her why he decided to move from here to where he was living when he died. Why did she say that about her mother? What did her mother have to do with him moving away from here? Did you really want to know that?

Her aunt moving away from here first with her family and then . . . why does she keep blaming her mother for causing her grandfather to move from here? Does she know what kind of case that she has against her mother? What about you – you used to think that mom-mom was the most special person in the whole world. Now that she's no longer here, you're finding out that . . . why didn't she tell me a whole lot more about mother and father instead of . . . I've so many questions for you right now mom-mom.

You should've be asking yourself guy some questions – like did you ever think about what you'd do when you graduated with that degree in student ministry? Had you ever thought about finding a job outside of where you were living? Did you always think that mom-mom would always be there? Whose fault is it that you weren't making plans to . . . don't blame mom-mom. Mom-mom never asked you to take care of her. Was mom-mom taking care of you? If you didn't have that job at the school, you'd never have been able to pay those monthly tuitions bills. Did you ever once think about where you were going to live after you . . . you know that the school wouldn't have let you stay in one of the school dorms. You would've had to stay with mom-mom. And who is to say that the school would've let you continue to work there? This place sure isn't where I want to be though. How am I going to get away from here?

Why is she grinning at me? What did I do now? Read my thoughts if that's what you think that you can do? Good luck. How did she know that I was thinking about mom-mom? So she had been sitting there thinking about her grandfather. I'm glad gal that you've got really good memories of your grandfather. My memories of mom-mom is that of an old lady who spent her life giving Jesus-hugs, passing out leftover cafeteria food and . . . we never once laughed together did we mom-mom.

Hey . . . why is she . . . she's not touching you. That's her phone guy. Give her her phone. Let her deal with whoever he or she is who's trying to get in touch with her.

Whoever just called on her phone is sure going a mile a minute. Does she know what a poker face is? The person on the other end of the line is a missing a lot not seeing her face. Why does she keep shaking her head like she doesn't know? For someone who always seems to be able to fit in a word, she's not getting in a word this time. That almost sounds like her voice on the other end of the line. I think that I'll go check on how the guys are doing.

I wasn't needed that's for sure. How's Tiny going to cut up the trunk of that tree now that he and Possum have almost all the branches cut off it and cut up into pieces that can be hauled to that chipping thing or cut into log pieces that can be stacked?

Tiny's kids are sure making short work of stacking up those log pieces. Moneybags must be in the house. There must be something that I can do out here.

And what're you thinking Po with that look on your face? Just tell him that she got a telephone call before you could give her that necklace. Guy – you know that you'd completely forgotten that he'd given you that necklace to give to her so . . . just tell Po that you'll give it to her later. Will you? Why are you so worried about how she'll react?

There has to be some rakes around here. Where do I look? Maybe Po would know? I didn't see that storage shed over there. If there's a rake in the shed, I'll start raking up the twigs. And what're you going to do once all the twigs are raked up? You're not going to be able to stay here you know. You still have that thing tonight at church that . . . good – here's a rake. It'll do. I'll start over here.

If Tiny would only take a break . . . and what would I say to him if . . . everyone seems to either really respect him or they're scared stiff of him. I sure would like to know what he's hoping to do in Po's mobile home park. Just showing up wherever to visit and to teach and to . . . how many who're living there have made decisions of faith? I bet Po knows. Ask him. He sure hasn't slowed down a bit.

Do you know what you're doing guy? I sure feel dumb raking up twigs while the other guys are working like it's going to start raining at any moment. It sure has gotten hot. You could go in and get some water. Looks like someone . . . there's a couple of pitchers of water sitting there on that card table.

Why don't you just sneak out of here? No one would notice. Everyone is really focused on what they're doing. Guy – you can't just leave without . . . everyone must be in the house. Just walk in – what's the worst thing that could happen? Just leaving without saying good bye . . .

I'll just wait until someone comes out. Someone has to come out sooner or later. Why don't I ever know what to do – or to say? Do you know how hopeless you've got to be guy? You know that you're never going to make it as a youth pastor. That I can live with. The odds aren't that good for anyone to make it as a youth pastor so . . . especially with someone like senior pastor thinking that I'm there to do whatever it is that he thinks needs to be done.

