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All scriptures are from the Bible and is not the work of the author.

*** Although this is Christian Fiction, there are instances of foul language. ***

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In Sickness and in Health

If you've read the other books in this series, then you know what I'm about to type. Yep, the difference between 'and,' and 'or.' The word OR signifies having an alternative whereas AND means either or both. Therefore, when you stand to take vows with the spouse of your choosing, and you say and, you're signifying agreement to the before and after.

Therefore, you must understand what your vows mean. Stop getting up there repeating stuff out of tradition. Baby, marriage is hard, and we have to know what we're agreeing with.

What does it mean when we vow "In sickness and in health?"

Well, not to sound like a broken record, but exactly what it implies. When we vow, "in sickness and in health," we're simply promising to love, honor, and cherish all of your person, even the parts that may not be cute. The times when they're as healthy as an ox or puking up everything they've eaten since kindergarten. When you make this vow, you're committing to being there when pounds have been added to their love handles or weight is falling off from being unable to keep food down.

Whatever the reason, you're saying, I'll be there because we made a vow. Yet, here's a hard pill to swallow. Sometimes life and its circumstances will force you to face a reality you simply were not prepared for. This is Alex and Jade's story.

Disclaimer

There is no standard set of wedding vows. A man and woman can choose their vows, tailored to them, their beliefs and relationship. However, part of the traditional wedding vows says ...

"I, ___, take thee, ___, to be my wedded husband/wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, forsaking all other till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge thee my faith."

In this mini-series, we will explore traditional wedding vows from a fictional and Christian standpoint. Please understand, my style of writing isn't considered "clean" Christian Fiction. I'm okay with this, but if you aren't, you may be offended by my use of sexual tones and curse words. Also, I use scriptures, and sometimes sermons, prayers, and Bible studies. If these are things you don't like to read, please refrain instead of leaving a negative review.

For me, this isn't simply writing, it's ministry and sometimes ministry isn't confined to tradition. As always, I'll never proclaim to know everything there is about God and religion. Who I am is who God has chosen and through a personal relationship with Him, He ordained me for a ministry to help His people, even through the pages of fiction work. I pray you enjoy this series.

Note: If you find grammatical errors, please feel free to email authorlakisha@gmail.com as I do not mind being corrected. As a human, I'm bound to make some mistakes.

HAPPY READING. – Lakisha

In Sickness and in Health

"The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed." Psalm 41:3 NKJV

Jade

“In 1984 Tina Turner penned a song titled, What’s Love Got to Do With it. Part of the chorus says, “What's love got to do, got to do with it? What's love but a secondhand emotion? What's love got to do, got to do with it? Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken?” In this song, Tina Turner embodies a woman enjoying the carnal encounters of her lover while feeling no emotional attachment. In researching, it’s said Tina Turner didn’t write, nor did she want to record the song, but because she could pull off any song, her vocals were convincing enough to make those hearing it believe what she was singing.

The problem with this, we’ll begin to believe a made-up song that tells us occasional hookups are okay because what’s love got to do with it. And when I say hookups, I’m not only talking about sex. I’m talking about the random hookups with Jesus too. You know when we only “hook up” with God when times are hard, when we need something, or when it’s convenient. I’m talking about random hookups with purpose. Those quick flashes when we actually believe we can be who God says instead of allowing flesh to talk us out of what God promised. The hookups with self. You know the occasional moments when we love ourselves enough to forgive self and try again. Tina and the songwriter were wrong. Love has a lot to do with it.”

“Preach Bishop!” Someone yells.

“To love is to be full of goodwill and to exhibit it. Yet, here’s what I’ve come to understand about love. It doesn’t start off bad, we’re the ones who messes it up. When God creates us, he fills us with love, the love we’re supposed to freely give to people, yet we allow people and things to taint our heart because we don’t guard what goes in it. First Timothy one, verse five says, “*Now the purpose of the*

commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith." See, love should be easy. I mean there are scriptures all throughout the Bible where God commands us to love. First John four and eight, First Peter four and eight, First Corinthians thirteen and thirteen, First Corinthians sixteen and fourteen, etc. So, the answer to the question, what's love got to do with it, is everything. Because when we love, when we truly have and show love, it is then we'll keep God's commandments. But in order for us to have genuine love for ourselves and others, we have to be careful what we allow into our hearts and our minds."

After service Alex and I walk to the car. Once inside, he looks over at me with a weird expression.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Bishop Pike said something that made me think. He said love is supposed to be easy."

"Yeah, it should be, but we know differently."

"Was it hard to love with everything you've experienced?"

