

WHEN WILL IT STOP!?

WHEN  
*You*  
DO

A Novel

*Diane C. Shore*



DCShore Publishing  
dcshorepublishing.com

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ISBN-13: 978-1-7326785-1-4

## DEDICATION

Jesus, You are the Healer and Deliverer to all those who call upon Your Mighty Name. With You, and You alone, we can rise up as if we had eagles' wings. This book is dedicated to Your Father, and mine; to the Holy Spirit given to all of us who do believe; and to You, who makes all things new.

Jesus, You are the answer when we cry out, "When will it stop?"

You make a way. Let us always choose You above all else in this life. You are the freedom we are all searching for. You are the peace and joy we all long for. Your name holds all the Hope we will ever need.

Thank You Lord Jesus!



## PRESENT DAY

*Tracy Lynn, better known as TL to many, barely slept the night before he hit the road for New Mexico in the spring of 2018. When he did doze, it had been a fitful and disturbed sleep once again. There had been far too many nights like this.*

*Rising before dawn, TL couldn't stop thinking about the answer that came to him when he cried out, "God, when will it stop!?" God swiftly and clearly answered, "When you do." It surprised TL. It wasn't even really a question of sorts, but more a plea for help. And yet, there it was...the plain, simple truth— just stop. Stop it. Stop allowing the wounding. Set up healthy boundaries that will put an end to the torture. Stop being the scapegoat. Stop being the excuse for misery. But God...stop being there at all? Is that what You mean? How do I do that? Don't You ask us to love our brother? Love our neighbor? Love even our enemies? How did I get to this place filled with such desperation?*

*With stomach churning, and head spinning through all the agonizing about Vic, TL pulled the car out of the driveway just as the sun was coming up over the hills. It seemed a hopeful sign...to leave in the darkness felt cold and uncaring. But then, there it was again...the pull—the wondering what he was doing wrong to cause this. Victor was seemingly TL's drug of choice. His very own brother. It was time...and TL knew it...but it was so hard.*

*After a lifetime of being there for Vic, TL knew he had to get away. His mom told him it might come to this. Physical escape seemed the only answer at this point. But would he be able to shut off his own brother? He doubted it. He knew the calls would eventually come from Vic. Could he*

*resist them? He wasn't so sure. His thoughts kept focusing on, "What am I doing? What if Vic needs me?"*

*Stopping at the first red light up the street, TL almost turned back. But if he did, he feared it just might kill him. He already felt dead inside other than the painful knot in the pit of his stomach that seemed to never go away. When would it stop? TL heard it again, "When you do." Had he been feeding off Vic, as much as Vic was feeding off him? Maybe. Maybe he was more part of the problem than the solution? Had he helped to create this monster?—this insatiable creature that grew in ferocity with each passing month he lived with him?*

*When the light turned green, TL stepped on the gas, and drove out of town. He knew he had to...for his own sanity. Maybe this could possibly wake up his brother, too? A verse came to him from Matthew 15:14 in that moment, "...if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a ditch." TL said out loud, "I always thought I was the one seeing clearly. Maybe I've been duping myself all this time?"*

*Thinking back, as he drove forward, TL recalled the day he simply met his brother at Charlie's Brewery...*

## ONE YEAR EARLIER

“Hey, Bro, how about we get a place together?” Vic asked, drumming his fingers on the table as he sat across from me.

I looked at him before answering. With my job being shaky, and Vic seemingly heading toward a divorce, it appeared to be a good idea at the time. Vic always depended on me when we were kids.

“Maybe that could make it easier on the both of us,” I answered.

“That’s cool, Bro,” Vic said, taking a sip of his beer. “Let’s scout out some places this weekend.”

“Sure. Let’s do that,” I agreed, although something inside of me did question what was happening.

Looking at a few locations, we finally agreed upon a small house. Normally it would have cost us more than an apartment, but the owners made us a special deal. We moved in two weeks later.

“I’ll take this room over here. I like the view out the front window,” Vic said, not really asking me as much as telling.

“Okay. That’s fine, although it would have worked well for my furniture.”

