

**Taint on Religion**

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Smashwords Edition**

**ISBN: 9781311989369**

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I was taught throughout my life these three things: to love God, to love myself, and to always go to church. It was easy for me to do all of these because of my Mom and Dad.

Each Sunday, for as long as I could remember, my mom would clothe me in these frilly feminine pieces that would often make my neck itch and my stocking covered legs feel scratchy. Then, she and I would hop into the car with Dad and drive 20 miles to make the Sunday service. I was confused why the pulpit clapped their hands with the music or why at times, the preacher's words would make some of the women swoon and the strongest of men cry. When I would ask, my mom would say that the Lord was speaking to them, and when He did, they would have no choice but to repent. I asked my mom why the Lord wouldn't talk to me. I never fell out or started crying. I guess she didn't have an answer for me, for she never said anything.

My mom told me to never stop loving the Lord or myself, no matter what happened around me. Back then, I didn't know why she told me that. But I found out soon enough.

After the age of seven, my world came crashing down. My dad turned to the Devil, which hid Himself in a bottle. However, my dad seemed to feel great most of time when he allowed the Devil to slide down his throat. And I guess my mom didn't say much because of the way the Devil made my dad feel.

Later on, however, the Devil made my dad mad, and he ended up moody and irritable. Everything that my mom and I did seemed to piss Dad off. The moodiness and anger grew inside Dad until he became a monster. That monster would make marks upon our bodies that my mom begged me not to say anything to others about. I did what she told me, but one day, the monster punched me in the eye, and I went to school with his mark on me.

The school stole me away from my Dad and Mom. I was glad to be away from the monster my dad had become, but I wished the school had saved my mom. However, I kept remembering Mom's words: to never stop loving the Lord or myself. I didn't have any hate towards the Lord then.

More years passed. My mom wrote me a letter, telling me that God had injected her with courage and that she was going to leave the monster. My heart rejoiced. Maybe she and I could be together again. I was eleven at the time, set to be twelve in about a month.

But apparently, God had told her too late.

While my mom dreamed of freedom, the monster sensed she was leaving and placed a tight grip around her throat. My mom tried to yell but no one could hear her. The only thing the neighbors

heard was a single gunshot. My dad had fought with the monster for a while but believed he had no other choice but to damn his soul to the Devil.



At the age of 11, I stopped loving God. How could a God that loved me allow that to happen to my family? I was alone in the world and decided to do what I chose. I learned of a different kind of love. One that involved guys. Not little boys, but men. Men who resembled my daddy. I liked them. They gave me candy and money in exchange for a special gift I had.

I first gave the gift when I was 12. Love consisted of sweet croons from men 10-20 years my elder. Their callused hands stroking my buds. Their lips encasing my tiny erect peaks. Their fingers invading my love and massaging my rosebud. Their sticks gliding inside resisting flesh, causing me to bite my lower lip in pain.

And that was the course of my life. Now at the age of 18 and 45 partners later, I want to love God again. I haven't been in church since the time Mom was murdered. Maybe God and I can try again, to salvage the relationship We once had.

I attended church this past Sunday. The preacher was very captivating. His name was Reginald Jamison, and he was only 32 years old. It was rumored he received his calling when he was very young. His voice rose and fell as he emphasized the glory in worshiping God and the downfall of worshiping the Devil. The whole town loved Preacher Jamison, even the elderly, who always boasted, "The young whipper-snappers don't know a damn thing about religion." Preacher Jamison was like Jesus' disciple of the new millennium. I admired him and was captivated by him, and I gave myself to God on this Sunday.

After the service, he strolled over to me.

"Good afternoon, Sister Lockett."

"How do you know my name?"

"Well, this is a small town, and people do talk. But don't listen to what they say about you. What counts is that you have given your life over to Him."

"Thank you! Hearing you say that gives me great encouragement," I replied as I took his outstretched hand in mine.

"Well, I hope it does. Where are you off to now?"

"I'm going to work in a little while. How about yourself?"