Finally – someone is coming out of the house. It's moneybags. Why is he coming over to me? Maybe this will be a good time to ask him for a check – like a check is going to really help you right now with the banks having already closed.

That's an awfully serious look on his face. What did I do now? Did she tell him that . . . what would she have told him?

Whew – thanks Tiny. I think that you just saved my life. You may only have seconds guy to disappear while moneybags talks to Tiny. You've got to stay guy. It's time for you to stop running. You've no reason to be intimidated by moneybags. Just because senior pastor is constantly making crude jokes about him doesn't mean that he's a bad guy.

Here he comes. How am I supposed to know what to do not having a father who . . . all you need to do guy is to listen to whatever it is that he wants to tell you. Just keep working. Po would probably know why moneybags wants to talk with me. Why didn't you ask him? How does Po know everything?

Why is moneybags . . . no one has ever thanked me for doing anything. I don't think that I did anything with his daughter that was so . . . and then helping with his wife? How does he know that I didn't have to help with the tree – but that he really appreciates all my help? I didn't help that much. Why did he ask me what I'd do if . . . why did he just ask me to do that? Don't you dare choke up guy.

Why did he lean over and put his hands over his face? Is he trying not to cry? He's sobbing. You did it again gal. Something must've happened to his grandmother?

Rub his back or something. Get him to talk. Let him know somehow that you care.

He wants to move. Guess he doesn't want the guys to see him sitting here with me. Don't blame him. I don't like to be seen sitting with myself sometimes. Just go sit on the porch in front of the house. Those rockers probably will be happy to have someone sitting on them.

There were how many people at her wake at the funeral home? What's a wake? Is a wake like a viewing? Did he just say that there were at least a thousand people who were inside and outside the church during the memorial service that the church had for his grandmother? She must've been a saint. It sounds like she blessed a lot of people. How many times would you've enjoyed a Jesus-hug gal?

Is he sure that he wants to know about me? Here goes. You're prattling gal. He doesn't seem to mind. I sure don't mind him asking me questions. It feels so good to be able to talk – even about papa. Why did he seem so surprised when I told him about papa's business? He obviously didn't know anything about papa until today. Did papa know that senior pastor had hired a youth pastor? Probably not. The guy is going to find out hopefully sometime soon that making the church his papal empire will only fly for so long and then . . . he may think that he has all his bases covered with his board plants but . . .

Did he just call me entertaining? I'm going to hit him. He really did think that you were going to hit him. Now he's turning red again.

What was I talking to him about anyway? You need to learn gal to listen to yourself speak sometimes instead of letting your thoughts go one direction while your mouth . . . I shouldn't have said that about mother. Mother really wasn't the reason that Auntie moved with her family to the coast. Mother really wasn't the reason either why papa and mama moved to where Auntie moved. They all really like it there. I'm sure that Auntie and papa and mama would be okay with mother moving there, too, if . . . it's a safe bet though that mother will never ever . . .

Talk about checking out . . . what in the world is he thinking about that he doesn't even notice that I'm no longer talking? He was sitting there thinking about his grandmother wasn't he? I bet he was. I was right. He was.

Why is he looking at me like I just poked him? That's a phone buzzing. That's my phone that he had in his pocket. How could I've forgotten that he left with it when . . . he could've answered it instead of . . . it's one of my sisters. Why is she calling me? Nothing has happened to mother that I know. Mother just called them? She never calls them. She sounded totally sane? Was that really mother who called them? Is she ever going to stop to take a breath? I'd be really shocked, too, if mother ever called me for no reason. Did I know that papa's funeral wasn't going to be here – that the church that he and mama were going to where they were living is going to handle the funeral?

You need to get her to stop talking so that you can tell her that you're not going to go to the funeral – that papa didn't take the time to see you when he was here last week so . . . what's this – mother said that you're going to go to the funeral – that she has talked with Auntie and that Auntie was really happy that she, dad and you will be leaving within the next couple of hours.

Who does mother think that she is making the decision for me to . . . I'm not going to go. If my sisters want to go – they can go ahead and be miserable. They know what it's going to be like with mother once she begins nose diving into her poor me world.

