

# *What* Do I *Want?*

*"What do you want me to do for you?"*

*"Lord," he said, "I want to see!"*

Luke 18:41

A Novel By

*Diane C. Shore*



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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to our Source of Life, our Source of Hope, and our Source of Strength! All praise and honor and glory go Heavenward!

Father, thank You for sending Your One  
and only Son into this world to save us and set us free!

Jesus, Your bright light shines into the darkest places!  
There is healing and deliverance in Your mighty Name!

Holy Spirit, without Your guidance,  
we would all be wandering around in a smoky haze!



## PROLOGUE

Sometimes, Truth can be stranger than Fiction. This may be one of those times! This book will challenge you, and stretch you, but your life and the lives of those you know may never be the same after reading it.

Take a moment and look at the two pictures on the front cover again. Go ahead, I'll wait... Okay, you're back. What you were looking at is the exact same photo taken just four days apart. With fires burning nearby, the skies became full of smoke. The once beautiful landscape could no longer be seen. The fall colors on the trees became dull. The air was dense, and breathing became difficult. Check it out again... Yes, that's the same roofline, the same trees, and the same foothills. But it all looks so different. And this smoke was many miles away from where homes were being destroyed by fires, and lives were being changed forever.

But God, in all His amazing ways, gives us a way to see something astounding in these two pictures—the realization that His children, true believers in His Son, Jesus Christ, may be living in this haze every single day...unknowingly. It doesn't feel like smoke, smell like smoke, or burn our lungs like smoke—but what it does is weigh heavy on our souls, cloud our minds, depress our spirits, and hurt our hearts. It's not called **Smoke**, it's called **Life**. Can you relate?

That's the *astounding* smoky part...now comes the *astounding* beautiful part. There's **Hope!**

Jesus came over 2,000 years ago to rescue us from the dominion of darkness...from this heavy, toxic, smoky haze. That's right! There's a CURE for what ails us. It's in the strong wind of the Holy Spirit! But this powerful Good News is not being shared nearly enough. And even when

it is, it may seem more like it's something from the past, or perhaps it's for someone else, and not you. But it's here, it's now, and it's for YOU!

In this fictional tale filled with the Truth of God's Word, join Randy and his wife, Linda, behind their *closed doors*, so to speak. Watch as they find out just how *smoky* their lives really are. Read about how they react when the *smoke alarm* goes off. And then follow them to where the *fire escape* is, should they choose to accept the freedom being offered.

This story has been described as a combination of, "True fiction and real life." There are Biblical Truths revealed in here that the enemy never wants you to know! Dive in, and be set free! Clear blue skies are yours to be had, in the power of Jesus' name! Amen!

## LINDA

I put down the phone feeling confused and totally out of emotional energy. With such a busy day ahead, I don't really have time to be thinking about what's happening to my marriage. At this point, I'm out of answers—I don't know what to do. As if this trip to Chicago isn't hard enough—I've got deadlines to meet. With Randy berating me about laundry, and hanging up on me, he's got my emotions on a roller coaster again. I can't stand this! How long am I supposed to put up with his rudeness? He blames all this on a dirty shirt. I blame it on... Well, I don't know what. But I know me not getting his shirt washed before I left is far from the problem.



Returning to my hotel room after another long day of work, I'm finding it so hard to relax. This morning's phone call still echoes in my head. Our marriage is so dysfunctional. I miss the days when the kids were home. Oh, there were hassles then, especially through the teen years, but at least there was more activity that hid the misery in our marriage. It was good to talk with Hannah earlier. She's tired of being tired. But she will probably get over some of that once she gets into her fourth month. I remember I did. Rob and Hannah didn't waste any time in moving away from home when opportunities arose. They probably had enough of our home life. And now with Hannah pregnant, I don't know how often we will see her. Her husband, Blake, doesn't get along all that well with Randy. Maybe they're too much alike? They say a daughter will often marry someone just

like her dad. I feel bad for Hannah sometimes. But what can I do? I can't even handle my own marriage. It's probably best that they live near Boston. And with Rob being in Florida, maybe he is finding some peace? Hannah and Rob have turned into decent adults. I'm proud of them. But I hope with all they've experienced through the years with Randy and me, we haven't wrecked their own search for happiness in this life.

