

Games of the Heart

A novel

By Eva Shaw

See I am usually the one who solves problems, being that I'm a minister and all. Yes, you heard it right. I might not look like one, i.e., rounded on all the right edges and a propensity to wearing clothes showing a smidge of cleavage and it's true if you've heard that I have Victoria's Secret's site as my homepage. Like it or not, that's me, Pastor Jane Angieski. I'm fully licensed, fully educated and fully confused most of the time.

You're not the first, you know, to wonder how a flashy woman like me got into the ministry business. Most folks come straight out, they're so dumbfounded to find out I know the Good News backward, forward and well-done in the middle. My response? "You see, they have quotas. Recall affirmative action? Needed more women who had some curves and padding in the ranks and that's me," I say. The one who asks gets a glazed look and nods. Honestly? Hold on to something sturdy because here it comes:

During college, I worked in retail (see above Victoria's Secret reference), at a mortuary where I applied make up to the dearly departed, gave out contraceptives and condom at a free clinic in Watts, and did time asking, "Want fries with that?" Along the way, I made enough so I could head to UCLA for a master's in psychology because I'm outrageously curious about people. Honestly, a few days before graduation I went to a program on campus, because the AC in my apartment was broken and I knew there would be cake and coffee. The program was to recruit grad students into the ministry. I signed on the dotted line right then, attended seminary, graduated with honors, accepted an assistant minister gig straight out the door, and got kicked out because I worked with the cops in tracking down hoods in the hood where I was the pastor for this ghetto church.

The church council didn't mind I nabbed the bad guys looking like a lady of the evening who could do it all through the night. What they didn't like was that I appeared on the front of the *L.A. Times* in a hot pink leather miniskirt, strappy sandals that only enhanced the look and a blouse leaving little to the imagination of your Great Aunt Tillie. The story hit the national news, and wham, bam, thank you, ma'am, little old me was plastered and talked about on *60 Minutes*, MSNBC, Twitter, YouTube, and it then went viral. *Time* begged for an interview but better judgment snapped in. I declined, well, only because my denomination's district council put the brakes on that one. Besides, I don't always want to stay second fiddle in church hierarchy. I do have pride. I'd like to be known, someday, as an important minister, but not the television evangelist kind with those flapping eyelashes and hair like Marge Simpson. No offense, Marge, but it's not a good look for either of us.

The happy ending to the above knuckle-rapping was that the jerks who were dealing, drugging and pimping went to a "helping" place in California, clogging an overstuffed prison system even more, and I got thanked by getting my backside booted to Vegas. I wasn't exactly demoted, but I'm no longer a full pastor. These days if I should burp without say, "Pardon moi," the council knows. Hence the youth minister I'm filling in for left exact instructions so I wouldn't lead the teens on a slope that has flashing orange signs reading "Beware: Point of No Return."