Where did he go? What does he think that he's doing with that rake? I need to talk to him – like right now. He'll understand. Maybe you should just go into the house and check out for yourself if what mother told your sisters is really true. What if it's really true that . . . there's no way that I'm going anyplace stuck in a car with someone who gets so irrational as mother invariably gets.

Why is dad heading for . . . the poor guy looks like he wants to hide. Tiny must've seen the panic in his face as . . . yell to the poor dude to come over here to where you're standing at the corner of the house.

You missed your chance guy to . . . I don't know what you said to him dad but the way that his shoulders suddenly drooped . . . you've made him cry dad. Why did you have to do that dad? You don't know what to do dad now do you? At least you knew enough to put an arm around his shoulders. Come on you guys – don't you all run off leaving dad alone with him.

That was a thumbs up that Tiny just gave you. A thumbs up? Oh no – dad just saw me. I'm going to have to . . . I don't want to go over there dad. I know that he doesn't want me to see him crying.

Go over there gal. Put your arms around him. For someone crying, he shouldn't look so happy. Why is he so happy? Did dad just say that he knows that he and mother didn't talk with me but . . . did he just say that he has asked the poor guy to go with him, mother and me to . . . you're not going to go to papa's funeral – remember? Tell dad that. Tell him why – that papa . . . he'll understand. Tell him that you don't want to be anywhere near mother when . . . does mother know that dad just asked him to make the trip to Auntie's house? It was mother's idea? How do you do it mother? How do you always manage to put me in untenable places where . . . why doesn't anyone ever ask me what I want to do instead of . . .

What're you doing now dad? Are you just going to leave me with him to . . . maybe I can go with him – if it's okay with him, to his place for some changes of clothes. Just start jumping up and down gal. You know that's what your heart is doing right now. And why are you so glad that . . .

Did I hear him right – that he doesn't have any decent clothes anymore – that he's been wearing what he took with him and that he hasn't had the money to . . . just go inside – get your purse and take him clothes shopping. If dad says there's enough time, we'll stop at the salon to trim his mop. Best bud can come with us. Where is she?

Let's look for her in the house. What's happened? What've I been missing? This place hasn't looked so clean since . . . is that tea that mother is drinking? If speaking Spanish makes her sound as happy as she sounds now, she should speak it all the time. Maybe if la doña is looking for a job as a maid . . .

Mother is talking to me like – like I'm a real human being – like I'm her daughter. Where did this mother come from? I'm glad that she's glad that he's willing to go with us.

What do I plan to do right now? Now what's going on in her mind? Why can't best bud and I take him to get some clothes now instead of . . . just humor her gal. There's nothing that dad is wearing now that'll fit him mother. Haven't you noticed mother that dad is a lot chunkier than he looks in your wedding photo.

Okay mother – we'll just go outside and walk around some more while you . . . why can't something ever be done my way? Why does it always have to be your way mother? You're going to spend the rest of your life gal humoring mother.

This is really awkward. It's like I'm suddenly what's his face's caretaker. Just put him on a leash and you'll have a pet.

He can talk again. Gal – this isn't the time to be goofy with him. Can't you see his face? He's definitely mauling over something that he wants to tell me. It better not be that he's decided not to go with us to papa's funeral. If he doesn't go with us, I'm not going either.

Good grief guy – you don't have to look like you're asking me out on a date or something. Can't you just spit it out guy? Okay – we'll go sit in the chairs by the lake. This better be good. What's that he's taking out of his pocket? It's his necklace. No – he's still wearing one. Po thought that . . . it's for me?

I don't care if it was Po who . . . and I don't care if he's embarrassed to death, he's going to get hugged. I don't care that the whole world saw me do it. He's going to have to learn to hug back as . . .

Butterflies . . . how did he know that . . . what does the verse say? That's just not any old verse is it? I don't know exactly what delight in the Lord really means but I sure can guess and . . . I'm going to put it around my neck right now. I don't think that he wanted me to do that. I don't care.

Good – he likes this verse, too – that he had made it his life verse when he . . . and then when mom-mom was . . . and thinking that God had left him on his own, he told God to take that verse back because . . .