I need to turn out the light and see if I can get some sleep. I have another busy day tomorrow. There is no way I am going to call Randy tonight. I know it would just upset me more. With the time difference, I'm sure he's just in front of the TV watching a game. That's fine. I'll leave him to it.



Turning over and seeing the clock through the blur of morning eyes, it's 6:23. The last time I looked it was after 1:00 a.m. I couldn't get my mind to stop spinning. This is not near enough sleep for me, and now I have a full workday ahead. Pulling back the drapes I see the sun is trying to come out this morning. There're some clouds, and maybe some rain expected. I have a good view of the city from this room. I like Chicago, with all the bridges over the river that runs through the city. I wish I had time to take a tour, so I could really appreciate the architecture. I've seen the people getting on and off the boats, having a great time doing that. I don't have time on a business trip. I wish I had a husband that I liked to travel with. Randy is just no fun. We've tried it, and it's better that we keep to our routine at home. Too much time in a car or plane together never turns out good.

After getting to work, I wait a bit before calling Randy. I don't know why I even do it after him hanging up on me. But I guess I feel obligated. With him being two hours behind me, I'm more fully awake than he will be. He does answer though:

"Good morning."

"Hi, Randy. How did you sleep?"

"Okay. Woke up a couple of times."

"I slept okay, too." I don't want to tell him I was still upset, and I lost sleep over it. I divert to another subject, which I'm good at doing. It's easier than confronting him. This isn't the first time he's done that, and it probably won't be the last. "I talked to Hannah last night. She's feeling good now that she's almost to the three-month mark, although still tired. They will find out the sex of their child soon. They're hoping for a boy. It doesn't matter to me."

"Mmm-hum," Randy mumbles back.

"Randy?" I can tell he's really not listening.

“Yeah?” he answers—I know he’s not even really connecting that there might be a problem.

“Randy...I think we have some things to talk about when I get home.” I don’t know if he detects the frustration, or even the sadness in my tone.

“Sure. Um...yeah,” he says.

“Okay, well, I can hear that you’re involved in other things, so I’ll let you go.”

“Okay. Yeah. I need to get to work,” he responds.

“Bye, Randy.”

“Bye, Linda.”

Hanging up, I know that conversation wasn’t worth much. He’s involved in whatever, and neither one of us cared all that much.

I have meetings in the afternoon, and lunch with a new employee first, so I better get to it. I’ve worked at this job in finance for over 20 years, and I like it most days. The good thing is, if Randy and I do call it quits, I have an income. I won’t have to worry about money. I wonder where I would go if I left? I know he’s not going anywhere. Maybe I could move in with my sister, Venyce, for a bit? Since her husband died three years ago, she’s been pretty lonely. I don’t know where Venyce’s name came from. Mom and Dad never said. She’s always had to spell it for people through the years. They want to spell it V-e-n-i-s-e because it sounds like Denise—we’ve laughed about that so many times. At least Linda is easy to spell.

Maybe I’ll call her tonight when I get back to my room. She won’t be surprised. She’s been very aware that things aren’t good with Randy. She even tried to talk with him a couple of times. That usually ended in a disaster. He wasn’t about to listen to Venyce, even though she really was kind to him. Venyce loves God, and she is very involved in her church. It seems like a good church. I have been there a couple of times, although Randy and I mostly go to the church in the next town over for the holidays. Maybe we should try to go more often? Maybe that would help? We need something, and from what Venyce has told me these past few years, God has been her strength through her grief. She joined a grief group, and it’s really helped, too. There are a couple other women in her group who are widows, and they spend time together.

Back at my desk after lunch, I hear my name called:

“Linda?”

“Uh, yes?” I answer, looking up from the desk where I have my head buried in my computer, but have my mind on so many other things.

“We’ll be meeting down the hall in conference room three in ten minutes.” It’s my co-worker, Evelyn. She’s been around a long time and likes to be in charge around here. When she says *jump*, most people do;

me included. But today I don't seem to care about pleasing her all that much.

"Okay. I'll be there," I respond with little enthusiasm. She did pull me out of my thoughts and back into the job at hand. I better finish up these last stats here, and head on down there. Evelyn doesn't like it when we stroll in late. Even though she's not the boss, she takes it personally.