“Back home to get some rest and relaxation. Whenever you need to talk to me outside of church, just stop by the house. I can teach you about the Bible and what it means if there are some things you don’t understand.”

“Are you sure?”

“My job is to educate God’s children, and you are one of His children. I would be sinning against God if I didn’t do so.”

“I’ll be sure to do that, Reverend Jamison. Take care!”

“You do the same, Sister Lockett.”



I got in my car and drove to work, feeling good about myself and looking at the world in an entirely new light. My eight-hour shift (from 2-10) didn't seem as boring or time consuming. I hummed as I worked, and my co-workers looked in astonishment at my new, uplifting attitude.

At around 10:30, the phone rang as I was cleaning up.

“Hello, Dawson’s Diner!”

“Hello, Natasha!”

“Hey, sweetie!” I crooned. “How’s everything been going?”

“Well, business has been kind of slow for the straight ones.”

You see, my boyfriend Derrick worked in one of the local strip clubs in our town. He was hoping not to be there for too long, since he was just there to pay for his college education. I hoped he wouldn't do it for long, either. The money can get some people trapped and make them forget why they even got into the profession. I almost didn't get out myself, and I hoped Derrick wouldn't let fast money overrule his studies. He seemed to be doing well so far.

“Really?” I asked. “So the gay and bisexual dancers are getting all the dough?”

“Yeah, but I’m not complaining. I raked in a whole lot of money Friday and Saturday. Anyway, are you about done? I’m ready to go.”

“Sure thing. I’m on my way. See you in a little bit, Derrick!”

“Okay,” he answered. “Bye!”

I put down the receiver and continued to clean the counter. I debated on whether I should mop the floor or not. I decided against it. Let the person coming in tomorrow do it, I thought, and took off my apron. I locked the doors to the diner, got in my Honda, and sped off.



11:00. I finally arrive at The Hot Spot, the strip club Derrick worked at. Was he in the front of the building?

“Gosh, I don’t see him! He must be in one of the dressing rooms, freshening up.”

I walked in the club towards the back. One of the rooms was ajar and I stopped, believing Derrick was in there. I pushed the door a little more but what I saw made me stop dead in my tracks.

A young man resembling Reverend Jamison was sitting on the blue leather seat. One of the male strippers was on his knees, partaking of the Reverend’s long, thick tool. I could hear Reverend Jamison moan in unmistakable pleasure and wanton passion.

“Natasha, here I am!”

That jolted me away from the door and further down the hall. I could see Derrick waving at me. He started to embrace me but stopped when he saw the horrified look on my face.

“Natasha, what’s wrong?”

“I can’t talk about it right now. Let’s get out of here, Derrick!”

“Okay! Okay!” he answered and we walked up the hallway towards the exit. The door that was ajar was now closed.

Once back at the apartment, I told Derrick what I had seen. But Derrick didn’t believe me. He said that I was mistaken and that the light was probably bad. I didn’t want to believe it was Reverend Jamison, either, so I told myself that I was wrong, even though a part of me sensed I was right. However, I told Derrick to let me know if that person who resembled the Reverend came into The Hot Spot again. Derrick agreed, even though he looked at me like I was crazy.



The next morning, I was at work when Reverend Jamison strolled in. I looked around, hoping that one of the other waitresses wasn't busy. I didn't want to confront him.

My boss came up behind me. "Don't just stand there, Natasha! You have a customer."

"Yes, sir!" I answered and walked up to him.

"Good morning, Reverend Jamison!"

"We're not in church. You may call me Reginald, if you wish. How have you been, Natasha?"

"How do you know my first name?"

"It's on the tag."

"Goodness, silly me! Would you care for anything to drink?"

"Coffee, black and strong. I had a very long night, my dear!"

As I left to make the coffee, I could feel his eyes taking in my frame. I knew that he was only human, but he was a messenger of God, too. Was he supposed to be looking at me in that way?

When I placed the cup before him, he grasped my hand. I visibly jumped. "I was serious about what I said, Natasha. You should come by. Will you have any free time this week?"