Wow – what did God do to him? How could he have kept his grandmother from being beaten up so badly by a couple of gangbangers from another gang who apparently followed her home thinking that she'd have some drugs that they could steal from her? The casket was kept closed because . . . she must've really gotten beaten for why whoever Mr. J is wouldn't let him see his grandmother's face again one more time? It sounds to me that he didn't have any choice but to go with that spring break beach evangelism outreach team in order to . . . if he'd been home – okay if he'd been home, those potheads who had followed his grandmother to her house would've seen him and . . .

The two druggies who killed his grandmother were killed by their own gang because . . . why? Crossing over into another gang's territory would've led to . . . so instead of starting a gang war, they killed the stoked up punks and made sure that the photo and the article that was in the paper ended up in the hands of the gang that ran the area where he lived? What would it be like if there was a gang around here?

Why is he all of a sudden railing on . . . what did his grandmother do to him? So – she had a cedar chest. There were some letters, medals, a photo with a newspaper article in the cedar chest. How come he didn't know that his grandmother had kept letters that his grandfather had sent her from the front lines – that he had gotten medals? He doesn't even think that his grandfather knew that his wife was pregnant when . . .

Why didn't his grandmother ever show him that newspaper article let alone that wedding photo of his father and his mother? Is that what his grandmother said about his mother – that she was full of life and that she was a perfect wife for his father because . . . that he has a feeling that his mother was a lot like me. I'll take that as a compliment. If he's really like his dad . . .

Did he ever ask his grandmother about his father and mother? Why would his grandmother say that there are things sometimes that you can do nothing about so the best thing that you can do is to put them behind you? She should've told him what happened. Okay – the newspaper article says that as they were walking home from a music concert at . . . that must've been the same Bible school where he . . . a car while turning an icy corner slid right into them – killing them instantly. That's awful. And his grandmother never . . .

Why is dad calling us now? Just when . . . apparently dad wants us to go into the house. Is he okay? He looks like the whole world has just been lifted off him.

Now maybe . . . why does mother have that shirt? Is that lipstick that she's trying to wipe off the collar?

What's wrong with dad? He looks like he has just seen a ghost. Why would he say to mother something about keeping that shirt all these years – that he had wondered what had happened to it? So – he wore it to the office Christmas party – so? Daddy came home from the Christmas party with lipstick on his collar? That wasn't very smart daddy. You should've known that mother . . .

Dad – why are you asking mother if she remembers that before you left for the party and because she had to stay home at the last minute to take care of me because I'd gotten real croupy that she had . . . that look mother tells me that you completely forgot what you did and then when dad got home and you saw . . .

You're going to forgive her just like that dad? Mother is letting dad hug her. I have to be dreaming.

What is la doña trying to show me? Is she trying to say that she likes her name so much that she embroidered it in English at the bottom of her apron so that . . . how can she not notice what just happened? That's la doña's name? I'm never going to let her leave. You do know that you're jumping up and down and . . . I know that I shouldn't feel so happy but . . . show him la doña's name. He'll know why I'm . . .

This can't be true. Nothing like this has ever happened to me before. You just got asked by moneybags to go to . . . because his wife asked him to ask me to go with them. I wish that I could go but . . . I can't leave today to go anywhere. Just get a hold of yourself and tell him that you've got a commitment at the church which you know that senior pastor will not let you out of for any reason.

He's putting his arm around my shoulders. Why are you letting him . . . he just called me son. No one has ever called me son. Does being called son always sound so . . . I'm not to worry? He's going to talk to senior pastor for me? I probably should know what? Is he really saying that when papa was here last week, that papa sat down with the governing board and with senior pastor and that they all came to a mutual agreement that senior pastor will take a six month sabbatical during which time the church will find someone else to replace him? How would I know that?

If senior pastor . . . what's the governing board going to do with me? This not to worry . . . yes mom-mom, I've got to believe that everything is going to . . .

Who is he motioning to? It's her. Has she been standing there this whole time? Please don't come over here. I don't want her to see me . . . just stop sniveling and . . . where are all the guys going. I'll join them.

He should've asked her first before asking me if I'd go along with them to the funeral. That look tells me that she didn't have a clue that her mother would want me to go along. If the world doesn't hear some serious screaming in the next few seconds . . . you knew that you should've bailed out when . . . where did that camera go? She's got to see herself. She looks like she's ready to explode. How can someone look like they're really mad while at the same time look like they're really happy? She sure is some kind of trip.

