

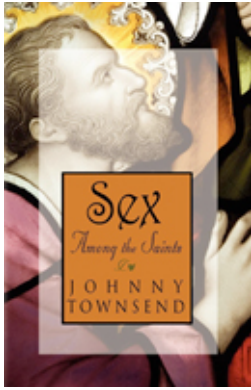


SEX

Among the Saints



JOHNNY
TOWNSEND



Sex lives of Mormons. Two women vie for the sexual affections of the same missionary. A farmer marries his best friend's mistress. A former missionary becomes an escort. A woman fantasizes about her sex life as one of Jesus' wives.

Sex Among the Saints

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Praise for Johnny Townsend's Books

In *Zombies for Jesus*, “Townsend isn’t writing satire, but deeply emotional and revealing portraits of people who are, with a few exceptions, quite lovable.”

Kel Munger, *Sacramento News and Review*

“Townsend’s stories are “a gay *Portnoy’s Complaint* of Mormonism. Salacious, sweet, sad, insightful, insulting, religiously ethnic, quirky-faithful, and funny.”

D. Michael Quinn, author of
The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power

Johnny Townsend is “an important voice in the Mormon community.”

Stephen Carter, editor of *Sunstone* magazine

“The thirteen stories in *Mormon Underwear* capture this struggle [between Mormonism and homosexuality] with humor, sadness, insight, and sometimes shocking details...*Mormon Underwear* provides compelling stories, literally from the inside-out.”

Niki D’Andrea, *Phoenix New Times*

“Townsend’s lively writing style and engaging characters make for stories which force us to wake up, smell the (prohibited) coffee, and review our attitudes with regard to reading dogma so doggedly. These are tales which revel in the individual tics and quirks which make us human, Mormon or not...”

A.J. Kirby, *The Short Review*

In *Sex among the Saints*, Townsend writes with a deadpan wit and a supple, realistic prose that's full of psychological empathy...he takes his protagonists' moral struggles seriously and invests them with real emotional resonance."

Kirkus Reviews

"The Rift" is a "fascinating tale of an untenable situation...a *tour de force*."

David Lenson, editor, *The Massachusetts Review*

"There are moments [in *The Abominable Gayman*] that are painful to read, steeped as we become in Elder Anderson's self-hatred and the constant onslaught of homophobia from his fellow missionaries. In the second half of the book, though, Anderson slowly emerges from the muck of self-pity. He has a companion who genuinely loves him, and before long he begins to love himself. The final story, 'Transfer Cookies,' ends...on a sweet note. The sense of relief as Anderson comes to terms with himself and with God makes the tension of the earlier stories worth it. And if that isn't the pinnacle of Mormon literature, I don't know what is."

Ben Christensen, *A Motley Vision*

In *Mormon Fairy Tales*, Johnny Townsend displays "both a wicked sense of irony and a deep well of compassion."

Kel Munger, *Sacramento News and Review*

"That's one of the reasons why I found Johnny Townsend's new book *Mormon Fairy Tales* SO MUCH FUN!! Without fretting about what the theology is supposed to be if it were pinned down, Townsend takes you on a voyage to explore the rich-but-undertapped imagination of Mormonism. I loved his

portrait of spirit prison! He really nailed it—not in an official doctrine sort of way, but in a sort of ‘if you know Mormonism, you know this is what it must be like’ way—and what a prison it is!

But flights of fairy-tale fantasy aren’t the only strength of Townsend’s work. He also captures the feelings and personalities of a variety of people on the fringes, fitting their lives into Mormonism and Mormonism into their lives.

Johnny Townsend has written at least ten books of Mormon stories. So far, I’ve read only two (*Mormon Fairy Tales* and *The Circumcision of God*), but I’m planning to read the rest—and you should too, if you’d like a fun and interesting new perspective on Mormons in life and imagination!”

C.L. Hanson, Latterdaymainstreet

“While [Townsend’s] many touching vignettes draw deeply from Mormon mythology, history, spirituality and culture, his book is neither a gaudy act of proselytism nor angry protest literature from an ex-believer. Like all good fiction, his stories are simply about the joys, the hopes and the sorrows of people... Townsend’s genre-bending [*Mormon Fairy Tales*] span geography, space and time, taking us from 19th century Salt Lake City to late-21st century Kansas City, or from ‘Spirit Prison’ to the U.N. where an alien has just arrived to explain that God does really live on the planet Kolob. For a lesser writer, this challenging range would press fiction into absurdity. But for Townsend—who has a bit of Philip K. Dick’s blood flowing through his veins—it only adds to the richness and variety of his developing oeuvre.”

