

RE·PENT·ANCE /RƏ'PENTƏNS/NOUN

THE ACTION OF REPENTING; SINCERE REGRET OR REMORSE.



“IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.” 1 JOHN 1:9

Well, it's not everyday that you get to sit across from the woman whose husband you slept with.

Amara nervously sat on the edge of her bed and tried to size up Lady Monroe. She was sitting comfortably in the tufted seat near the window, dressed in a cream jumpsuit and pearl accessories, with her hair pulled into a sleek bun. She didn't look like she'd come prepared to physically fight Amara, but looks could be deceiving.

“You're not special, you know,” Lady Monroe said, examining Amara. “There were a few others before you, but, as far as I know, those flings only lasted about two months each. I did have my concerns about you when you became his assistant, being that you were *mildly* attractive, but he usually preferred more polished young women, and you...you looked like a piece of...work when you first started working at our church--very thrift store chic. Then again...my husband always did have an interest in cheap, easy things, so maybe I should've been more concerned about you.”

Amara shifted uncomfortably on her bed. She almost wished that Lady Monroe would just throw hands and get this whole confrontation over with. She wasn't sure how much longer she'd be able to take this subtle, slow-burning shade.

“Did he ever talk about me?”

“Yes. He said that the ministry wouldn't be what it was without you and that you were one of the most God-fearing...”

“Cut the pleasantries. What *else* did he say about me? I know that he didn’t mess around with you for a year and only see fit to sing my praises while he was doing so.”

“He...He said that sometimes you pushed him too hard to do more and be more. Sometimes he felt like you were more in love with the status, power and opportunities that came with being the first lady of such a prominent church than you were with him. He said that that’s why he liked being with me. He could just relax and be himself.”

Lady Monroe released a disgusted laugh.

“And that made you feel so special, didn’t it?”

“Yeah...I guess it did. I knew it was wrong, but I told myself that since you two weren't together at the time...”

“We were *separated*, not *divorced*. We were still *married*,” she said, holding up her middle finger, on which she wore a 10 carat diamond ring. “Anyway, what did he buy you with *our* money, and what special things did he do for you?”

“He bought me some outfits so that I could ‘upgrade’ my professional image. He paid for me to get my hair done once a month. He got me a laptop and some recording equipment. He encouraged me to pursue a media career. He said that I had the personality for it.”

“I see. So, why did you choose to have this tacky affair with *my* husband, of all people? I’m sure a little piece of tail like you could’ve easily mooched off of another man.”

“I never planned for it to happen. I was helping him organize his new place after you all got separated, and he asked me to stay a little later one night. He said that he needed someone to talk to, and he really trusted me. I knew that it wasn’t appropriate, but I...I guess I liked feeling needed, especially by someone that important and powerful. So, we ended up talking for hours, sipping a little wine and getting a little too comfortable with each other. One thing led to another and...things happened...and we kept letting them happen...for a year.”

“You really are pathetic. You were a 25-year-old having an affair with a 50-year-old just because you wanted to feel needed? You truly are a broken woman, who obviously has some daddy issues.”

Even under these circumstances, the topic of her father was off-limits. So, she stayed silent.

“Did you use protection when you were together?”

“Yes. Always.”

“So, I don’t have to worry about any illegitimate brats giving my children and me any problems in the future?”

“No ma’am.”

“Good to know. So, why were you dumb enough to record a video and take photos of what happened?”

“I didn’t know anything about the video until it got leaked yesterday, and...I sent him the photos just because he asked me for them. I’m really sorry.”

“I see.”

“Listen, Lady Monroe, I know that you hate me for what I did, but I really am so sorry. I've asked God to forgive me for what I've done, and I hope that eventually you can forgive me too. What I did was wrong and inexcusable, and if I could take it back, I would, in a heartbeat.”