"It was at first, but honestly, I never thought I wanted or needed it." I tell him while fastening my seatbelt.

"What changed?"

"Me."

"That's it?" he questions starting the car. "Dang, I had no part in it?"

I laugh. "You helped me to see love differently, but you weren't solely the reason I love. Otherwise, you could potentially control how I love going forward."

"Huh? How?"

"If you were the reason I chose to love again and you broke my heart, love could once more be tainted for me." I sigh. "It's a terrible feeling to believe you'll never know what it means to truly love or be loved based on the past."

"I'm sorry babe. I didn't mean to bring up any bad memories." He says touching my leg.

"I don't consider them bad anymore. I call them lessons." I cover his hand with mine. "I never told you this. When I was seven or eight, before coming to our group home, I was placed with the McDougal family. They were a weird bunch who were big on hugs and saying I love you."

"What's wrong with that?"

"The affection was after you were hit for moving slow, being loud, leaving a wet towel in the sink, when they had a bad day, if the sun was bright or if they woke up and wanted to treat you like crap."

"Oh. It wasn't good affection?"

"Nope. They'd push, pinch, or chastise with the most vulgar of language and afterwards say, you know we only do this because we love you." I mock. "They even had the audacity to recite Proverbs twenty-nine and fifteen, *"The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."* I hated them. Due to what I'd experienced from them and others, it closed my heart. Then as I got older, I realized I couldn't let what I'd gone through change my heart. Not if I ever wanted to experience real love. So, I protected it."

"How?"

"By doing the work to heal and being picky with who I give access to."

"Who have you given access to besides me?" Alex questions.

"Nobody."

"Come on J. I know I'm not the only man you've been with."

"Physically, you're not, but emotionally you're my first and only."

"Yeah, okay." He says with a tone pulling out of the now empty church parking lot.

"What does that mean?"

He shrugs.

"Seriously, what does that mean?"

"Nothing. Are we doing lunch or what?"

"Don't change the subject. Are you calling me a liar?"

"I didn't say you were lying. I just don't believe you've never loved before me."

"That's calling me a liar sir."

"Let's drop this before it turns into something more."

"It's already something more. Why is it hard to believe I've never loved before you?"

"You're a woman."

"And?"

"Women gravitate to men to feel loved, especially when they've never had it. They use the daddy and abandonment issues as an excuse to continually walk around broken and making every man pay for it."

"What book did you get that crap out of? Daddy and abandonment issues aren't excuses. They're inflicted wounds we never asked for. Yet, we aren't the only ones. There are men who are just as broken and seek the attention from others to fill the void as well. Why do you think there's so many single mothers and deadbeat daddies? Men can be messed up also, Alex. However, regardless of my past, I didn't need to jump from penis to penis to know love wasn't worth it. I lived it and got the scars to prove it."

"Then how can I know you love me for real?"

"Where is all of this coming from?"

"Answer the question." He states.

"Because I've been here, and my actions prove it."

He doesn't say anything.

"Are you really questioning my love for you?"

He hunches his shoulders. "People stay in relationships for a plethora of reasons."

I laugh. "A plethora, huh? Like what?"

"Money."

"I got my own."

He looks at me and I look at him.

"Stability."

"I can stand by myself."

"Fear of being alone." He says like he's cracked the code.

"Never been scared of me. What else?" I counter.

"You know what I mean Jade."

"No. I'm listening to what you're saying, and it sounds like you have some unresolved feelings triggered by Bishop's Pike sermon which has nothing to do with me. And you got the nerve to say women are the one with issues. Well, it seems you're the one who needs a therapist. Take me home."

Getting home, I slam the car door before going into the house. After disarming the alarm, I drop my purse and Bible bag on the kitchen table and go into the bedroom. While undressing, Alex comes in and stands in front of me.

"Jade—

"Don't." I push him. "For you to question my love is a low blow. If you want honesty, here it is. I'd decided to never love you or anybody else because love has always been painful for me. Then I began a relationship with God, and he showed me unconditional love. I started seeing things and myself differently. My experiences were different, and it felt good. A year later, you stumbled back into my life and for the first time, I gave access to my heart to someone other than God. Now, today, you've made me second guess my decision." I go into the bathroom and close the door.

Jade

I grab my bag, purse, and smoothie from the kitchen counter. As I turn the corner, Alex comes in. I walk pass him towards the door.

"Babe, wait."

"What!"

"I'm sorry for the way I acted yesterday."

"Okay."

"Is that all you're going to say?"

"What else is there to say Alex? You were an asshole for no reason or if there was one, you haven't shared it."