Kirkus Reviews

Sex Among the Saints

Johnny Townsend

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The Pig Door

“Is your name Jeff Landers?” asked a young voice, a young man, on the other end of the phone.

“Yes,” said Jeff hesitantly. Was this another telemarketer? He was on the Do Not Call registry, but some calls still seemed to get through.

“Did you used to live in Houston about 20 years ago?”

“Yes,” Jeff said again, even more cautiously. Was this a bill collector? His finances had always been in good order. But he’d moved to Dallas eighteen years ago, when he was 25. Who could be looking for him there? Had someone stolen his identity and was causing trouble now?

“Did you ever give sperm at the Greendale clinic?”

What the hell was this? Jeff stared at the phone in his hand. Had the Church found out what he’d done? Was he about to get in trouble? He’d been disfellowshipped once back eighteen years ago for having sex with his girlfriend, which was one of the main reasons for getting away from Houston. And he’d been disfellowshipped here in Dallas a year later for having sex with his fiancée in this city before they married.

He’d tried to be good after their divorce and was really working hard to resist his new girlfriend until he could convince her to marry him, but it wasn’t easy. He certainly didn’t want to get in trouble now for donating sperm twenty years ago.

“Why would you need to know a thing like that?” asked Jeff.

“Well, if you did, then you’re my father.”

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Jeff was speechless. He looked at the phone again. Could this be real? Was he really talking to his son?

Jeff never had any children of his own. His girlfriend back in Houston had been a single mom with two kids and didn't want more children. When he started getting serious with her, he felt such a longing for children of his own that he decided to donate sperm, just so he could always feel that maybe somewhere out in the world was a kid with his genes.

"Are you there?" asked the young man.

"Y-yes, I'm here," said Jeff. "It might be me, but we'd have to do a DNA test before I'll say any more."

"Really? You'll do a DNA test? That's great!"

Had Jeff made a mistake in offering that so soon? Was this guy just after his money? Even if this was biologically his son, Jeff clearly had no financial obligations, did he? Besides, the boy must be almost an adult by now.

"Are you down in Houston?" Jeff asked.

"Yes, but you tell me when you want me to come up for a blood test, and I'll be there."

They talked just a couple more minutes. The young man said his name was Sweeney. It seemed an odd name, but Jeff didn't say anything. After he hung up, Jeff sat at his kitchen table, staring at the floor. When he'd moved to Dallas and eventually married Sherry, he still never fathered any kids. Sherry also had two kids and didn't want any more. They'd been married for 15 years, breaking up two years ago. Now he'd been dating Kristen for several months. She had two kids as well, so it looked like he was never going to have any children.

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Only now it seemed he'd had one eighteen years ago. It was kind of scary, but he hoped it might be true.

He wondered briefly if he'd get in trouble with the Church for having a child outside of marriage. But it was years ago, and it wasn't as if he'd actually had sex with the boy's mother.

Jeff heard a grunting noise and felt a nudge at his feet. Penelope was hungry. Jeff reached down and scratched behind Penelope's ears. He'd had the pot-bellied pig for two years now, since breaking up with Sherry. He'd thought for a while it might be his only real "child." Sherry's kids had never liked him and hadn't spoken to him once since the temple divorce. They attended a different Mormon congregation now and he never saw them anymore.

It was another two hours before Jeff could see Kristen for dinner. She always brought the kids, Tim, aged 8, baptized a month ago by Kristen's ex-husband, and Lizbeth, aged ten, already wearing sexy outfits at her age. When Jeff had said something to Kristen about it, she'd said, "They're my kids. Don't worry about it."

But they certainly seemed like Jeff's kids when the check came at the restaurant, or when it was movie night with Kristen and the kids. The children had even started bringing their friends along on movie night, and Jeff found himself paying for them, too.

They sat at Denny's for the buffet. Jeff only saw Kristen twice a week, and they ate out each time. Kristen was a flight attendant for American Airlines, where Jeff worked as a baggage handler. She said she was too tired to both go on a date *and* cook, so he'd have to take everyone to dinner if he wanted to see her.

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But he did want to see her, so they went to Denny's a lot.

Tonight, Jeff made an effort to ask the kids about their day, but they answered in monosyllables, and Jeff didn't have the energy to draw them out. Kristen, on the other hand, went on in detail about her day.

"First, the other crew and I decided we didn't want to serve alcohol today and deal with the money, so we told people there was a new policy that this was a non-drinking flight. One man insisted he'd flown on this flight just last week, and there was alcohol then. So I said the new rule just went into effect today. But he said he was going to call and complain, so we had to get out the alcohol just for him, and then other people saw us, and we had to let everyone buy drinks who wanted one. What a bother."