Don't walk away from us. Don't leave me alone with her. Can we just stop for a second so that I can wrap my arms around what just happened? Do we have to go to my place now to get some changes of clothes for the trip? Why go back to my place – there aren't any clothes there for me to pack. She wants to do what? She's wants to buy me clothes? Why? And if there's enough time for me to get my hair cut . . . are you just going to let someone who've you've only known for a couple of hours take over your life?

Did she give me a choice whether or not about going into the house? Somebody's been . . . those ladies had to have known each other before today the way that they're chit-chatting with each other. Do I want some tea? Just go outside guy and let the six gals do whatever gals do when . . . for a place that sure felt dark a couple of hours ago when . . . this place feels like it's filled with light right now. How can that be?

You shouldn't have disappointed your daughter again like that? She was obviously really looking forward to . . . and you were, too, weren't you guy? And now you're kicking us out of the house like . . . just maybe I've spent enough time with . . . maybe this is the time that you're supposed to give her that necklace?

You know what she's going to do when . . . she's going to look at you like you're a weirdo and . . . she's never going to wear it so . . . do it guy. If you don't give it to her, you're going to have to answer to Po. Po better know that he owes me big time. How many times has he given a gal something? How would he feel if a gal told him that she didn't want something that he was giving to her? Like it'd really bother him.

Ask her to go with you to those chairs by the lake. She can throw the necklace into the lake if . . . or never talk to you again – neither which would be the end of the world. Do you really want her guy to disappear out of your life?

Why did that smile disappear from her face like that? I don't like that frown. She was going to say something but . . . ask her what she was going to say. You probably don't want to know. Just tell her that Po told you to give it to her.

You don't have to gal pretend that . . . don't do that. Everyone's looking at us. Doesn't she care that I look like a . . . she really does like it. She still has the collection of the butterflies that she caught and which papa helped her to . . . I couldn't have known that she likes butterflies. It makes sense though the way that she's always flitting around that . . .

She has never heard of the verse? I thought everyone had heard of that verse. She's going to make that verse her life verse, too? Why? It's just a verse. How did she memorize it so fast? Including it in your prayers every day until . . . you'll never forget that verse. Maybe you should . . . you really need to start praying again the way that used to pray every day guy.

Why is she putting it around her neck? Everyone will see it and . . . you're stuck guy. She's going to tell everyone that you gave it to her and . . . that's just who she is. You knew better than to give it to her.

Why are you telling her about mom-mom? She doesn't want to hear about mom-mom right now. She just had her grandfather die. She doesn't need to know the gory details. Why are you telling her everything then? She doesn't have to listen to me.

It's not right to be so mad at mom-mom. You were never mad at mom-mom when she was alive. Why are you so mad at her all the time now? It doesn't do any good to be mad at mom-mom. You can't talk to her. She's dead. It's your fault.

Why did she let those two acidheads into the house? You know that she did. The door wasn't forced in or a window broken. It's one thing to be trusting but . . . those punks had a rap sheet that . . . she had to know that they didn't live in the area. Why did they have to beat her like they did? She was an old lady who . . . why didn't she just retire when she could've and moved to where her family lives?

Thank goodness for gang justice. Don't look so shocked gal. You've got it really cozy here. How many guys – or gals, does she know who're dead today because . . . how many times has she heard shooting right outside her door or seen gangs fighting or . . . she doesn't have a clue that that's what life is like in the depressed areas of large cities.

They could've let me take care of that street trash instead of . . . don't you think guy that that they had grandmothers, too, who . . . drugs are the evil. Why can't the cops get the drugs off the street? Maybe mom-mom would be alive today if the cops weren't doing such a . . .

Why did I let the school make me go on that trip? Why didn't I go on that trip last year instead of . . . how many kids go on trips to . . . they're just looking for an excuse to get away from home. How many kids do you know who're sold out to . . . you're just as good as anyone guy living behind a spiritual façade. You knew that you had to make that trip in order to graduate. I sure would think that the school would want to do all that it can do to invest in a student believing that he or she was the future of the church instead of treating us like we're nothing more than a necessary evil for their existence.