He takes my hand. "I don't know why I reacted the way I did. It was, no I was stupid. I had all these thoughts from Bishop's sermon swirling in my head and didn't process them well. When he said stop trying to change or fix folk to make them love you, it took me back to my childhood. You were right. Old feelings were triggered. All the times I thought if I were a good little boy, I wouldn't have to go to another home. Maybe if I loved hard, a family would adopt me. Nobody ever did. Babe, I was in my head and I'm sorry."

"Then why not talk to me instead of treating me like an enemy? I experienced the same as you, maybe worse sometimes. The past told me girl, stay by yourself because love isn't worth it. Girl don't let love lie to you. Girl, lock your heart with no intentions to ever give someone the key. Yet, I'm right here choosing to love myself and you despite my past. I thought you were too."

"I am." He sighs. "I am. Jade, don't leave here upset. I'll be gone for three days, and I can't get on that road with you being mad at me. Look at me. It wasn't you I was doubting, it was me and I'm sorry." He pulls me into him wiping my tears.

“Move.”

“Do you forgive me?”

“The only reason I’m contemplating is because you’re leaving. Otherwise, I’d drag this on.”

“Is that yes?”

“It’s an, I guess.”

“That’s better than no.” He kisses me again, this time putting his hand on the back of my head and sliding his tongue into my mouth.

In a split second, I’m on the counter with my skirt up.

Afterwards, he steps back. “Man, I love you and I really am sorry.”

“I love you too. Now, move. I need to get myself together before you have me late for my meeting. You done wrinkled my skirt and everything.”

“Oh, this is the meeting, meeting?”

“Yes.”

“Then hurry up and quit playing around. Can’t have you messing up our big commission. We worked too hard.”

“We? When did you start speaking French and what part have you contributed to said commission?”

“The wee-wee.” He jokes.

“Boy. Move.”

Twenty minutes later, he walks me to the car and gives me another kiss goodbye. Walking off, he stops.

“What’s wrong?”

“Can we pray?” he asks.

“Sure.”

“God, thank you for the blessings of a new day we didn’t deserve. More importantly, thank you for giving us another chance to make right the things we messed up yesterday. Father, cover us today and every day. And God, thank you

for allowing me to give my wife a little extra strength and confidence today to bring home that fat check. You know what I mean. Hallelujah.”

I push him. “And God, protect my husband on the road. Keep him safe and bring him home to me. Amen.” I kiss him again. “Be safe.”

“Always.”

I get to work. Going inside, I’m met by my assistant and best friend Tasha who follows me into my office.

“Here’s your iPad. Everybody is here and enjoying the continental breakfast we provided. I’ve already loaded your notes and presentation, the conference room is set and all you need to do is work your magic girl.”

“Thanks Tasha. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“And we will never find out. I’ll have your celebratory coffee waiting after it’s over.”

I smile and nod as she heads out. Taking a few deep breaths, I calm myself. Today, I hope to finalize a contract with Methodist Hospitals to be their new provider of security personnel. Our company, Maxwell Security offers security guards, personal details, and security systems for residential and businesses across the Mid-South. If all goes well, my commission check will be exactly what I need to plan our anniversary trip in a few months.

Looking at my watch, I have thirty minutes before my meeting. Sitting at my desk, I go through and reply to some emails. Ten minutes later, I close my eyes and whisper another small prayer. Finished, I change into my heels, grab my tablet, and make my way to the conference room. I’ve been preparing for this meeting over the last three months, and I pray today all my hard work will pay off.

Two hours in, after going through the action items and answering all new questions, I’m wrapping everything up when I hear Tasha clear her throat. We all turn to her.

“All, please accept my apology for interrupting but Mrs. Newman, I need you.”

“Can it wait a few minutes?”

“No ma’am, come now.”

I lay the tablet on the table.

“If there’s no more questions for me, I will turn things over to our chief legal advisor Langston. Thank you all for coming today and I look forward to the partnership. Please excuse me.” I walk out to see her eyes misting with tears.

“Tasha, what’s wrong?”

“I answered a number that called your phone a few times and it’s Alex. He’s been in an accident.” She drops my flats in front of me as I kick off my shoes. “I already have your purse and phone. Let’s go.”

We race to the car. Tasha is driving but it doesn’t seem like we’re moving fast enough.

“Is it bad?” I ask and she looks at me.

“Oh God.” I begin to pray for God not to take the best thing that has happened to me. Finally arriving at Regional One, she lets me out at the front door. Running in, I wait in the security line with all kinds of thoughts running through my head. Finally, the young lady motions me forward.