“Well, that room there will work, too. Don’t worry about it. It will fit,” Vic said.

I looked at the smaller bedroom at the back of the house and remembered when we were boys. Vic always got his way. I thought for many years it was because he was Mom’s favorite. Maybe that was true...maybe not. Vic had a way to get what he wanted.

Carrying in boxes, we didn’t talk a lot—although Vic suggested what was left of my stuff, when we got done, I could sell at a yard sale, or on

the internet. In other words, Vic's stuff would be placed first, and any space remaining, I could have. I didn't care all that much, so of course I went along with Vic's ideas for furniture placement.

"How about I run and get us a pizza for dinner?" I suggested, after we'd been working a few hours.

"Oh, I don't know. I'm feeling more like Chinese. Let's have that instead."

"Uh. Okay. I'll go to that place around the corner from here. I've been there once before. It was pretty good," I told him.

"That's not such a good place. I like the one over by the grocery store. You know the one, with the big red sign out front. Get it from there."

"I know the one," I simply said, as I headed out the door.

Returning after about 45 minutes, I came through the door to a barrage of angry words from Victor. "Where have you been? I had questions about some things here! Did it really take that long to get food?"

I just stood there, bags in my hands, and a look on my face that said it all...if Victor would have been listening. "I haven't been gone that long," I said under my breath.

"Let's eat. I'm hungry." Vic said, taking the bags and heading toward a kitchen full of boxes. "If you'd emptied these out earlier, we'd have some dishes to work with."

I followed Vic into the kitchen but wished I hadn't. Once again, it was my fault that there were no dishes out for us to use. "I got us some paper plates and forks at the Chinese place. I knew we wouldn't be able to find the dishes yet," I offered, hoping to appease him.

"I don't like plastic forks," Vic complained.

At that point, we mostly ate in silence, unless Vic spoke up about how his furniture wasn't fitting perfectly in his room and maybe he should take a look at my room again. "I wish Mandy hadn't left me with that bedroom set. No wonder she didn't want it when we split. She probably got herself something that works better, and she left me with this junk. I think I'll sell it as soon as I can. This egg roll is cold. That place is disappointing. I won't go back there again."

"I sure like this egg foo young though," I said, trying to change the mood. "They really know how to make it."

"I guess," Vic said with a grunt, and then quickly added, "We need to set up the stereo system. I don't want to wait to do that. I like listening to music pretty much 24-7."

We fell into bed that night exhausted as the questions from Mom ran through my head. "Are you sure this is a wise choice?" She wasn't so sure about it when I told her of our plan. Vic probably went right to sleep. All I know is I laid awake, rolling over from side to side. The demands of Vic

from earlier kept going through my mind. Maybe it was just because Vic gets stressed out moving, I remember thinking, looking for some excuse. He couldn't really be this way all the time, could he? I hoped not. I tried to pray, but I was so distracted, it seemed God was a million miles away. When I finally got to sleep, it didn't seem like any time at all and I could hear music coming from the living room. Opening my eyes, I noticed the sun was up, but I surely wasn't ready to be yet.

Sitting on the side of my bed, I rubbed my eyes open, and walked lazily into the living room. Vic was sitting on the couch, head back, eyes closed, and nodding to the music. He didn't hear me come into the room. I was glad as I walked to the kitchen. Finding a glass, I got myself some water, and then went back to my room, dressed, and started to unpack the boxes. I knew I'd need something to eat soon, but I wanted to get a few things done first.

Vic appeared in my doorway. "I didn't hear you up."

"No. Probably because of the music. You seemed to be enjoying it, so I didn't want to disturb you," I answered him, with a bit of sarcasm.

"What do you mean by that? I told you I like music. I kept it low."

"Yeah. It was low. Don't worry about it," I said, trying to sound more sincere.

Vic turning and muttering under his breath said, "Don't worry about it...This is worse than being with Mandy..."

That was all I heard as Vic made his way back toward the living room. I hoped it would be a better day. Maybe once we got settled in, Vic would lighten up a bit.

"Have you seen my screwdriver?" Vic suddenly yelled from the other room.