The meeting is long and arduous throughout the afternoon. I'm glad to get out of the office at the end of the work day. Stopping at a pizza stand on the walk back to my hotel, I take a look around the city. With so many people walking from work, it's a mad rush down the sidewalk. Many are headed to the "L." In the Bay Area, I'm used to calling our transit system BART. But in Chicago, I found out it's called the "L," which is short for "Elevated." Some of the tracks do run above the city, but I've seen those that don't. Thankfully, I can get to my hotel walking. It makes it nice at the end of the day to get some fresh air.

I give Randy a call about 8:00, but he doesn't answer. I'm not surprised. Then a text quickly arrives:

"Linda, exhausting day. Let's talk tomorrow."

"Okay. Sleep well," I text back, glad to not have to talk.

It's definitely time to give Venyce a call with it becoming more and more obvious that things are not going well with Randy. I scroll to find her name, so wishing this wasn't necessary. But it is...

She answers cheerfully, "Hi, Lin. How's it going?"

"Hi, Venyce. Okay. How are you tonight? I'm in Chicago, so a couple hours ahead of you."

"Oh, really? Another business trip? I'd like to go with you sometime," Venyce says.

"Yeah. It's business. That would be fun to travel out here together. I was just thinking today how I'd like to visit this city sometime for pleasure and take a look at the sights. If you joined me on a business trip, we wouldn't get much free time together."

"Well, we should plan a fun trip again soon then—to there, or somewhere else. I'm feeling okay to do a bit more traveling now. You know, we've done a little, and I'm grateful for that. But my heart was so sad after losing Earl. It was hard."

"Yes, I know. It's not been easy for you. But you have stayed strong, Sis. I'm proud of you for that."

"Thank you. I don't know how I would do this without God. Earl loved Jesus, and he was more than ready to see Him face to face. I didn't want

him to go. But Earl always reminded me how Jesus said to His disciples in John 14:28, *'If you really loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, who is greater than I am.'* Earl wanted me to be happy for him. After all, he fought that cancer long and hard. He was tired."

"I know he was. I'm so glad I came by the day before he passed. I will never forget the sparkle in his eyes when he told me he would be leaving soon. I thought he should be so sad. But he wasn't. He told me he hated to leave you and the family, but he knew it was his time. And he knew that God would provide for all of you. And He has, hasn't He, Venyce?"

"Yes. It's not easy, but it is possible with God. I cling to God's promises like never before. And you know what? It makes me a better mom and grandma. There are many things I should have done with my children when they were little, but I was so busy. I thought I didn't have as much time for Jesus then either, even though we took the kids to church. Isn't that crazy? I thought sitting in church once a week would do it, and then we could go on our way."

"Well, Sis, you did better than me. Randy and I are still mostly Christmas and Easter people. And I know I need more than that...which sadly, brings me to this phone call. Things are not good with Randy. I don't know what it's going to be like this time when I get home. It seems worse than ever. We can barely talk on the phone these days. He hung up on me. It's just getting impossible to live with him. I was wondering if it's really not good when I return if I could stay with you for a while? Maybe take some time to think it through. I don't want a divorce. I really don't. But I'm so unhappy with the way things are."

"Let me think and pray on that, okay? I'm in no way telling you that you can't come and stay with me. You know I welcome you any day, any night. But this is a big step for you both, and I want to be sure that what I'm doing to help you is in line with God's will. I hope you understand what I mean."

"I do, Sis. I know that divorce is not God's plan for any of us. But you and Earl had an exceptional marriage. I always envied how you were able to talk with one another, and even laugh so much together. Randy and I just don't have that. So far from it..."

"I know. It's been difficult for you, Linda. But God has ways to help us even when things seem impossible from our perspective. And sometimes, a little break can help. I just have to make sure that opening my door to you isn't closing the door on what God might want to do in your marriage. So, let me pray on it some, and we can talk tomorrow night, okay?"

"Okay. Please do pray. I'm not so good at praying, and I know I have leaned on you through the years to sort of carry my faith. I'm thinking it's

time I start to grow into this on my own. Maybe getting some time away from Randy will allow me to do that? And then who knows what God might have planned for my marriage? I really have no idea at this point.”

“I’m so glad you called, Linda. Let’s talk tomorrow. I love you, Sis. Good night.”

“Love you, too, Venyce. You’re a good sister, and example of a godly woman. I want to learn from you. Nite.”



## LINDA

Randy is avoiding my call again.

“...leave me a message and I’ll get back to you.”

I don’t really want you to get back to me, I think to myself, as I wonder what to say.