“But you can't. Anyway, I'm a Christian woman, so eventually I can forgive you. However, I will *never* forget, and when I choose not to forget something, I tend to make sure that those closest to me don't forget it either. I'm very well-connected. So, whenever you, that neurotic manager and that smothering publicist of yours decide to try to repair what's left of your little career, you may find that some doors are permanently closed to you. You might even run into some trouble with your pending podcast and publishing deals. Just saying.”

This was worse than Amara could've imagined. Not only did this woman hate her but she wanted to ruin her life by blackballing her.

“There's one more thing that I need to do before I leave,” Lady Monroe said, rising and standing right in front of Amara. She examined her for a second and then swiftly slapped her before gathering her things and preparing to leave.

“Stay away from my husband, and don't you *ever* think of contacting him again. Goodbye, Amara.”

Lady Monroe slipped on a pair of sunglasses and a hooded jacket (even though it was early May, and it was in the evening), and left without another word.

Amara sat in astonishment after she left. What was she going to do now? Well, she knew one thing for sure--she needed to talk to Kelly.

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“What is wrong with you, Kelly?!”

Amara stormed into the office that Kelly shared with Aunt Serena.

“What happened?” Aunt Serena asked, nervously glancing between Amara and Kelly.

“She contacted the wife of the man that I had an affair with and had her waiting in my room!”

“You did what?! Kelly, what were you thinking?”

“I was thinking that it was time for her to face some consequences for her actions, for once in her life. I was thinking that I’m tired of you always protecting her like she’s your child, when I’m the only daughter that you have. I was thinking that it’s not fair that she’s just running from her problems, like she always does, while a marriage and a brand are falling apart.”

“Kelly, listen, I know that what Amara did was wrong. I understand that she has to deal with consequences for what she did, but you went too far. That woman could’ve hurt Amara out of spite, and you invited her to come here? We’re supposed to be looking out for her. She’s family.”

“We don’t know that for sure! It was never confirmed that Uncle Sutton was her real daddy, and since he’s dead and her mother is God only knows where, we may never know for sure.”

“Kelly Simone Holt, you watch your mouth! My brother accepted Amara as his daughter, and he told me to always look after her. That’s what I’ve been trying to do.”

“Yeah, and she’s taken you for granted every step of the way. You managed to get her into that fancy performing arts high school, and she constantly cut class and barely graduated. You worked your butt off to help pay for tuition to that college in Atlanta that she just *had* to go to, and she dropped out after two years, without even telling you until a month after she left. After that, you told her that she could come home and work here, but she refused and decided to work at a church, where she had an affair with the pastor.”

“Kelly...”

“The list goes on and on, but I think that the worst part about everything is that she doesn’t even appreciate you enough to acknowledge you. In the six years that she’s been building her little “influencer” career, there hasn’t been one YouTube video, devotional or motivational speech where she gives you a simple shout-out or ‘Thank you.’ She barely even calls you just to check in or see how you’re doing, but she never hesitates to call when she needs something, like your opinion, some encouragement or a place to hide from the mess she's made.”

“That’s enough, Kelly.”

“You’re right. It is enough, and I’ve had enough of you always giving her a slap on the wrist instead of one across her face. So, I’m going to go do something productive around our business, because that’s what I do--I make productive, responsible choices, unlike some people.”

With that, she exited the office.

“Amara, I’m so sorry. The lady isn’t still here, is she?”

“No. She left not too long ago, and I um...I think I’m going to get some air. I need to clear my head.”

#

When Amara got inside the Eden Springs Bar & Grill, she sat at the bar and ordered hot wings, sweet potato fries, a small order of fried pickles, a large strawberry lemonade and a piece of apple pie.

“I see that you still have a big appetite.”

She turned to see Chef Josiah smiling at her from a few stools down. She felt a little self-conscious when she saw that his meal consisted of a small salad, a baked sweet potato and water with lemon.

“Yeah. Well, it’s been one of those days.”

He rose from his seat and moved closer to her so that there was only one seat in between them, without even asking if it was ok to move closer, Amara noticed.

“I’m sorry to hear that. Why don’t you tell me about it?”