"No. I haven't," I called back.

"I thought you had it last night," Vic said.

"I didn't," I answered.

"Are you sure? You had it before you left to get the Chinese food."

"What?" I said, confused.

"Yeah. I'm sure. You had it, and now I can't find it anywhere."

"I'll help you look. I don't remember using it. But maybe I did," I said, shaking away any morning cobwebs that might be blurring my thinking.

"You did. Now help me find it," Vic said in a commanding voice.

"I'm looking. I'm looking," I sighed, already exacerbated by how the morning was getting started.

"Oh, here it is. On my dresser," Vic exclaimed.

"I didn't think I had it," I muttered to myself, as I got back to unpacking boxes in my own room. What's wrong with that brother of mine? Is he in his right mind? I'll be glad to get back to work on Monday, and get a little

space between us.

Around ten, Vic came into my room saying, “Run and get us a breakfast burrito! I don’t want to leave right now. I’m in the middle of something.”

I looked up at Vic from my position on the floor where I was going through things. I would have had a few choice words for him if he’d still been standing there. But he was gone again—back to doing what was important to him. No use arguing, I thought, I’ll just keep him happy. I don’t want to deal with the wrath of Vic. Not this early in the morning.

Returning from the breakfast shop down the street, I handed Vic his burrito.

“This feels cold...it better not be cold. They’re always doing that. They make these up ahead of time, and then sell them like they’re fresh.”

“Vic, I saw them making ours while I stood there. I’m sure it’s just fine on the inside. Unwrap it and see.”

“Yeah. It’s okay once I got all this paper off. Is this onion on here? It looks like they put onions in here. You didn’t order it that way, did you?”

“No. No, I didn’t. I know you’re not a lover of onions,” I said.

“Oh, maybe it’s just some white cheese,” Vic said, taking a large bite off the end, and sitting down on a box, now wanting to talk. “TL, this place is a too small. I wish we’d gone for that large apartment we saw. I’m not sure this will work.”

The rest of what Vic said, I wasn’t sure of. I stopped listening after the first few comments, and concentrated on eating my burrito. By the time I was done, Vic had gone on to other things, not really noticing that he wasn’t being listened to. I was glad for that, and went into my room, shutting the door behind me.

*Looking at the light traffic up ahead, it seems a good idea to be on the road before most of the commuters are up and running. Since quitting my job on Friday, I feel God opening this door for me to “escape.” The last year has been brutal...on my soul, on my spirit, and on my body. I could feel the knot in the pit of my stomach getting worse with each passing month, and I’m wondering if it could cause actual physical harm? Enough is enough! They say sometimes disease comes from dis-ease...I’m beginning to see how that could be true.*

*Stopping for coffee, I look around at others who are out so early in the day. What are their reasons? Are they escaping from something...from someone? How crazy it is to think I have to do this? It’s my little brother, after all. What harm could he cause? And yet, here I am. After loading what belongings would fit into my car, and getting rid of most of the rest of it, I’m running away. A grown adult. Crazy!*

*I remember a catch in my spirit when Vic suggested moving in together. There were too many memories of our childhood, and even early adult years, where things were rough. He was really reminding me of Dad. How had Mom put up with this for so many years? When I first talked to her, she didn’t want to say a whole lot about Dad, or Vic. As the year went on, she opened up and even talked more about getting healthy herself. I’d never heard her talk like that before. I’d really like a good sit-down with her, face to face. I hope there’s time when I get there.*

*Since Vic and I had been living in different cities for a number of years, we hadn’t seen as much of each other, and I didn’t give moving in together enough thought. I should have. Maybe I hoped his wife helped him grow up a bit. Now it didn’t seem so. Vic was not exactly like I remembered him, he was worse. The incessant complaining, and bursts of anger. Everything*

was wrong, and none of it was his fault. And no one, and nothing, existed except what was important to Vic. The house that started out small, turned into a crackerjack box that felt like a prison cell. Coming home each night from work, there would be Vic, on the couch, listening to music, waiting for me to be at his beck and call. After all, isn't that what I lived for? Well, it seemed so to Vic.

