

# **LIFE INTERRUPTED**

By Verlaine R Todd

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## No Rest for the Living

The kitchen was in a disarray and the telephone was ringing nonstop from a 1-800 number. Peter rounded the corner, picked up the phone once again, and slammed it back down. Ketchup was splattered all over one of the counters, and dirty dishes filled the sink and spilled out onto the counter next to it. The floors looked as if they had not been swept or mopped in weeks.

Peter sat his briefcase down on the ceramic tile floor beside the small round breakfast table. He hung his suit jacket on the long back chair, rolled up his sleeves, and grabbed the dish gloves. He started with the ketchup and worked his way around to each counter and then the dishes. He was working up a sweat before he realized it. His eyes grew blurry as the tears and sweat mingled together on his face. He wiped it away with his arm and kept working.

Thoughts of regret held him captive for what felt like forever. From this point on he would do better. He would come home more often to see his father. His mom had been gone for years and he just up and left his father all alone. He needed him now and he was going to do better and spend more time with him. That's all that matters now. He just has to make up for it while he can. He knows his father will be happy to see him again. He smiles.

Several hours had passed and he had made it to each room, including the bathrooms, and cleaned and sanitized to the best of his ability. He changed the sheets in his father's room and laid down some new pads and moved the bedside commode closer to the bed. His home was ready to receive him. He had just started a load of clothes when he heard the car pulling into the driveway. He was finally home.

Peter rushed out to greet his sister Mandy and brother-in-law Jeff to help with his father. He immediately noticed the tears in his sister's face and the frown on her husband's. *Something is wrong.* They got their father into the wheelchair, up the ramp, into the house, and into bed all in one piece. Peter cornered his sister bringing in the luggage.

"What's going on and don't you dare lie to me?" he said with a temper.

"Peter, can't we talk about this later? It's been a rather long and disappointing weekend."

"I know! You haven't called me once to let me know anything except to get the house ready for his return. I want to know right now!" Peter could feel his heart racing in frustration and fear.

"Fine! You want to do this now? Fine, here it is! Dad is dying and there is nothing they can do. You happy now? That's why I hadn't called you because it was all bad news and I was waiting to tell you at a more appropriate time than over the phone."

"What do you mean, dying?" Peter said stunned.

"Exactly what I said. He is dying Pete. No cure or treatment will help him."

"That doesn't make any sense. He had a fall! How can someone be dying from a fall?"

"Pete, he fell because he was already sick. You saw the house. He's been sick for a while he just didn't tell us. He has stage four stomach cancer."

"What do we do now?" Peter said with tears in his eyes.

"We make him comfortable," Mandy said as she brushed past her brother dropping a bag at his feet for him to carry inside. Peter grabbed the bag and slunk inside. It still didn't make sense. *How does someone go from living to dying over a weekend?*

Peter walked inside and took a look at the fragile and feeble father that he had once known as strong, stubborn, and independent. He could see how pale he was and how skinny he had

gotten. How did he miss this? He longed for the years of business that had consumed his time and kept him away too long. The empty promises of trips home again now plagued his mind. There is only rest for the dying and no peace for the living.

## Visitation Day

Tension. Fear. Fidgety fingers and sweaty palms. The questions in the air were unquenched, unheard, and unspoken. The feeling of dread deep in her stomach. Marisa looked down at her plaid, pleated skirt and adjusted it. Standing against the wall next to the office entrance, she watched the dark red front door. The office phones rung in a high pitch robotic tone behind her in the other room. She needed this to be over as soon as possible.

Her mother sat biting her nails in the next room waiting for it to be over. She was relieved that the court order didn't require her presence during his visitations. The office had narrow walls and a single chair opposite the desk for her to sit. She watched the guard who was watching the monitors and typing away on his dingy white keyboard. He offered no comfort or conversation. His focus was clearly on the monitors and the computer screen.

Marisa heard the clinging and pulling at the door and turned to face her father. He slunk in, darkening the peace and tranquility that they now owned in his absence. Two square packages wrapped in gold paper were in his hands pressed against his body. Her little brother Michael who was riding an old tricycle in the floor, jumped off and reached up with eagerness for the gifts. He looked forward to gifts every week, but he didn't understand their meaning. He smiled and tore into the heavily taped boxes to see what new treasures awaited him.

The ugly purple ceiling was crushing her as she felt her breaths quickening. She brushed her hair behind her ear trying to appear casual. *In and out. In and out. Just breathe.* She felt his gaze fall upon her.

"Marisa, how are you?" he said as he nodded his head at her.

