

Tainted

Ladislav Goldberger

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When successful young executive Charles meets lovely grad student Lisa, they seem a perfect match. But as they fall deeper in love, Lisa worries that a past indiscretion could ruin her new happiness. When Charles begins working on a political campaign with someone from her past, Lisa's carefully buried secret threatens their seemingly rock-solid relationship.

In *Tainted*, author Ladislav Goldberger explores the ways in which the past never leaves us. Charles is the son of modest but hardworking parents, and he sees himself as completely different. He wants so much more than they have, and his ambition leads him to work in the high-powered world of New York. Yearning for power and advancement, he uses his marketing skills to consult on political campaigns. His past seems to drive him forward.

Lisa's past as the child of battling parents has left her with a deep craving for love and acceptance. Her parents will not help her pay for school, so Lisa does her best to cover the difference with grants and a part-time job. When a friend offers her the chance to make \$5000 in a weekend, Lisa allows herself to be persuaded. This one decision sets off a series of chain reactions that one day will threaten her happy, stable relationship with Charles.

Goldberger weaves the narratives of Charles and Lisa together with those of two pivotal figures in their lives—Lisa's friend Jen and multimillionaire Kevin. New York City provides the backdrop, and the horrific events of 9/11 serve as a catalyst that speeds the revelation of Lisa's past.

Goldberger's slightly florid style suits this baroque morality play. And make no mistake, this is a morality play, one in which even small sins come back to haunt the characters. Goldberger builds to the revelation of Lisa's past with a slow but implacable pace; even the rhythm of the prose suggests that Lisa's mistake will see the light of day.

A sort of world-weary pessimism permeates this story—certainly Lisa's punishment seems rather extreme given her crime. *Tainted's* ending is abrupt, leaving the reader to grapple with its implications. Is the past inescapable? Would Lisa's story have turned out differently had she been honest about her mistake, or was the mere fact that she sinned enough to damn her?

Ladislav Goldberger, a retired educator from Long Island, NY, now splits his time between South Florida and Vancouver, British Columbia. He is also the author of *Discordant Lives*.

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