"I don't know. I have a very busy schedule. My boss has me down for every day this week."

"Surely you could shorten your time. Miss a day. Do you want me to talk to him?"

"No, Reverend-"

"Reginald."

"No, that's not necessary. I need the money."

"Money is more important than your spiritual welfare? Surely that is not what you are telling me."



“No, of course not! But I do have a car note to pay. And rent, too.”

“I tell you what. What if I pay you for the day that you miss? That way, you won’t feel like you have missed any days. How much do you make at this place?”

“7.25 an hour, plus tips.”

“Hmm..Let me see..Will \$75.00 cover you for a missed day?”

“Yes, but I have to clear it with my boss-”

“I talked to him while you were fixing my coffee, and he is giving you Wednesday off. I am inviting you to dinner, and I will take no refusal.”

“Well, okay, Rev- I mean, Reginald. I guess I have no choice but to comply. Will 7:30 be a good time for me to come?”

“Nonsense, Natasha! I will stop by your apartment and get you. Just give me your street address.”

“Okay. 1229 Pillsbury Drive, Apt.6.”

“All right. It’s a date. Wednesday at 7:30.”

He arose then and placed ten dollars on the table. “Do you want me to get your change?”

“No, Natasha, keep it. I look forward to seeing you.”



As he strolled out, I wondered why he was so anxious for me to come to his house. After I got off work, I talked to my boyfriend about it.

“Natasha, he just wants to share the word with you, nothing more. I know of a lot of people in town who have been at Reverend Jamison’s house.”

“But should I ask him if he was at the Hot Spot?”

“Natasha, we talked about this before. You just have a very active imagination. It wasn’t him you saw, okay? Reverend Jamison has done so much for this community. He brought a lot of us together. You would be challenging a whole town to even suggest that the Reverend is doing all these wicked things.”

“But under all those holy words, he is just a man, Derrick. I am still not one hundred percent convinced that this is all my imagination. Wednesday will tell the tale.”



## WEDNESDAY

I was very nervous. Tonight was the night. I knew I shouldn't have these feelings. I couldn't get the images of him out of my mind. The way he grasped the young stripper's head. The way he moaned in pleasure as the young man partook of him. I hoped for my sake that I had been mistaken. But I knew what I saw.

I decided to put on a long, red dress and small pearl earrings. I pinned my auburn hair into a giant clamp to secure it. Then I put on the lightest hint of perfume.

I glanced at my Timex. 7:29.

"He should be here any minute now. Let's see, what am I forgetting? My Bible, of course. Now, what did I do with it?"

As I rushed into my room to find it, I heard a knock on the door.

"Well, one thing I do say for him. He is punctual," I said to myself as I finally discovered the Bible under the foot of my bed.

There was another knock, louder and more impatient.

"I'm coming!" I yelled as I rose and walked to the door. There stood the Reverend, holding a box of chocolate in one hand and a dozen white roses in the other.

"For you, Natasha," he crooned.

"No, you really shouldn't have," I replied, blushing slightly.

"Oh, but I insist, my dear," he answered and handed them to me.

After placing the chocolate in the refrigerator and the roses in some water, we left and made our way to his house.

"So," I queried, attempting to make light conversation, "what is on the menu for this evening?"

"Marinated T-bone steak, scalloped potatoes, and asparagus spears."

“Wow! Do you always treat invited guests to such royalty?”

“Actually, no. Only special sisters of the church.”

“Hmm,” I answered, frowning on his reply. “So does that make me special?”

“All of us are special in God’s eyes. Let’s eat, shall we?”

We ate our meal in silence. I could notice his eyes looking at me, seeming to bore a hole in my soul. I didn’t know what to say or do. I knew the look of desire even if it was coming from a man of God.

“Reverend, I have a question. Are we living our lives mostly by the New Testament or by the Old Testament? I am a little confused because in the Old Testament, it states that the penalty for sin is death. Yet in the New Testament, we get countless opportunities to redeem ourselves. Doesn’t that seem like a contradiction in terms?”