“Randy, I’m at work, and have a full day ahead. Just wanted to touch base with you this morning. Talk to you later.”

Turning back to my computer, I know I didn’t sound nice. I didn’t say that I loved him. Just cut it short, and not so sweet. I don’t even know if he’ll notice. And I don’t even know if I care all that much. Even the phone calls are getting so difficult.

Evelyn suddenly appears at my desk. I look up when I hear her say, “Linda, the files you gave me yesterday don’t make sense. Can you come into the conference room with me in about 15 minutes? I want to look them over before handing them off to Daniel.” Evelyn’s back at it today. Her voice has an edge to it, and I’m not looking forward to this little meeting at all. She reminds me of Randy. Always sounding intimidating, and she’s not even in a place in this company to be like that. She’s pretty much my equal. We have to merge our work at times. I don’t complain about how she does hers—not sure why she has to give me a hard time about mine. Oh well, I only see her a couple times a year here in Chicago. Other than that. I’m left to myself. I feel bad for the people who have to work with her all the time.

Coming out of the conference room, I’m glad that’s over. My mind then wanders more to my conversation with Venyce last night. She is so wise. Even though I wanted her to gladly tell me to come on over, I know

she's doing what's best. She's always been like that. She doesn't just jump on things. She thinks and prays about it. I need to take a lesson from her. Probably many lessons from her, and whomever else, if I really do leave Randy. That will be a huge step, and a scary one. He's been my life for the past 40 plus years. He's the father of my children. I can't just cut him out and pretend he never existed. I don't think divorce is ever that easy, no matter how unhappy people are. I do care about Randy. I do think I still love him. I just can't live with him and have any peace in my life. I need to find peace again, with or without him. I think that should be my goal. Peace. Maybe I'm starting to know the *what*. I just need to figure out the *how*.

I find myself sighing a lot during the day, and I feel so tired. Maybe it's because I know things are coming to a head and I don't want to really face them. I've learned through the years how to walk on eggshells around Randy. And it's worked, for the most part. I let him have his way, and he makes sure I know what that is. This is out of character for me...to think of leaving him on my terms, and not on his. I wonder how he will take it? Maybe he'll be glad I'm out of his hair? Honestly, I don't know at this point.

The walk back to the hotel feels welcoming again. There's always a certain sense of freedom when leaving a work building. My time is mine then. I don't have to worry that I'm not focusing on the job at hand, which is extremely hard to do this week. Before, I just ignored the hard stuff at home when I got here. This time, not so much. This time it seems like a game changer, to put it in Randy's terms. He loves his baseball. And I don't mind it. Really. I like to watch some of the games with him. What I don't like is that he loves baseball more than me...that's what it seems like. That doesn't feel good. And with a grandchild on the way, won't we want to be an example to future generations how a loving family should function? It seems like the ante is being upped as we move into this next season of life. Our kids know we're far from perfect. They've seen so many of our marital and parental flaws. But I don't want this new little one to experience what the kids have through the years. I don't want grandchildren to hear the harsh words between us. If we aren't together, will it spare them that? This may be why I'm just not willing to live the status quo any more. Change is needed here.

As I walk along, I start to pray. It's almost like I can't help it, and yet it feels strange at the same time. Prayer hasn't been a huge part of my life like it has for Venyce. But she was desperate. She was so broken when Earl was sick, and now gone. I saw it on her face. I wondered if she would ever smile again? It wasn't like a depression. Grief appears in a different form. It was more like something in her had died and she had to let God

mold and shape her life in a new way now. Things for her would never be normal again, as she knew them. But lately, just this last year, I'm starting to see more smiles. I'm starting to believe she will learn how to live what she calls a "New Normal." I wasn't sure what she meant when she would talk about that. But I'm seeing it lived out in her life. She knows she still has a way to go, but I'm so proud of her for not giving up.

As the prayer comes from inside me, I feel a lift. Some of the heaviness is gone, and I'm thankful. That may be a touch of what Venyce experiences. I should do this more often. The mad rush of walking commuters isn't even a distraction. It's like talking to God is taking me to a place above it all, and I feel some peace in the process. I want to talk to Venyce about this later when I call her. She will be a good one to bounce it off of. Randy would just think I'm nuts. I know he believes in Jesus. He did go forward that one Easter. He said he felt that he should. When he prayed with the person up front, they took him through a prayer that to him meant receiving Jesus as his Savior. He was changed for a few days...a bit nicer. But then once he got back to work and it piled up, it seemed to quickly disappear. I gave my life to Jesus a few years before that, and even though I understood what it meant, it didn't really change me all that much either. I still feel the same insecurities, the same fears, the same anxieties. I don't really get it. But I want to. I hope to.

