

LIVING PROOF

BY LATANYA CARTER

“Hypocrite!”

“Fraud!”

“Adulterer!”

Even months after the scandal broke, the online comments relentlessly continued. A tsunami of judgment added to the guilt already flooding her mind. Ironically, most of those hurling the hate were from her own church. People who had praised and prayed for her and her husband for leaving their small town to reach the unchurched in the big city. People they had mentored and welcomed into their homes for Bible studies. Those same Christian brothers and sisters were now calling for her to not just step down but to step away. They wanted her out of the church she helped to build. For them, a divorced pastor was more palatable than an adulterous wife.

Leader.

Wife.

Mother.

The names they called her were far from the ones she valued most. She had lost all of those titles. Despite her protests and promises, the pain of her betrayal was too deep for her husband to overcome. For his own sake, he offered her forgiveness. Then, divorce papers, after only 8 years of marriage. If that weren't enough, her husband also took their two young children. They were too young to understand what Mommy had done, but that did not prevent her from prematurely bearing the shame of the day that they would.

Passion.

Jealousy.

Betrayal.

She gave into temptation, and now everything that mattered to her was gone. She wasn't willing to walk away from her life for him, so he determined to destroy her life for revenge. The man before her husband never got over her. More like he never got over her leaving him. He pretended to be happy for them; he even agreed to be their worship leader in the new church. Yet he coveted what they had and waited patiently for the day to take back what he thought he never should've lost. Late nights, extra meetings, and walks down memory lane led to weeks of self-indulgence. He felt her pull away as the guilt within her built. He knew it was coming. She was leaving him...again. Fiery fury filled his heart, and he unleashed it all on her. Videos of their last night were secretly taken and publicly posted. His misery ensured he had company, no matter the cost to the one he supposedly loved.

Isolation.

Shame.

Despair.

Her guilt was undeniable. He assured it. Now she had nothing and no one. Alone with her thoughts was the last place she needed to be but the only place she had left to go. The church had rejected her. Her family had left her. Her own moral compass seemed to have abandoned her. She lost her way somehow, leaving a chasm between who she thought she was and her recent choices. How did she get from happy wife and mother to divorced and ostracized adulteress? Shame filled her mind with its own ideas: "Maybe you never were who you thought you were. Maybe you were always a hypocrite and a fraud. Maybe you always will be. You had a good run but you were never cut out to be a pastor's wife, loving mother, or church leader. After this debauchery, you never will be again. There is no redemption for a woman like you."

Still.

Small.

Voice.

"That is a lie. With Me, all things are possible. I still love you, even if your husband does not. I still want you, even if your church has rejected you. I can

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still use you, even with the sins you've committed. That's why I died—for you. Come back to Me, and I will show you who you really are.”

Loved.

Forgiven.

Redeemed.

A memory flashed through her mind—the day she first met Him. Sixteen and scared, she prayed for forgiveness at the church revival. Now, weighed down in shame, she fell to her knees and prayed for it again. The same warmth that filled her heart all those years ago she could now feel washing over her. As grace chased away her shame, she remembered she was not alone, abandoned, or useless. She never would be. She was His daughter, a title she would never lose. He renewed her purpose, turning her story of shame into a testimony of triumph to share with others desperately seeking hope and redemption. He does make all things new. She was living proof.