“That is a very good question, Natasha. We live our lives based on the New Testament. Jesus died for our sins. Each day, we strive to be more like Jesus, and He knows that is hard for us to do. This is why He gives us all these chances. When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, we were like God, knowing good and evil. Which means in the hierarchy of things, we are one step under God, and we should always strive to be holy as He is. God sacrificed His son for our struggle with primitive sin. Does that somewhat answer your question?”

“Why, yes it does.” I answered.

“Do you care for some more iced tea, dear? I’m about to go get a little brandy myself.”

“You drink?”

“Well, drinking in moderation is okay. Overindulgence is a sin. Every now and then, I relax with some brandy or some cognac. A little wine every now and again. There was wine consumed at the Last Supper, for wine is of grapes.”

“Sure I would like some more tea,” I replied. He returned with the tea and we adjourned to his den.

“Care to watch some TV?”

“No, thanks.” I replied and looked at some of the pictures he had on his fireplace mantle. “Who are these people?” I queried.

“Well, on the first picture is my mom and Dad. They have passed on. In the second picture are my two brothers and my three sisters. They stay in different parts of the U.S. I haven’t spoken with them in a while. And the last one is my daughter, Sheila.”

“So, you do have a daughter? Where is your wife?”

“I have no wife, dear.”

“Did she die?”

“No, I never had a wife. I’m not saying my daughter was a mistake. The relationship was.”

“Oh, I see,” I answered, thinking how could he preach to others about sin when he had committed quite a few of his own. Fornication. Having a child out of wedlock. Indulging in alcohol.

“Where is your daughter?”

“She’s with her Mom. I send them money every month with the funds collected on Sundays.”

“You mean to tell me that the money doesn’t go to the church? It goes towards your own personal gains?”

“I wouldn’t see it in that way. God has called upon me to take care of my responsibility. The church is the vessel that is helping me do that.”

“I’m sorry, Reverend Jamison, but I don’t think it’s fair of you to do that. In fact, it is selfish! I’m disgusted at what I have heard this evening! I think I better go.”

I rose to get up, but Reverend Jamison quickly followed me and turned me around.

“Please don’t leave.”

“You call yourself a man of God, yet you do all these unholy things! How can anyone trust your word when you are doing as much sin as anyone else?”

“No one said that this path was easy-”

“But you are not even trying to repent from your evil ways! I don’t call repentance allowing some gay man to give you a blowjob!” Reverend Jamison’s eyes gleamed in anger. I hadn’t meant to say anything about it at that moment, but my anger had gotten the better of me.

“So you saw me?”

“Yes, I did. If that is your way of repentance-”

“What were you doing there, Natasha?”

“I was there to pick up my boyfriend.”

“That’s right. Derrick does work there. Didn’t you use to work there, too?”

“That’s besides the point!”

“What did you do to those men while you worked there? Strip for them? Tease them with your rhythmic grinds? Or did you service them, like that young man serviced me?” I raised my hand to slap him. How dare he say this to me? But he grabbed my hand and forced my arm behind my back. Then, he stole a desire filled kiss from my lips. “Show me what you can do, Natasha!”

“I left that life behind when I gave myself to God. I will not allow you to degrade me in this way!”

“It’s not degradation. I want you in the worst way, and you want me, too. You even dressed for seduction. The hint of Rapture on your skin. Wearing red, a whore’s color. You are temptation, and I am weak. Therefore, I must take of you-”

“How DARE you! I don’t have to stand here and listen to this! Take me home right now!”

“I will do no such thing.”

“Very well, Reverend Jamison. I will walk back. Don’t say that it has been a pleasure because it hasn’t! In fact, it’s been a nightmare!”

As I ran out of the door, I could hear him chuckle before saying, “God bless you, Natasha! I will see you on Sunday.”

When I finally got to the apartment, Derrick was there. “How was your study session with Reverend Jamison?”

I started to tell Derrick what had happened, but I knew he wouldn’t believe me. “It went quite well. I am looking forward to attending church this coming Sunday.”