"I am fine, Papa. How are you?" She managed to say without making eye contact.

"I am fine. I am glad to see you again this week." He shifted as if his words were being remembered from a rehearsal. "I miss you and your brother dearly. These weekly visits are just not enough."

"I understand."

She found herself staring at Michael as he opened his gifts on the floor.

He was so happy to be showered with gifts each week that he never noticed he was the only one to receive them. She couldn't be bought, and a cordial conversation was the best she could do.

She watched him as he mused over Michael's reaction to his bribes. His black shirt, black pants, and black shoes mimicked his blackened heart. Reformed is a strange word, a word that had distanced itself from him. She sensed that behind that creepy smile, there was a vengeful devil just waiting to make them pay for putting him away. His anger seeped out of his skin like a poisonous gas, choking the trust out of Marisa and binding her to forever hold onto who she knew him to be.

"Look sissy, I got a new train track and a new car!" Michael said.

"That is so cool, Mike, I know you will enjoy them." Marisa said, trying to take the sarcasm aimed at her father from her voice.

The miniature visiting room was an unsettling orange that made it hard to relax. Her shadow growing on the wall looked much larger than she felt. Empty conversations with little believe or trust flowed throughout the room for an hour. Every time she looked into his

charming brown eyes she cringed. Those same eyes had charmed her mother into marrying and making a father out of a monster. He was uncontrollable and untamable by nature. She wouldn't be blindsided by him. She was much bigger and she would be ready this time. The door opened and a caseworker summoned his departure. Marisa's mom came out of the office when her father left.

"Mom, he scares me."

"Me too, honey. Let's go."

Michael carelessly gathered his things from the floor chattering about his new toys with glee. Marisa grabbed the door and watched her mom limp out, the same limp that wouldn't let her forgive her father.

## We'll Be in Touch

The restaurant is nothing fancy, but cozy. The smell of grease and comfort food fills the air of the busy room. Her booth nestles in a corner, away from the kitchen, giving her a full view. She repositions her earpiece and straightens her dress.

A gentleman in his mid-thirties approaches in a pale blue dress shirt, dark denim pants, and tan cowboy boots. The dimples in the corner of his smile are charming and his hazel brown eyes piercing. "Are you Cindy Dewberry?"

"I am."

"Hi, Cindy. I'm Trent Turner."

"Nice to meet you, Trent. Have a seat."

"Make him feel comfortable," the voice in her earpiece says to her.

"Trent, how long have you owned your own ranch?"

Trent flashes his dimples again with pride.

"It's been 'bout three years now." Trent stares into Cindy's emerald green eyes.

"Were you raised on a ranch as a kid?"

"Um... no. Actually, I just needed a change of pace."

"And shoveling hay and being covered in poop was it, huh?"

Trent's catchy chuckle fills the air. Cindy can't help but to join him in his contagious cackle.

"I've been covered in a lot worse. It's not so bad." He looks down at himself. "I clean up pretty nice though, right?"

"Well, you hardly look like you need to be fixed up on a blind date." Cindy feels her cheeks warming up as his eyes search her face.

"I could say the same 'bout you. Why is a darling like you on a dating site?"

"My job prevents me from having a personal or social life." *Why did I just say that?*

"I see."

"Enough with all that. Get to the point!" The voice in her earpiece startles her.

Cindy takes on a sterner tone. "So, Trent, my boss seems to think you're pretty important and has requested a meeting with you."

"I'm not sure I follow..." Trent leans in with his eyebrows furrowed.

"Does the name Murdock mean anything to you?"

He sits back. "I don't know what you're talking 'bout." Cindy matches his stare, suppressing the butterflies in her stomach.

"I think you do, Trent."

"Who are you? How'd you find me?"

"Let's just say it's not so easy for people like you to escape your past. Unfortunately, you still owe a few favors."

"I don't owe anyone anything. You have me mistaken with someone else." Trent pushes on the table in an attempt to get up.

"His name is Jason," says the voice in the earpiece.

"Oh, but I don't, Jason." Cindy reclines in her seat forcing a confident smile. Trent falls back into his seat. Cindy takes a sip of her watered down tea. Her heart pounding in her chest.

"Now that I have your attention, shall I continue?"



“What do you want?” he says, through clenched teeth.

“Mr. Murdock has requested your skills.”

“I switched careers five years ago. I hate to disappoint, but please send him my regrets.”

“He doesn’t have a choice and he knows it. Give him the flash drive and get rid of him,” the voice in Cindy’s ear says.