I bought Randy a sign for his office soon after that Easter. He hung it up. I saw it when I dropped in one day. I remember looking at it and reading, "When you find a Bible that's falling apart, you'll find a person who's not." Neither one of us have a Bible that's falling apart...maybe that's why our marriage is? We probably should have put a little more effort in before getting to our own place of desperation. But maybe it takes that. I once heard a pastor talking...what was it he said? "Deliverance is for the desperate. If you're not desperate, come back when you are." I don't even know quite what he meant. I know the Lord's prayer says something at the end about "Deliver me from evil." I memorized that as a child in Sunday school. My parents would send me with my brothers to learn about God, I guess. They never went, and it was never talked about at home. It's amazing how the memory works when we are young. I wish I could memorize things that easily now.

Ahhh, this hotel room feels welcoming. Throwing my stuff on the desk, I flop onto the bed. It feels good to be out of the hectic office, and the commuters on the streets. Ordering some room service, I kick off my shoes and change into some comfies. I'll be home in two days...I better relax here while I can.

After dinner and a hot bath, I give Venyce a call. She is always quick to answer.

“There you are, Lin! I’ve been waiting to hear from you.”

“Hi, Sis. How are you today?”

“I’m doing just fine. It’s been a good day. There are some that are tougher. This was not one of them.”

“That’s good to hear. I’m always happy for you when you are not feeling the pain and missing so much. I know it’s a daily ebb and flow.”

“It is. It keeps me close to Jesus and the Hope He gave to us through His death and resurrection. It brings it to life when you have someone who’s not here in this life with us anymore. I never had to think about Heaven as much as I do now with Earl being there. The Bible says *‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.’* I’m understanding that verse a whole lot more now. I do feel God’s comfort as I draw near to Him each day.”

“Speaking of drawing near, I was walking back to the hotel here, and I started praying. Now, I know you pray all the time. But I don’t. I do have to tell you, though, it felt good. It’s like all the commotion down there on the street...you should see the people heading to the ‘L’ at the end of the day...it’s like all the commotion faded away for a few moments and I was lifted above the chaos. It felt so good. Is that something you normally experience when praying, Venyce?”

“Not always, but it surely can happen. When we pray, we are escorted right into the Throne Room of our Father in Heaven. We are welcome there. It’s interesting how the other day I saw my granddaughter walk into her parents’ bedroom without a thought of interrupting them. Their door was open. When it is closed, the grandkids are very good about knocking. But when I saw the ease that she had about entering, it made me think about how welcome we are into the Father’s Room in Heaven. He loves it when we join Him there. He wants an intimate relationship with us, and through His Son, Jesus, we can have that now.”

“Well, I felt close to Him walking on the busy street. Honestly, I really enjoyed it and I want more of that. Do you think when I get back, even if I don’t stay with you a while, we can work on this together? I really need some up close and personal help. Just going to church doesn’t seem to do it, although going more often would help also.” I laid it out there and waited for Venyce’s reply.

“Linda, that would be wonderful, to spend time together like that. And, if you are willing, I have a friend, Trisha, who is very good at helping people grow in their faith. Would you like me to introduce you to her? I could even send her your number if you’re ready for that.”

“Well, if you think that’s what I should do, I’ll trust you. Yes. Let’s do that when I get back—and go ahead and give her my number. Why waste time? I’ve wasted enough already.”

“Okay. Don’t feel any pressure when you hear from her. She is very patient to wait on God’s timing for when you would want to meet her. But knowing her, she won’t take long to reach out. Also, I have given you staying with me for a while some prayerful thought. It seems if that is what you need to find some healing in your relationship with Randy, you should do it. I don’t know how Randy will take it, but it may be what wakes him up also. I once heard that if we keep doing what we’ve always done, we’ll keep getting what we always got. So maybe you should change things up a bit. God keeps us moving forward in our relationship with Him. That is what we will be focusing on together.”

“Thank you, Venyce. I need your encouragement and help right now. I’m sorry to put this on you, after all you’ve been through, but...”

