

FORGOTTEN

Book III in the Forsaken Series

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Other Books by Vanessa Miller

Long Time Coming

A Promise of Forever Love

A Love for Tomorrow

Yesterday's Promise

Forgiven

Forsaken

Through the Storm

Rain Storm

Latter Rain

Abundant Rain

Former Rain

Anthologies (Editor)

Keeping the Faith

Have A Little Faith

This Far by Faith

EBOOKS

Love Isn't Enough

A Mighty Love

The Blessed One (Blessed and Highly Favored series – book 1)

The Wild One (Blessed and Highly Favored Series – book 2)

The Preacher's Choice (Blessed and Highly Favored Series – book 3)

The Politician's Wife (Blessed and Highly Favored Series – book 4)

The Playboy's Redemption (Blessed and Highly Favored Series – book 5)

One

Margie Milner sat in stunned silence as Linda Tiller mumbled, “Enough is enough of this craziness.” The woman then began spewing obscenities as she raised herself from the bench.

Margie had been sitting next to Linda in the back of the church while the deacons told the congregation how Pastor Randolph Lewis had been stealing money from the church to feed his gambling addiction. Margie noticed that Linda seemed a bit agitated, but she never imagined that she would start cussing like she was sitting in a bar rather than a sanctuary. Margie could understand Linda being upset. She was ticked off herself, but she wasn't going to cuss Pastor Lewis over missing money. She pulled Linda back to her seat and whispered, “Now, you know you shouldn't be talking like that in God's house.”

“Girl, where you been? God been done left this house.” Linda waved her arm around, indicating the sanctuary they were sitting in. “This ain't nothing but the devil's playpen.”

“What's wrong with you?” Margie asked, shocked that her friend would say such things. But even as she asked, Margie saw the hurt in Linda's eyes. She recognized that kind of church pain, for she had once endured such pain herself, after putting her trust in a no-good man. She'd worshiped him as if he had been her God, did everything he'd

asked her to do. When it was all said and done, Margie had been left with nothing but her pain. Ever since she had fallen into sin with that no-good married man, Margie had been trying to rebuild her relationship with God. Although she had only been a member of The True Way for six months, she was deeply troubled about these allegations against her pastor. She had vowed to get her life back right with God, but Margie knew that she couldn't do such a thing in a church that was as messy as this one appeared to be.

Linda got up again. "I just can't keep sitting here watching this mess." She headed down the aisle toward the front of the church, and this time Margie just let her go.

Many in the congregation she had previously attended knew that the married preacher she had been having an affair with was no good. But no one had the guts to stand up and say anything about it. So, if Linda wanted to get something off her chest, Margie figured... 'bout time. Maybe when this meeting was over, she'd go over to JT Thomas's church and get a few things off her chest as well.

But then Linda said, "What y'all gon' do about what this no good dog did to my son?"

"Yeah," another woman added as she stood, hands on her hips and neck rolling. "Y'all know what Pastor Lewis did to my son, too, but all we've been talking about tonight is the money he stole. Is money more important than our sons?"

Margie could not believe what she just heard. Another level of anger seemed to rise up in the church after Linda's comment about her son. And then others began speaking out. If what they were saying was true, then Margie agreed with them. Pastor Lewis shouldn't be put out of this church for gambling—he should be put out for destroying the lives of those boys.

A husband and wife seated on the opposite side of the church leaped to their feet. “We came to this meeting tonight because we want answers. We want to know why y’all would hire a pedophile and then turn him loose on our children.”

Deacon Frost tried to appease them, “Now, y’all need to sit back down so we can take this vote and finish this meeting.” He turned to Linda and said, “Weren’t you thrown out of this church already? What are you doing back? You really need to sit down, because none of this concerns you anymore.”

Linda reached in her pocket, pulled out a gun and started waving it around. “I’m not sitting down and shutting up this time, Deacon Frost. I suggest you sit down before you get a bullet.”

“Oh my God, she’s got a gun!” one of the women in the back of the church yelled.

Deacon Frost and a few of the other deacons backed away as Linda advanced on them.

A few people ran out of the back door of the sanctuary, while others stayed in their seats, watching the action as it unfolded.

As Margie watched her friend wave that gun around, she felt responsible for what was taking place. It was out of order for Linda to get out of her seat and disrupt a church proceeding in the first place, but Margie hadn’t stopped her because she felt that it was high time that somebody let these leaders know that they couldn’t do wrong and get away with it. But now her friend was waving a gun around and she had to stop her from making the biggest mistake of her life.

Margie inched her way down the aisle.

One of the deacons said, "Linda, please put the gun away."

Now, standing by the front pew, Margie held out a hand to her friend as she tried to remain calm. She said, "Put that gun away before someone gets hurt, Linda. Let the authorities handle this."

"You don't know, Margie, you don't know," was all Linda mumbled as tears bubbled in her eyes and she began walking down the aisle. Her head was held high as if she wasn't about to commit a criminal act.

The deacon tried again, speaking slowly this time, "Be reasonable about this. There's no reason for the gun, Sister Linda."