"TL," the barista called out. "Coffee mocha, extra hot."

"Thanks," I answer, wrapping my hands around the cup, looking for some sort of comfort, I hope maybe this will soothe the ache I feel, and the worry that's consuming me. I know I need to get out of town. But everything inside of me shouts, "STAY!" When Vic gets home and tries calling me, I won't answer it. I can't answer it. What will I say? "I've left town. You're on your own. I can't do it anymore!" Oh no, that's not happenin'. Duck and avoid, at all cost right now. As much as I tried to discuss things with you before I left, there was no getting through to you, Vic. You gave me a "last straw," and I'm taking it!

Getting back in my car and turning out of the parking lot, I know what awaits me in New Mexico might not be perfect, but it will be better than what life with Vic contains. With some family there, maybe it will be a good landing place. How did this all get so unbearable? What did I do to cause this constant one-sided relationship? Why didn't I speak up for myself right from the beginning? Why did I let it get so bad? Wait...wait!! There it is again, thinking it's all my fault—that I caused this. That I should have been different, better, more understanding...more there for him. I did everything I could do, and so much more. But it was never enough for Vic. He took, and took, and took. I have to remember, this is not my fault. No wonder women stay in abusive relationships. They must get so depleted they can't see a way out. I'm just about there, with just enough left of me to make my escape. I'm feeling so depleted, and I'm a strong guy. Capable. But it seems less and less so, as Vic tore me down each day. I gave him any power I had. I let him be all that and a bag of chips. In his mind I wasn't worth the garbage can the empty bag was thrown into. Enough is ENOUGH!

After Vic finds out I'm gone, what will he do? Will he be sad? Will he understand I've left for good? I warned him, but he didn't listen. He thought I would never leave. But I have now. Is the ache that I feel just me needing a fix? Am I already thinking of missing the interaction that left me feeling weak and used? That makes me laugh, but it's not funny. It's truly sad. I'm wanting to call Vic, see if he has a way home, tell him I'll change my mind if we can only work on some things. Vic might agree to that. But even when we tried that in the past, it never lasted. It was only a ruse to get me to stick around. This is sick. It's my own brother.

## WHEN YOU DO

*When he calls, I'll have him leave a message. Then I'm not going to listen to it. I know him...he will talk a good talk, or he won't. He could be vicious, trying to convince me how this is all my fault once again. Or he could act all nice and beg for another chance. Keep driving, I say to myself, as I head out onto the I-5 going south toward Los Angeles. I reach over and turn my phone off, just feeling safer that way. I need some time to think before seeing my parents in Chino, and I need to talk this over more with Mom when I see her.*



With a lot of unpacking left to do, I still left early for work that first Monday morning after moving into the house with Vic. I didn't want to be late to my job. They were letting people go all the time, and I didn't want them to have any reason to look my way. I spent a lot of my life staying under the radar, as I called it, and then moving in with Vic, I was realizing where I learned it. Through the years, I had become a professional *egg-shell* walker. I knew the right "lane" to stay in to avoid an "accident." It was always best to stay out of Vic's way, and give him that *way* as often as possible.

"Hi, TL. How are things with you this morning?" Butch asked. My manager was a friendly sort of guy.

"It's going okay. How're things with you, Butch?" I didn't want to go into the move, or my brother. There again, keep things simple and smooth. The less I was noticed, the better.

Butch answered, "Had a good weekend. Took the wife to the coast. She enjoyed that. Me not so much. I'm more of a mountain guy."

"I getcha," I said, trying to make it short and get on with sorting through the boxes in the warehouse. Working at a distributor of electronics, there wasn't a lot of time for chit-chat anyway.

"Have a good one. I'll see you at the meeting later," Butch said.

"Meeting?"

"Yeah. Didn't you hear about it? All departments. Five o'clock. Mandatory."

"Okay. Thanks." It's not what I wanted to hear, but I was glad I knew. Missing a meeting right now might give the company the excuse they were looking for to let me go.

Five o'clock came around fast that day. The meeting didn't contain any