"Maybe it's better not to lie in the first place," Jeff suggested, smiling.

"Drinking alcohol is a sin. It's my duty to discourage it whenever I can."

"So that's the reason the other crew members didn't want to serve alcohol today?"

"Whose side are you on?"

"Oh, yours, always, sweetie." Jeff smiled again, but Kristen gave him an annoyed glance.

They were almost finished dinner when Kristen looked at her watch and then said in a bored tone, "And how was your day, Jeff?"

"Well," said Jeff, taking a deep breath. "I got a call from a man who claims he's my son."

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Kristen froze with her glass halfway to her lips. She looked at him quickly.

“I thought you had a vasectomy.”

“Well, I wasn’t born with one.” Jeff laughed.

“Oh, gross, Tim!” said Lizbeth, hitting her brother. “Don’t eat like a pig!”

Kristen ignored the fight and put her glass down. She looked at Jeff, her eyes narrowing. “If you have a kid, that puts things in a different light.”

“How do you mean?”

“It means you’re not all mine. I don’t want to have to share you.”

Jeff glanced briefly at the two kids, still fighting, but he didn’t say anything.

“You believe him?” Kristen asked.

Jeff shrugged. “I don’t know. I guess we’ll have to do a blood test.”

“Don’t open that door.” Kristen shook her head firmly. “Just refuse to see him. He’ll go away.”

“And if he *is* my son?”

“He’s not your responsibility. His mother never told you about him. You have other responsibilities now.”

Jeff didn’t know what to say. He’d never actually proposed, but every time he started hinting that he wanted to, Kristen would change the subject. Was she saying now she felt they were committed to each other?

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Kristen was a beautiful woman. She could have any man she wanted. She'd married once outside the temple, and she and her husband never did get sealed there because he could never stop drinking coffee. Kristen herself drank tea. She was drinking it tonight.

But Jeff wanted a temple marriage. He wanted to know he was going to be with his wife forever. Kristen could be a little harsh, but she'd had a hard life, abandoned by her father, who she only referred to as "the pig fucker," when she was ten. So Jeff was willing to cut her a little slack. She could also be quite pleasant to be with. They'd all play Sorry with the kids sometimes, or Clue, or Life. She always seemed to be at her best when she was in a playful mood. Jeff sometimes pushed her on the swing at the park or took her and the kids to jump on trampolines or took them to the waterpark. One weekend, he'd taken everyone down to Astroworld. He loved seeing Kristen smile. She seemed so sweet and innocent then.

"Come on. We're done. Take me home now. I'm getting a headache."

Jeff drove to Kristen's apartment, where she unlocked her door and let the kids go in. Then she turned to Jeff.

"Can I come in for a few minutes?"

"I have an early flight."

"Well, I have to be at work at 5:30."

"So you'd better get home and get to sleep."

Jeff leaned forward, but Kristen pulled back. "For God's sake, Jeff. Do I have to kiss you all the time just because you paid for dinner? You make me feel like a prostitute."

"You don't want to kiss me just because you like me?"

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“I don’t want to kiss you if I can’t know you’re all mine.” She turned around and went inside, closing the door behind her.

Jeff drove back home slowly, thinking about how to get Kristen to warm up to him. If he could just convince her he was really committed to her, that he wouldn’t leave her like her last husband did. If he could get her to understand he truly loved her, she’d relax and let the sweeter part of her nature take over. She was just mean sometimes now because she was afraid. If Jeff could only get her to understand there was nothing to be afraid of, she’d be fine.

Jeff took a cold shower, but as he lay in bed later, he still found himself fondling his penis. He’d had a vasectomy while he was with Sherry because she kept avoiding sex, afraid the condom would break. Still, he’d always hoped he could have it reversed.

But this penis, this very penis, may have already sired a child.

Jeff smiled, thinking about it. Then he kept stroking his member, as if to reward it. But soon he was tugging forcefully at it, and before long, he was sighing in relief.

He instantly felt guilty. He no longer believed masturbation was a terrible, terrible sin. But he didn’t want anything to keep him out of the temple if he and Kristen did finally decide to get married.

The next day at work, Jeff couldn’t help but look at some of his younger coworkers. Did his son look like any of them? That is, if it really was his son, he kept telling himself.

On his lunch break, Jeff called a clinic that could do the DNA test. Thank God, the appointment was only a week away.

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When he got home, he called Sweeney to see if the time was acceptable.

