Hurting to Heal

Rebecca Ratterman

The very first thing you see on the pilot episode of ABC’s Revenge is a black screen. Then, slowly, words emerge: “‘Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves.’ - Confucius (504 B.C.).” This quote becomes a crucial theme throughout the story of Revenge and its protagonist, Amanda Clarke (Emily VanCamp). Now in its second season, Revenge has found its niche as a fantastical dark and twisted production that has created a new side of drama that the TV world has never seen before. It is a sinister, almost emotionless, tragedy that pulls you blindly into its numerous plot dips and twists, while dealing out numerous antagonists and even more potential villains. While Revenge is a serious and dramatic show, it is categorized as ‘television entertainment’ for a reason. The key to enjoying this show is to not take it too seriously; and the far-fetched events exist for the viewers enjoyment, not for reality’s sake.

The drama begins with Amanda telling her story: “When I was a child my father was framed for a crime he didn’t commit. Before he died he left a roadmap for revenge that led me to the people who destroyed our lives.” With her mother out of the picture at a young age, Amanda spent a lot of time with her father in the Hamptons during her childhood. David Clarke and his daughter lived a charmed life there until he was suddenly framed and sent to jail for laundering money to a terrorist organization. After her father’s death in a prison fight, Amanda returns to the wealth-riddled Hamptons with only one mission: vengeance.

Revenge is a show that reveals nothing willingly. The only people who have an insight to the real Amanda Clarke are the audience members, and even then they only have a front row seat to a woman being consumed by her own rage. The show has a habit of making you feel like you are finally in on a secret, then slamming you against a wall with a head-spinning new plot twist. Besides the obvious theme of revenge, the message ‘to never trust anyone’ shines throughout the plot. In Emily’s world, trust is for the weak and will inevitably result in failure. Yet, the first 24 episodes have revealed cracks in her seemingly emotionless character; cracks that continue to widen and grow with every scheme and conflict.

Victoria and Conrad Grayson are the real culprits of the crime that was blamed on Amanda’s Father. Part evil, part misunderstood, the two play their bi-polar-miscreant roles perfectly. Much of the plot focuses on the Grayson’s insurmountable wealth, as well as their corrupt morals. Victoria (Madeleine Stowe) is the entitled ice queen of the Hamptons. She manipulates others with a ruthless cunning and destroys anything that interferes with her schemes. Yet, she is schizophrenically portrayed as a loving mother and friend. Conrad, on the other hand, is portrayed as purely sadistic. He lacks empathy for anyone but himself; and selfishness has been one of his constant character flaws. Victoria and Conrad are perfect antagonists because they are on a personal level with the audience. The viewers get up close and personal, only to find that every decision the Graysons make revolves around money.

The wealthy, superficial, and power hungry cast majority is nicely balanced out by the sarcastic wit of Nolan Ross (Amanda’s only ally), the refreshing humility of Jack Porter (a local bar owner who was a childhood friend of Amanda’s), and the realistic perspective that is brought to the table by Declan Porter (Jack’s younger brother). These characters help define the subtle
conflict between small town life and the life of the rich high rollers, all against a backdrop of morally corrupt hit men, cold blooded murderers, and the greedily selfish 1%.

Yet, the most mesmerizing aspect of the show is revealed in the wardrobe choices, settings, and props. Every episode consists of a party, gala, or charity event so much so that it seems as if the writers are playing a game of ‘how many different kinds of parties can we throw before we repeat ourselves!?’. These vivid and lavish gatherings create a perfect standard of visual beauty that is ruined with each vengeful and ugly act committed. Each character’s wardrobe is specifically designed and polished to perfection; considerably so that it becomes a crucial part of his or her identity. As opposed to the likes of Charlie’s Angels or Nikita, Amanda/Emily wears sophisticated clothing with graceful lines that flatter her curves without being revealing. Nolan can be described only as having a ‘geek-preppy’ look, and laid-back Jack wears exclusively flannel. Each character’s look helps every setting and accessory mesh seamlessly into each perfectly coordinated scene.

As with many other dramas, Revenge isn’t exactly realistic; and the opening graphics could definitely use some work. Plus, if you have a problem with continuously dramatized plot lines, it might not be the show for you. However, if you put these judgements aside, at the heart of the story is a wonderful and desperate need for retribution. Every time the show throws you for a loop, you find yourself sinking deeper as one by one Amanda eliminates her enemies and strains against the pressure creating the cracks in her foundation.