“May I help you?” she asks without looking up.

“Yes, I received a call saying my husband was in an accident.”

“His name.”

“Alexander Newman.” I state.

“I’ll need your id.”

I fumble in my purse and hand it to her.

“I’ll also need to take your picture. Stand there, back up a little. Right there.” She instructs.

A few more minutes and she hands me a sticker. “Your husband is in the trauma bay. If you go through those double doors, show security your badge and

they'll let you through. Once they do, go to the left, down the hall, press the button on the wall and someone will be out to talk to you."

Tasha comes running in and I wait for her to go through the same process. Finished, we follow the directions to the trauma area. I press the button and give them my name. The door opens.

"Mrs. Newman, my name is Jennifer, one of the nurses taking care of your husband."

"How is he?"

"He was taken into surgery, ten minutes ago. I don't have an update, but I will take you to the ICU waiting room. There you'll listen for your name as the nurse, in the operating room, will call to give you updates."

Following her through the solemn halls of the hospital has my heart beating fast. I feel as though I'm in the twilight zone. I'm aware of where I am, it's just doesn't feel real.

"Here we are." She states, pulling me from my thoughts. "Sign in at the desk and again, listen for your name."

"Thank you."

Walking inside the doors, the waiting room is packed with other families who have the same look of fear I'm sure shows on my face.

"He's going to be ok Jade. We must believe it." Tasha offers, and I smile at her. "While we wait, do you want me to make any calls?" she asks.

"I don't even know where my phone is."

"I have it. Tell me what you need, and I'll do it."

"Can you call Mr. Asher and Bishop Pike?"

"Of course. I'll be right back."

When she walks off, I go to an empty chair in a corner. Slumping into it, I clasp my hands together, close my eyes and begin to pray. "Thank you for being a God who hears and responds. Right now, I need you. You already know where my

husband is and what he's been through, so I'll only ask you to show up as Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals. God, I can't lose this man. Touch the hands, eyes, ears, minds, hearts, and patience of every doctor, nurse, anesthesiologist, CNA and whomever else will come into contact with him. And Father, don't just do it for my husband, but for all who are in need, right now. Touch and heal like only you can. Then give me and each of the families here strength for the road ahead. But if for some reason, healing isn't appointed on this side, give us strength and understanding that only comes from you. God, you've got to do it." I rock back and forth. "Please do it. In Jesus' name. Amen."

I didn't realize I'd been praying loudly until the others say amen. I open my eyes to see them looking in my direction, some with tears streaming.

"We have to believe." Somebody says.

Jade

“Excuse me, I’m looking for the family of Alexander Newman?” a gentleman states from the front of the room.

I shoot up from the chair. “Yes, I’m his wife Jade and this is my friend Tasha. Are you a doctor?”

“No ma’am. My name is Detective Marshall Hill and I’m investigating the motor vehicle crash he was involved in. A nurse downstairs told me I’d find you here.”

I sigh.

“Can this wait?” Tasha asks him.

“It’s fine. Detective what can I do for you?”

“First, I apologize for showing up like this. How is your husband?”

“He’s still in surgery. We’ll know more once the doctor comes out. May I ask why you’re here? Is my husband in trouble?”

“No ma’am. Your husband was not at fault.” He replies.

“What happened?” I ask, motioning for him to sit.

“Your husband was the unfortunate victim of the out-of-control violence plaguing our city. Around 9:45 AM this morning, he was traveling westbound on Poplar at Germantown Road when a car driven by a seventeen-year-old Black male, crossed lanes of traffic, and hit him head on. During our investigation, it was discovered the car was stolen and had just been involved in an armed robbery.”

“Oh God.”

“Please tell me you’ve arrested him.” Tasha says.

“Unfortunately, the driver, along with three passengers in his car were all killed, on impact, due to speed and no one was wearing seat belts.”

“Jesus.” I cry out as Tasha takes my hand.

“What happens now?” she asks.

“We’ll finish the investigation for your insurance company then close the case. Due to the deaths of the at fault driver, that’s all we can do.”

“Can she not sue his parents or something?”

“That’s up to her. All the information we have on him will be included in the report. Again, I’m sorry you all are having to experience this. Here’s the report number and my card. If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to reach out. And I’ll be praying for your husband.”

“Lord, these children have no regard for the impact they’re leaving on families. Ours and theirs.” I tell Tasha. “A few hours ago, I was kissing my husband goodbye and now, I don’t know if he’s—

“Shh. Alex is going to live.”