“What did the two of you talk about?”

“Sweetie, I am really tired. I think I will go to bed now.”

“Well, okay, then. Good night!”

As I changed into my nightgown, I made my decision to expose Reverend Jamison for the fraud that he was during church Sunday. I prayed that at least one person would believe me.



## SUNDAY

“Are you sure you don’t want me to drive?” Derrick asked as I put on my makeup and smoothed my light blue church dress.

“I’m positive. You need your sleep. You did overtime last night at the club.”

“Okay. Tell Reverend Jamison, I said hello.”

“I will, sweetie. Bye now!”

I strolled down the road to Reverend Jamison’s church. I was a little nervous about what I was going to do, but in my heart, I felt it was the right thing. When I arrived there, they had already started and I could hear the choir singing.

*“♪ Go tell it on the mountain ♪ O’er the hills and everywhere ♪ Go tell it on the mountain ♪  
That Jesus Christ is born... ♪”*

“Sing it again, y’all!” exclaimed Reverend Jamison, moved by their words.

*“♪ Go tell it on the mountain ♪ O’er the hills and everywhere ♪ Go tell it on the mountain ♪  
That Jesus Christ is born... ♪”*

The congregation applauded.

“Let the church say, ‘Amen’.”

“Amen!”

“Let the church say, ‘Amen’.”

“AMEN!”

“I am going to begin a little differently this morning. I am going to start off with a verse, and I would like to get someone’s interpretation of what that means. Are all of you ready?”

“YES, REVEREND!!!”

*“Behold, I send you out as sheep amidst the wolves-”*

“Well, I don’t know about being a sheep, but I know a holy man in wolves’ clothing when I see one!”

Everyone stopped to look at me.

“Why, Sister Lockett, glad you could join us this morning!”

“You stand here, telling us to follow God’s word when you’re out doing the Devil’s work!”

“Whatever do you mean, child?”

“You are going to stand here in God’s temple and say that you did not fornicate? That you did not have a child out of wedlock? That you were not at the Hot Spot last Sunday night engaging in sinful pleasure?”

The congregation gasps in horror and disbelief.

“You ungrateful little trollop! How dare you come and say such lies about the Reverend?!” one elderly man replied.

“Let him answer the question!”

Reverend Jamison took a breath before finally speaking, “Yes, I was at the Hot Spot. The Lord called me there to save a young man from his evil ways. That was why I was there. The question we all should be asking is what Sister Lockett was doing there.”

“Yeah, what were you doing there?” another lady asked.

“I was there to pick up my boyfriend.”

“Well, you use to work there, didn’t you? Maybe you’ve gone back to hooking and tricking.” The lady decided.

“That’s not true! That’s not true at all!” I cried.

“Well, Sister Lockett stopped by my house. I invited her to teach her about the word of God. She saw a picture of Sheila, one of the underprivileged kids I’ve tried to help. I send Sheila and her mother funds overseas to assist with her education and other needs.”

“You came on to me that Wednesday night. You asked me to have sex with you!”

“Sister Lockett, you must be having delusions of your previous lifestyle,” crooned Reverend Jamison. “The dress you wore was quite revealing, and red does look good on you. You



attempted to charm me with your feminine wiles, but God told me to steer clear of temptation. I'm sorry you are upset that I refused you."

I look around at the faces of the congregation. Their eyes were filled with anger. Anger that I had said those things about Reverend Jamison.

"But I'm telling the truth!"

"Get out of here, you two-faced whore!" The lady yelled and threw her purse at me.

I heard yells and screams of rage as I made my way out of the church, feeling items stinging my arms, my back, and my legs.

After that day, I lost my job at the diner, and my boyfriend was expelled from college. Because of what I had done. I had turned against Reverend Jamison, the small town favorite. I was harassed endlessly until I had no choice but to leave town.

Now I only abide by two rules my mom told me- to believe in myself and to believe in God. To this day, I have never gone to church again.

THE END





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