“Um...no offense, but I don’t know you like that.”

“Fair enough. I’m Josiah Moore. I grew up as a military kid, did a stint in the military, and then I went to culinary school. I’ve spent the last several years living all over the world working as a chef, and I came to Eden Springs because I used to be stationed near here and thought that it might be a cool place to come back to someday. Oh, and I’m an empath, so I can’t just see someone in pain and not do anything, especially when that someone is Ms. Serena’s beautiful niece. So...here I am, just trying to lighten your emotional load.”

Amara studied Josiah closely. His eyes looked warm and inviting, and his smile seemed genuine...and gorgeous. What the heck? It wasn’t like her life could get any worse, and it’s not like he’d try anything crazy with her since he worked for aunt.

“Ok. Well, I’m Amara Holt. I grew up here. I went to college for two years in Atlanta, but I dropped out because I didn’t feel like I belonged there. I had a great career as a media personality, motivational speaker and an author, but now everything’s messed up because everyone found out that I had an affair with a megachurch pastor. Now, his wife might be out to destroy my career. So, here I am, trying to indulge in a lot of comfort food.”

“Sounds messy, but it’ll get better.”

“I know that I’m supposed to believe that, but I’m not so sure.”

“Well, once you finish your feast, maybe we can take a walk, and I can convince you otherwise.”

“I just feel like such a disappointment and failure,” Amara said as she collapsed on a park bench in Eden Springs Park. “I just wanted to be someone who could use my creativity to make Christianity and learning more about God fun, relatable and refreshing, instead of intimidating and inaccessible. Now, I feel like my calling is...corrupted. I’ve been praying and trying to get God to tell me how I can fix things so that my life can get back on track, but he hasn’t answered me.”

“I think you need to expand your prayers a little bit.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, you’ve been praying for God to get your life back on track, which is fine, but have you asked him what he wants you to learn and what he’s trying to develop in you by letting you to go through this?”

“Um...”

“And what about the other people involved? I know it’s not the easiest thing, but have you prayed that Lady Monroe is able to heal from her embarrassment and hurt, and that she’ll eventually forgive you? Have you prayed that Pastor Monroe is able to get delivered from strongholds that could threaten his ministry, credibility and family? Have you prayed that other people aren’t so quick to doubt Christianity and the ‘the church’ just because a few people made some mistakes?”

“Wow. I guess I got so caught up in running and hiding from my own shame that I didn’t think to pray about all of that. Now that I think about it, I feel like I’ve been doing that my whole life--running away from anything that challenges me and makes me uncomfortable and towards anything that seems like it’ll make me feel good, or at least...good enough.”

Josiah gently placed a hand on Amara's shoulder.

"Well, at least you can admit that. Sometimes our regrets can lead to revelations, and our revelations can lead to our renewal. In my experience, sometimes it's the things that we think are going to destroy us that can push us closer to our destiny. Just because we think certain mistakes disqualify us from being used by God doesn't mean that God sees things that way."

"That'll preach."

Josiah chuckled before examining Amara.

"Can I pray for you?"

"Um...Sure. I'd like that."

"Dear God, we ask that you transform what is being used to tear Amara down to build her up. Reveal to her the lessons that she's supposed to learn from this and what is being developed in her during this difficult season. We pray not only for her healing, but also healing for the Monroes as they try to figure out what's next for their marriage and their ministry. We pray that eventually Amara's story will be used to help people understand how you can use anyone, despite any damaging or shameful mistakes they've made, for the good of your Kingdom. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen."

"Feel better?" Josiah asked when he finished.

"Actually...I do. Thanks."

If tonight's talk and prayer with Josiah was any indication, things might be turning around for her after all.

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For the first time since she'd arrived at Heaven on Earth on Thursday night, Amara slept peacefully and felt refreshed when she woke up that Sunday morning...until she saw who was waiting for her.

“Toni? Shanice? How...”

“Your little waiting period is over,” Toni said firmly, folding her arms over her chest. “We’re handling this crisis. Today.”