



Listen... someone's life may depend on it.

We all know what it's like to get that phone call in the middle of the night. This night was no different.

Jerking up to the ringing summons, I focused on the red, illuminated numbers of my clock. Midnight. Panicky thoughts filled my sleep-dazed mind as I grabbed the receiver.

"Hello?" My heart pounded, I gripped the phone tighter and eyed my husband, who was now turning to face my side of the bed.

"Mama?" The voice answered. I could hardly hear the whisper over the static. But my thoughts immediately went to my daughter.

When the desperate sound of a young crying voice became clear on the line, I grabbed for my husband and squeezed his wrist.

"Mama, I know it's late. But don't... don't say anything until I finish. And before you ask, yes I've been drinking. I nearly ran off the road a few miles back and..."

I drew in a sharp, shallow breath, released my husband and pressed my hand against my forehead. Sleep still fogged my mind, and I attempted to fight back the panic. Something wasn't right.

"... And I got so scared. All I could think of was how it would hurt you if a policeman came to your door and said I'd been killed. I want... to come home. I know running away was wrong. I know you've been worried sick. I should have called you days ago but I was afraid... afraid...."

Sobs of deep-felt emotion flowed from the receiver and poured into my heart. Immediately I pictured my daughter's face in my mind, and my fogged senses seemed to clear, "I think..."

"No! Please let me finish! Please!" She pleaded, not so much in anger, but in desperation. I paused and tried to think what to say. Before I could go on, she continued. "I'm pregnant, Mama. I know I shouldn't be drinking now... especially now, but I'm scared, Mama. So scared!"

The voice broke again, and I bit into my lip, feeling my own eyes fill with moisture. I looked up at my husband, who sat silently mouthing, "Who is it?"

I shook my head and when I didn't answer, he jumped up and left the room, returning seconds later with a portable phone held to his ear. She must have heard the click in the line because she asked, "Are you still there? Please don't hang up on me! I need you. I feel so alone."

I clutched the phone and stared at my husband, seeking guidance. "I'm here, I wouldn't hang up," I said.

"I should have told you, Mama. I know I should have told you. But, when we talk, you just keep telling me what I should do. You read all those pamphlets on how to talk about sex and all, but all you do is talk. You don't listen to me. You never let me tell you how I feel. It is as if my feelings aren't important. Because you're my mother you think you have all the answers. But sometimes I don't need answers. I just want someone to listen."

I swallowed the lump in my throat and stared at the how-to-talk-to-your-kids pamphlets scattered on my nightstand. "I'm listening," I whispered.

"You know, back there on the road after I got the car under control, I started thinking about the baby and taking care of it. Then I saw this phone booth and it was as if I could hear you preaching to me about how people shouldn't drink and drive. So I called a taxi. I want to come home."

"That's good honey," I said, relief filling my chest. My husband came closer, sat down beside me and laced his fingers through mine.

"But you know, I think I can drive now."

"No!" I snapped. My muscles stiffened and I tightened the clasp on my husband's hand. "Please, wait for the taxi. Don't hang up on me until the taxi gets there."

"I just want to come home, Mama."

"I know. But do this for your mama. Wait for the taxi, please."

I listened to the silence in fear. When I didn't hear her answer, I bit into my lip and closed my eyes. Somehow I had to stop her from driving. "There's the taxi now." Only when I heard someone in the background asking about a Yellow Cab did I feel my tension easing.

"I'm coming home, Mama." There was a click, and the phone went silent. Moving from the bed, tears forming in my eyes, I walked out into the hall and went to stand in my 16 year old daughter's room. My husband came from behind, wrapped his arms around me and rested his chin on the top of my head.

I wiped the tears from my cheeks. "We have to learn to listen," I said to him.

He studied me for a second, and then asked, "Do you think she'll ever know she dialed the wrong number?"

I looked at our sleeping daughter, then back at him. "Maybe it wasn't such a wrong number."

"Mom, Dad, what are you doing?" The muffled voice came from under the covers. I walked over to my daughter, who now sat up staring into the darkness. "We're practicing," I answered. "Practicing what?" she mumbled and laid back on the mattress, but her eyes already closed in slumber.

"Listening," I whispered and brushed a hand over her cheek....