“I’m sorry if I gave you the impression that you have a choice.” She retrieves a flash drive from her small silver purse and places it in front of him. “Everything you need to know is here. We’ll be in touch. If you would please excuse yourself, I have a real date. Nice to meet you, Mr. Turner.”

“Wow! What a blind date. And here I was starting to fall for you myself,” he says, sarcastically. Trent grabs the flash drive, rises from the table, and saunters to the exit of the restaurant.

Cindy exhales a deep breath. The voice in her earpiece startles her, causing her heart to skip a beat. “Well done, Cindy. You’re a natural. Just a few more tasks and you will be free to live a normal life. As long as you remain discrete your family will go unharmed. We’ll be in touch.”

*They’re never going to let me go.*

Cindy pulls out her small clear earpiece, places it in her purse, and waits for her Mom and dad to join her.

## Macy Face

Macy kicked off her busted pumps at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Elm street. Blood trickled down her legs. The stench from the garbage cans lining each driveway in anticipation of the trash pickup in a few hours filled her nostrils. She was on the verge of puking, but she couldn't stop running.

There was a long, wide, black car with chrome trimmings parked on the side of the road up under the street light as she reached 12<sup>th</sup> and Mark. At the sight of the car she ran faster.

Macy reached the car. Relieved that it was unlocked, she slung open the heavy backseat passenger door, threw herself in, and slammed it shut. She stretched herself out like a surfboard on the floor of the car and waited. The heat from her body and quick breaths fogged the windows. She wrapped her arms around her stomach. Her heart beat quickened and filled her ears with its loud pounding.

The sound of Rick's voice sent chills down her spine.

"MACY!" Rick's voice pierced through the cold wet night. "I found your shoes. I know you are still on foot. Come out and I will show you mercy," he said with a frown.

"Oh, God, please protect me," Macy whispered.

The door swung open and Macy was dragged from the floor by her long blonde hair. She screamed out in pain as strains of hair ripped from her scalp. Macy fell onto the sit and looked up at Rick. Her body trembled and deep sobs escaped from her gut.

*He is going to kill me.*

"What is this, Macy Face? You trying to leave me? You're stuck with me for the rest of your life, Baby," he said, grabbing her face.

"Please, Rick, just let me go. Please just let me go, Rick." Macy's sobbing increased as his hands moved to her neck.

"Tell me, Macy Face, did you think leaving me would be that easy? Huh?" He tightened his large pale hands around her neck.

Macy managed to get her knees up and pushed her foot against his prickly neck, ridding herself from his death grip. She kicked and fought like a fish out of water flapping desperately for air. "What has gotten into you?" He slammed her head into the window with a loud thud.

Macy lost consciousness. She awakened to an intense throbbing at the back of her head and a blurry image of a pistol pointed at her. Cold sweat drenched her body as she focused and eyed the silver gun in Rick's hand. Her heart rate increased with her breathing as Rick moved in closer to her.

"Not feeling so tough now are we, Pretty Face?" Rick said. He traced the gun around her face, across her lips, and down her neck as if he was caressing her with warm wet kisses. "I think you need a new lesson in manners," he said, watching the throbbing vein in her neck and her rising and falling wet chest.

Macy tensed up as Rick leaned in to kiss her. She slid away her hand as he reached for it. She snatched the door handle and rolled out of the car as the gun went off. Macy stood up and focused on the house in front of her. She sprinted as fast as she could but, her legs gave way to the burning intense pain in her stomach.

She was hit.

Rick knelt beside her and dropped the pistol to the ground. “You did this! You brought this on yourself!” “Why? Why did you try to leave?” He said, grabbing her face as the life slid out of her. A growing pool of blood soaked her pale pink dress. “How can you just throw five years away Macy?”

Macy placed her hand on her stomach. Tears rolled from eyes and across her ears. “Because, I’m pregnant.”

## Claire and Sweet Sherry

Claire adjusted her wig and retrieved her glass of sherry from the small round table. She took another long drink. The tall brown wooden fence surrounding the patio hid the view of kids playing on the other side, but the sounds of screams and laughter pierced through her heart. She folded her small fragile body into the chair and tucked her feet under her to soothe them with her body heat. The feel of the patio carpet under her feet made her feel fake and stuck in a pretend world with false hope. She looked at the trees across from her. They looked real, but she could smell their plastic leaves from across the porch.

The door clicked unlocked

She closed her eyes. The patio door creaked and harsh feet treaded near her. The aroma of Dolce & Gabbana invaded her nose a few seconds before his presence did. She felt the sting of his eyes.