“But nothing. God’s Word says we are to comfort others with the comfort we have been given. I think that’s in 2 Corinthians. I have received a lot of comfort in so many ways these last few years. It’s starting to be the time when I am able to give some back. And I know with Trisha in the picture, too, you will find a new way of living this life through her encouragement and prayers. She’s been so helpful to me.”

“I love it. Thank you. I need to go now. It’s been a long day. But we’ll be in touch soon.”

“Sounds good. Love you, Sis. Bye.”

“Bye for now.”

Hanging up, I feel encouraged already. I’m glad Trisha will be in the picture. I don’t want to lean too heavily on Venyce. Although I know she wouldn’t mind, I really want to be respectful of where she’s at with her grief. Earl was a great loss to her.



## LINDA

Coming out of a meeting, I glance at my phone. Randy has called me. With the time difference, and me being at work long before him, he probably thinks I avoided his call. That's not good. Not that I really feel like talking to him, but I know I should. Oh, there he is again.

"Hi," I say, sounding out of breath.

"Hi. Sorry. Been busy," Randy responds.

I really don't know what to say after that. I could say I've been busy, too, and that's why our phone calls are short and infrequent. But busy wouldn't keep me from talking to a man I felt something for. I just don't feel much at this point.

"How's work?" Randy asks. It seems he's at least trying to make some sort of connection now.

"It's okay. I'm looking forward to being done with this week," I answer with barely any emotion.

"What time do you land?"

"6:45. Don't pick me up. I'll get a ride." Wow, that was curt of me...

"You sure?" Randy asks.

"Yeah. I'll see you between 7:30 and 8:00. Don't wait dinner." Sadly, I'd rather get a ride than ask Randy to pick me up. The ride home would just be uncomfortable with him. The company pays for it anyway.

"Okay. I'll see you tomorrow then," Randy says.

"Okay. Bye." I can tell I'm not trying to make him feel better at all, and wonder if he even cares whether I do.

Randy simply finishes with, "Bye."

Letting out a long sigh, my heart aches. I don't want it to be like this.

Far from it. But it's been going downhill for so long, I don't know if my marriage can be salvaged...even with help from Venyce and her friend, Trisha. Maybe I'm just hoping I can find a new life by myself, with some sort of peace and happiness in it.

"Linda?" Oh, now it's Evelyn again. I really can't wait until this week is over.

"Yes?" I say, turning to face her.

"That last report you gave me isn't making sense. I would like it if when you present it to Daniel, you let him know that I didn't have anything to do with it. It's not the way I like it done."

"Uh. Okay, Evelyn. I'll make sure he knows," while thinking I can't believe her rudeness. Like she knows the job so much better than I do? Where does she think she gets the right to be like that? I can't wait to get out of here at the end of the week.

"Good," she says, almost huffing off.

I find a corner office that's empty and set up my things in there for the rest of the day. I can't work in the main area with her wandering around. It's good some of the employees are off at that work faire. It makes it quieter in here, and I can hide a bit. Isn't that what I do best? Hide? Hide from Evelyn. Hide from Randy. I feel like hiding from the world...

Eventually meeting with Daniel, he seems perfectly happy with the report. I neglect to mention what Evelyn said, on purpose. Why should I point out that she's unhappy with it if he's not? Daniel is a great boss. He is always encouraging and happy to help. I wonder if he notices Evelyn and her peculiar ways? Should I ask him? Probably not. It's best that I just finish my work here in Chicago and get out of town silently.



Arriving back in my room after work, I settle in to eat a sandwich I picked up on the way. It feels lonely tonight. Although there's a form of peace here, I really would like to be with someone. I wonder after meeting with Trisha if it will be possible to get my marriage working? The kids won't be happy if we split. That's never good for them at any age. Rob doesn't even have a girlfriend yet. I don't want him to think if he meets someone that it can't be happy. I'm afraid at this point it may be too late. He's seen and heard too much. I should give him a call...

"Hi, Mom. How ya doin'?" Rob answers.

"Oh. Pretty good. How are things with you?" I ask trying to sound upbeat.

"Not bad. I really like this new place I found. Great view of the ocean, and not too expensive. You won't believe how cheap apartments are here

in Florida compared to California! It's fun to go looking when you see what you can get for the money!"

"I've heard that. When did you get fully moved in?" I ask.

"I did a lot this last weekend. Just a few more things still left in the old place. But I have two weeks to get it out and cleaned, so no pressure."