How many times did we sit alone home together mom-mom? Did you ever think mom-mom that I just might like knowing about . . . you tried to shut those memories of . . . you did, didn't you mom-mom?

You have to focus on those good memories of mom-mom not those . . . I'd think that she would've really wanted to talk about my grandfather. He was a hero. How many people can say that their grandfather was a hero? You shouldn't mom-mom have kept all those memories hidden away in your cedar chest. Did she ever go into that cedar chest to . . . it didn't look like anything had been moved for years.

Why did mom-mom keep just that wedding photo of mother and father? There had to have been other photos. Who was my mother? What about mother's family? There has to be records someplace at the high school. There has to be. She had to have taught there for at least four or five years. Was she as beautiful as she looked in the wedding photo? Why did she sit back like that? If what I just said bugs her, that's her problem. She needs to find a way to get the victory.

How long have I been . . . and she just sat there listening. What can I say to her about mother and father? There isn't anything to tell her other than what the newspaper article says – that a young couple was killed on such and such corner as they were walking home from a concert at . . . that their deaths left behind his mother and a two month old baby. Why didn't I burn that article instead of . . . every time now when I open that cedar chest . . .

Is someone calling? It sounds like her father. It's her father. What does he want? Just when . . .

Now they want us to go inside the house. Can they make up their mind? The guys were really working while . . . even the trunk has been completely cut up and . . . where did they go?

Everyone is in the house. What've we missed? You can tell Po that you gave her the necklace and that she . . . okay Po – you've already noticed haven't you. Does he ever miss anything?

I need to find a corner to lay low. There're way too many people in this house right now. At least la doña knows that I'm here. That was nice of her to bring me a glass of that rice milk stuff.

You need to go over to where Po is with Tiny's . . . talk about a couple of big kids. I sure wouldn't want to meet them in a dark alley. Why does he want me to come over there? He better believe that I'd really like to spend some time hanging out with him when I get back from the funeral. That'd be really awesome.

How did they know where I was from? Po . . . they're definitely intrigued with where I lived. Would I like to come to their church sometime? If they think that their dad is a good preacher . . . why not? They seem like a couple really decent young guys. Ask them about the upcoming football season.

Why did it suddenly get so quiet? I don't like this. Why is everyone staring at moneybag's wife like . . . did she just say something – or do something that I missed?

Whatever it is it must have to do with that shirt that she's holding. That shirt is probably one of her husband's shirts that she thought would fit me. She doesn't need to worry about that smudge on the collar. I've worn shirts all my life that've had worse smudges on them than what that shirt has on it.

Why is he looking at the shirt like . . . that's a shirt that he wore to a Christmas party? When was the Christmas party when he wore that shirt? The shirt looks like it would be way too small for him now. It was . . . that was the same year when mother and father were . . .

By the way that she's looking at him, she . . . how could a gal completely forget that she had put a lipstick smudge on her husband's shirt collar before he went to a Christmas party so that . . . didn't she trust him? The way that she's shaking her head . . . she really did forget that – even though she had a babysitter lined up to come over because her little baby was sick, she decided that she needed to stay home. She didn't want to stay home?

What happened after the Christmas party when moneybags got home? His wife evidently decided to save that shirt. Has she all these years been . . . thinking that her husband . . . why wouldn't she want to ever confront her husband about . . . and how long are you going to harbor memories of mom-mom that . . .

Does the gal know that she's standing there with her mouth wide open like . . . poor moneybag's wife. I would forgive her, too, moneybags. I sure don't know how anyone could forget something that they did and then . . . what would everyone do if I started to applaud? I should've known that Tiny would . . . that was nice of him motioning to his wife to join him to give moneybags and his wife a big hug.

Why is la doña heading for . . . what's la doña trying to say to her? Why is la doña pointing to the bottom of her apron? It must've been something important as she . . .

Now what's she doing? Why is she hugging la doña like . . . does she know that everyone is looking at her? Does it ever bother her the kinds of bizarre scenes that she makes? Those octopus arms . . . and the way that her eyes get all sparkly and . . . why is just waving for me to come over to where she is?

What does she want me to see? Do I know la doña's name in Spanish? La doña's name is Esperanza? So la doña's embroidered her name in English on the bottom of her apron. She's right. I have it, too.

Hope.