"I'm over being reasonable. I told y'all over and over again that Pastor Lewis molested my son. But all you did was throw me out of the church for complaining about this no-good dog." She was standing in front of Pastor Lewis now, pointing the gun in his face. "He was only thirteen when you started messing with him. Now my son is a seventeen-year-old drug addict, in and out of the mental ward. But you don't care. All you care about is your sick desires. But I'm not going to let you get away with what you did."

"Shoot him!" another woman yelled from the pews.

"Stand up," Linda demanded of Pastor Lewis.

"Don't do this, Linda. One of the members has probably already called the police. They will put you in jail," Margie told her.

"They can call whoever they want; I'm not going to jail, though." She grabbed Lewis by the collar and yelled, "Stand up!"

“Okay, okay.” On shaky legs, Lewis did what he was commanded with his hands shoved in the air.

“Now, I want you to tell these people what you did to my son.”

Lewis said nothing.

“Tell them!” Linda shoved him.

Lewis turned to Linda and said, “Please stop doing this to yourself, Linda. Your son is mentally unstable. He’s on drugs, how is any of that my fault?”

“That’s a lie,” the woman who had stood up after Linda shouted out. “Whattin’ nothing wrong with our sons before you started messing with them.”

“Sit down,” Linda snapped.

Pastor Lewis seemed to exhale and obeyed.

“Since, the good pastor here can’t seem to open his mouth to tell the truth, I’m going to tell you all what he did.”

“We already know. We can get rid of him with this vote. Put the gun down and let’s get on with this vote,” one of the deacons shouted from behind the table where he crouched down with others.

Linda ignored them as she said, “My son, Mike, was a wonderful praise singer. Saints loved it when Mike led praise and worship. Then this dog came along.” She sneered in Pastor Lewis’ direction. “He started taking my son out of town to conferences he preached at, so Mike could sing. But after the conference he was molesting my son and it drove Mike crazy.”

“You need to stop lying, Linda. I didn’t do anything to your son.”

Margie saw something snap in Linda, but she was paralyzed by all that had transpired and couldn't move to stop what she knew in her heart was about to happen.

Linda turned toward Pastor Lewis and without saying another word she lifted the gun and shot him in the head. People screamed and scattered for safety. Spinning around, Linda eyed the bystanders. "You're all to blame. None of you helped me. You people left me no choice. Thanks for nothing," she said, putting the barrel of the gun to her head.

Brain matter splattered the front pews. However, the people had already vacated the seats after Linda shot Pastor Lewis.

"Call 911!" Deacon Peterson yelled as he checked Pastor Lewis's pulse.

Margie was still too stunned to move. She'd known Linda was angry when she stood up, but she'd never dreamed the woman was this upset. *Should I have yelled out and warned everyone? Oh God, what just happened here? I don't understand this.*

Hundreds of mourners attended Pastor Lewis's funeral, including Margie. Since the vote to fire him had not been cast before his death, the leadership of The True Way thought it best to have his funeral at the church Pastor Lewis had led for almost ten years. He had been laid to rest in the purple and gold preacher's robe he normally wore in the pulpit. Pastors from all over the world spoke at the service. They all proclaimed how great a man Pastor Lewis was and cried over the fact that he had been so violently cut down in his prime.

What about the other victims of this tragedy? Margie wondered if any of these men of the cloth had cried for Linda and her son. Would they come to Linda's funeral

and say such glowing words over her body? What Linda had done was wrong. There was no question about that, but what Pastor Lewis had done to Linda's son was wrong, also. Margie could make no sense of the whole matter; could find no justice in any of it.

The next day as she sat in a funeral home with no more than fifty people in attendance, Margie wondered why more of the members of The True Way hadn't shown up for Linda Tiller as they had for Pastor Lewis. There were no glowing testimonials spoken over Linda's body. Each person who stood up, from her daughter, Elaine and her son, Mike, on down to friends of the family, only spoke of the tragedy that became Linda's tortured life.

Half way through the funeral, Margie began to cry uncontrollably. It was a bit embarrassing, because she was crying harder than the family members. But Linda's story had touched her in a way that made her want to take action. But what could she do? Linda was already dead.

Linda's sister, Deneen was the last person to speak. She was one of the deaconesses at The True Way. Deneen wiped the tears from her eyes as she said, "All my sister wanted was for somebody to listen to her. She was so filled with hatred and bitterness over what happened to Mike, but she couldn't find any place to release her anger, because no one would listen."

Deneen got choked up and couldn't finish. Mike hugged his aunt and walked her back to her seat. It was at that moment that Margie realized something. Although it seemed as if the church members had turned their backs on Linda in her time of need, the problem went deeper than that. They hadn't just turned their backs on her, they had forgotten about her and just hoped that she would go away and leave them alone.

As Margie and the rest of the mourners filed out of the funeral home, she determined that she would never forget what happened to Linda and her family in the house of God. She would find a way to help other wounded and brokenhearted souls that the church had mercilessly cast away.