He snatched a chair out and sat down letting out a forceful sigh. "I thought we were done with this, Claire."

"Actually, Marcus, *I* never said I was."

"Is this what you are doing up here?"

"What do you want from me, Marc?" She opened her eyes to let her irritation show.

"I want you to let all this mess go! It's been a month; this isn't normal." Marcus rubbed his rough stubby face.

Claire slammed the glass down and leaned in. "What isn't normal is how you don't seem bothered at all."

"You want me to bunk up with you in that other bed and neglect all of my other duties too?"

"Is that what you call it? Neglecting my other duties? My life is over, Marc. Whatever 'duties' I had left will be someone else's problems soon."

"You are just giving up, huh, Claire? You're not even going to try?" Marcus rubbed his hands through his hair and leaned back in his chair.

"Marc, I have already lost. The sad part is I wasn't really living before."

"Why do I feel like that was directed to me, Claire?"

"You have spent the majority of our marriage chasing the skirts of your secretaries while I pretended to not know." Claire got up and grabbed her glass.

"Where are you going?" Marc said slamming his fist on the table.

"I need a refill to drown my sorrows. Do you want some?" Claire said, with a smile.

Claire leaned over the desk adjacent the beds. The broad colorful stripes of the matching comforters made her nauseous. The smell of the sour carpet that had been wet one too many times, accompanied her upset stomach with a watering mouth. She fought the urge to empty herself by taking a few deep breaths. She grabbed the hidden bottle and filled her glass. Taking another look at Marcus she grabbed the whole bottle.

Marcus took long drags on his second cigarette while he waited for her. He enjoyed the warm breeze and the laughter of kids playing just beyond the fence. He was at peace. He looked at the dying trees in the corner and somehow, he could feel their desperate need for attention.

Claire staggered back to the table and with her glass and bottle in hand. Marcus couldn't help but notice how loose her clothes fit her fading body.

"Do you think drinking like this is helping the situation? It can't be good for you, especially

now,” he said.

Claire lifted her chin high. “Marc, my situation can’t be helped. I am terminal.”

“I received the same report that you did,” Marc said.

“Then why are you giving me so much grief?” Claire readjusted the wig on her head and took another sip.

“Because, Claire, your way of dealing with this is to move into a hotel and drink until it’s over. That is not dealing. That is hiding!” Marcus stood up and paced.

“I have been fighting my whole life.” Claire sat up straight fighting back the pressure behind her eyes. “Fighting to be happy. Fighting to be loved. Fighting to trust. Fighting to forgive. I’m done fighting. *This* I embrace and welcome.”

“How can you say that? How can you welcome a terminal diagnosis? You are like a stranger to me.”

“Death is rest for me. I can finally lay down and rest forever.”

“You make it sound like you’ve had such a complicated life. You have a good life. You don’t want for anything, and I have always made sure of that.”

“I haven’t had a difficult life just a difficult marriage.”

Marcus took a deep breath and braced himself on the table. “Are you saying that you don’t love me? Help me understand.”

“I have always loved you, but I’ve always known about the others. Your determination to care for me is to appease your own guilt, and I’m done pretending.”

“Claire, I love you, and I want to be here for you.”

“That would mean so much more if you had showed me that before I was dying,” Claire said.

“What do you want me to do, Claire, just leave you here to die alone?”

“Yes, I do. Let me die with the dignity and truth that you never gave me in our marriage.”

Marcus got up, kissed Claire on the cheek, and walked toward the door. “You may want to water these trees here, or you will be taking them with you to your grave.”

“That’s pretty ironic how you can notice the dying fake trees, but never noticed life slipping from me.”

“Claire, those trees are very much alive.”

“I have lived a lie for so long I can’t tell real from fake anymore. Good-bye Marc.”

####

Thank you so much for taking the time to read my book. If you enjoyed it, please take a moment to leave me a review. I would love to hear your thoughts!

## About the Author



Verlain R Todd is short story author, playwright, screenwriter, scriptwriter and novelist who takes great pleasure in inspiring and motivating others with her Christian/faith-based stories. She is earning a BFA in Creative Writing at Full Sail University. She has a forthcoming flash-fiction piece to be published in *The Story Shack* in April of 2017.

She and her husband have produced seven wonderful children with zero casualties, so far. She enjoys reading, writing, do-it-yourself projects, attending dramatic arts performances, and juggling the many tasks it takes to manage her zoo/home. To get a glimpse into her life and her crazy antics, check out her blog at: <https://brokenvessel.wordpress.com>.

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