"Oh, that's nice. Good planning on your part. I talked to Hannah."

"How's she doing? Am I going to have a niece or a nephew?" I can hear the excitement in Rob's voice to be an uncle.

"She doesn't know yet. They will find out soon. But she's feeling good, just tired."

"It's so strange to think of my sis as being a mom. I know I'm not ready to be a dad, even if I did have someone I was seriously dating," Rob says.

"It's a big responsibility. That's for sure."

"Where you at, Mom? I know you were going away on business this week."

"I'm in Chicago again. I'm looking forward to getting home...well...I..." I stop there. I don't know quite what to say to Rob at this point. I don't want to lie to him.

"What's up, Mom? Is Dad okay?" he asks.

"He's fine, Rob. I have to be honest with you. You're not a kid anymore. I don't know how much longer we will be together."

"You guys are divorcing? SERIOUSLY?"

"I don't know, hon. Not yet. But I can't lie to you. You know things are rough between your dad and me. Have been for years. And I'm sorry for the things you have seen and heard. I know it's been pretty ugly at times. Kids shouldn't have to hear those things growing up."

"Yeah..."

"Are you okay?" I ask, feeling guilty, and rightfully so.

"Yeah. I'm okay. I don't want you guys to be miserable together. It's just never easy, I guess, to hear that my parents might be getting a divorce. It honestly scares me to think about marriage."

"See, that's what I'm worried about, too. That you won't think marriage can be a good thing. I want you to know that there are plenty of good marriages out there. Please don't think they are all like ours. They aren't."

"I know. But many are. Sadly," Rob says.

"There has to be a better way, Rob. And I hope to find it one day."

"If you do, let me know! There's a gal at work that I've been a bit friendlier with lately. And I want to maybe take her out soon. I've really tried to keep my relationships light and easy. But Jane seems different—not like anyone I've met before. I do know I'm not ready to step into what Hannah's got going—husband, baby, and all. I give it to her...she's

brave!”

“I understand. Take it one step at a time. I hope things go well with Jane. I need to get some rest now, Rob. Good talking with you. I’m sorry...” I stop there.

“Sorry?”

“Yeah. Sorry to have not set a better example in marriage, in life. I’ve made a lot of mistakes. I hope to get some of this figured out one day. I know you think your parents are all grown-up. But really, we are just kids in older looking bodies. I don’t want to just grow older now, I want to grow wiser.”

Robs laughs. “Okay, Mom. Well, I love you, and you’re a good mom. Don’t worry about it.”

“I love you, too, Rob. Glad you like your new place. Hope to come out there soon for a visit.”

“That would be great. Bye,” Rob says.

“Bye. Sleep well.”

Hanging up, I feel sad. It’s just as I suspected. Rob stays away from serious relationships because of what he’s seen. That breaks my heart. Something has to be different. I need to talk with Trisha and get some of this figured out. Where did we get so off track?

Turning out the light, I lie there in the dark thinking how life might have been different. I also wonder if God can really change what is, and mend what’s been so broken. I surely hope so.

## LINDA

By the next morning, Trisha has sent me a text. Venyce was right, she doesn't waste time. She sounds nice, just from her message. I won't answer it right away. I want to think about it a bit.

It's my last day here in Chicago. I'll leave the office early to get to the airport on time. I've heard Evelyn is out sick today. I was wondering why I hadn't seen her...not that I miss her.

Giving Randy a call, more out of habit than want to, there's no answer. I wonder if he's avoiding me?

"Linda?" I swivel my chair around and see Daniel standing in the doorway.

"Hey there," I say to him, hoping there's not a problem.

"I just want to thank you for all your hard work this week. It's always good to have you here in Chicago with us. I know it's a lot of work when you get here. But it's done now. And very well, I might add."

"Thank you, Daniel. I'm glad you're pleased. And if anything comes up, let me know. I know we covered a lot."

"We did. I'm going to be leaving for a meeting across town, so I wanted to say 'Bye' and have a good flight home."

"Will do! Great seeing you again. Enjoy your weekend," I say with a silent sigh of relief.

"You, too," Daniel says with a wave of his hand as he walks off.

Wow. That helps my morning. Daniel is so easy compared to Evelyn. Maybe God was being nice to me today by keeping her home sick...just not too sick, I hope.

There's Randy, calling me back...I better answer.