Six hours later, Tasha is nudging me. I open my eyes and hear my name being called. I throw the blanket off and rush to the front.

“Yes, I’m Jade Newman. Please tell me my husband is okay.”

“Mrs. Newman, I’m Dr. Sager. Your husband made it through surgery, but he has a long recovery ahead of him. The accident caused damage to his spine, fractured some ribs, severed his spleen, and broke his left arm and wrist. He has some contusions on his head and a concussion. Right now, we won’t know the severity of the spinal injuries until he wakes up.”

“Wait. Do you think he’ll be paralyzed?”

“We just can’t be sure.” She steps forward placing her hand on my arm. “The good news is there’s still hope.”

“Can we see him?” Tasha questions.

“Yes. Nurse Jasmine will get you once he’s settled in the ICU, but I have to warn you. He’s hooked up to a lot of machines, he’s badly bruised and swollen. You must prepare yourself because the man you’re going to see will not look like your husband. I’ll be around for most of the day if you have any additional questions.”

“This can’t be happening. Please pinch me so I can wake up.” I tell Tasha when they walk off.

“You heard the doctor. There’s still hope.”

“What if he’s paralyzed?”

“What if he isn’t? Right now, we’ll rejoice over him being alive. Come on. Let’s take a walk. You’ve been couped up in here for hours.”

Leaving out of the doors, we see Bishop Pike and his wife Keena.

“Jade, we got here as soon as we could. How’s Alex?”

“He’s, um he’s.”

“He’s out of surgery, but there’s a lot of damage. Spine, broken arm, wrist, ribs, severed spleen, bruises—it’s a lot.” Tasha answers instead.

“God of Heaven.” Keena blurts.

“He shall recover.” Bishop Pike states. “We must believe it. Have you been able to see him yet?”

I shake my head no.

“Then we’ll wait with you.”

An hour later, we walk into Alex’s room and the sight of him stops me in my tracks. I begin to breathe fast. “God. Oh my God.”

“Jade, look at me. Breathe.” Keena coaches. “Sweetie, look at me.” She pulls me into her. “I know this is hard, but we’re right here with you.”

“Let’s pray.” Bishop says. “God, here we gather praying to you, Jehovah Raphe, the God who heals. God, Alex’s body has been through trauma, but we’re believing you to heal. Start from the top of his head then move down to mend fractured ribs, fuse the broken bones of his left arm and wrist then God, do your best work on his spine. We ask you to remove swelling and let his legs function as they were intended. Do it God. Heal by your power and in your time. For whatever your time is, it’s better than ours. Give Jade the strength and understanding to be what her husband needs while he’s being healed. Be resources and peace. And God, while

you're healing this family, we also pray for the families of the young men who caused this accident and lost their lives. In the name of Jesus, we pray by faith believing you will hear and respond. Amen."

Hours later, Tasha drops me off at home. Due to Alex being sedated, and in ICU, his nurse said it'd be best for me to go home and get some sleep. Yet, being here doesn't make sleeping easier. After a shower, I get into bed pulling his pillow into me.

"Ay, how long you been in the system?"

"What?" I scowl looking up at the boy with glasses taped together and a huge smile interrupting me playing with the cold plate of food.

"I asked how long you've been in the system."

"Who said I was?"

"Um, you ain't just here for a visit cause the food ain't good and that bag you're carrying. I got one just like it. Hi, I'm Alexander but everybody calls me Alex. I'm thirteen and been in the system since I was three."

I pull my bag closer to me. "From what I've been told, I was dropped off at a fire station when I was eleven days old with only a note showing my name."

"Okay, you got me beat. But what is your name?"

"Jade Atarah Lester."

"Ata-what?"

"A-T-A-R-A-H. Ah-tar-ruh. It means crown."

"If you say so." He shrugs. "Well, it's nice to meet you, Jade. When you're done eating, come find me outside and I'll show you around."

I laugh, wiping tears while remembering meeting Alex for the first time at age nine. We were both in a state foster home and from that moment, we were inseparable. Even when we were moved from place to place, we always found our way back to each other. Once it was known we weren't being adopted, Everleigh Children's Home became our home. Aging out of the foster care system when we

each turned eighteen, Alex did odd jobs to cover rent at a rooming house while he went to school for truck driving. When I turned eighteen, I'd received a scholarship from the University of Memphis. Over the years, we drifted apart then ten years ago, we reconnected, and it's been him and I ever since.

"God, I can't lose him."



Thank you for taking the time to read the sample of In Sickness and In Health. To download the full book, please click here -> <https://amzn.to/3UErRIH>