“I’ll be there.” Jeff could hear the smile in the boy’s voice. “Thanks!”

But Kristen was livid when she learned Jeff had made an appointment for the blood test. “You’re living your life in the past. You have to think of your future. You have other obligations now.”

“Obligations?”

“I don’t want to talk about it. I need to feel special. You’re not making me feel special.”

“Well, can I come over? You’re my pet, sweetie. I can make you feel special in person.”

“No,” she said. “You’re always causing trouble. Don’t talk to me again till you’re ready to put me first.”

She hung up, and Jeff felt a tremendous weight on his chest. Was he lousing things up just for some egotistical thrill at knowing he had sperm that worked? Was it really that important to have biological offspring? There were plenty of kids already here that needed tending. And this kid was probably close to 18. Why ruin what could be a lifelong relationship, an eternal relationship, just to see a kid who would probably at best only call twice a year even if he did turn out to be related? Was Jeff being a selfish pig to want both?

Jeff heard some grunting and looked down. Penelope was after some attention again. Jeff leaned over and scratched her back. Penelope was always good to him, no matter what. Why couldn’t people be like that?

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Jeff watched as Penelope ran off and pushed her way through the pet door to get outside. He'd installed the door after his divorce. He was lucky to have been able to keep the house, of course. He'd had to pay Sherry off, but this was his house, and he liked being here. It was true that it was a little lonely at times with just Penelope, but it had been lonely far too often even when Sherry and her kids were here.

No one was perfect, but Jeff understood Kristen wanting to feel special. So he decided on a plan. He set up his video camera and spent \$300 on flowers. He placed them all around the gas fireplace and then, wearing a rented tux, he turned on the camera and started talking.

“Kristen, you’re the best thing that ever happened to me. When you come home, all these flowers are yours.” He motioned around the room. Then he patted his chest once. “And *I’m* all yours, too,” he said. He got down on one knee and looked right at the camera, offering it a bouquet of roses. “Kristen, will you marry me?”

The next morning at the airport, Jeff pulled aside one of the other flight attendants that was scheduled for the same flight as Kristen. He explained that he wanted her to substitute his DVD for the regular movie they were going to show on their return trip, and she giggled when he told her it was a proposal, but she agreed.

By the time Kristen’s flight returned later, Jeff had finished his shift at work, gone home to clean up, and had put on the tux again. He was waiting at the airport with the roses when Kristen walked past security and into the main terminal.

Two other flight attendants were with her, and they were laughing when they saw Jeff. But one of them gave him a thumbs up sign as they moved off to the side to let Jeff

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approach Kristen in person. Jeff gathered his courage when he saw Kristen was smiling.

She came up to him, and he got down on one knee again and offered the flowers to her. "Will you marry me?"

Kristen smelled the roses and looked around to see everyone's reaction to the scene, enjoying the attention. "You'll always put me first?" she said.

"Always." He handed her a small box, which she took with a gleam in her eye. He couldn't quite gauge her reaction when she saw the engagement ring, but she carefully put it on her finger and nodded.

"Okay," she said. "I accept. Tomorrow I'll go pick out a wedding ring."

Jeff stood up and moved to kiss her. She put a hand up, though, and said, "How much are you willing to pay for the wedding ring?"

Jeff had already thought about it and knew he couldn't hesitate, even though he was going to offer spending more than he could really afford. "\$5000," he said confidently. He'd only spent \$600 on the engagement ring, but he knew she'd want to spend more on the permanent ring.

Kristen considered for a moment. "Okay," she said, smiling. Then she let Jeff kiss her. "And you might want to see about getting that vasectomy reversed," she whispered in his ear.

"Really?"

"I want *all* of you."

That kept Jeff on a high until Tuesday, when he was supposed to meet Sweeney at the doctor's office. He'd given

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Sweeney the address of the clinic, not sure he wanted this guy to know his home address just yet. When Jeff arrived at the office shortly before 11:30, he saw a young man already seated in the waiting area.

Jeff had brown hair now, but it had been sandy blond when he was younger, and the young man sitting there also had sandy blond hair. He was slim, like Jeff, but otherwise didn't look particularly like him. Still, he was a good looking kid, and for some strange reason, Jeff felt proud of that.

The young man looked up and smiled immediately. A sweet smile, thought Jeff.

“Sweeney?”

“Hi, Jeff! It's good to meet you.” He stood up and offered his hand, smiling. “I won't call you Dad till the results are back.” He laughed pleasantly.

“Did you have trouble finding the place?”

“I used Mapquest.”

“Sorry about the gas money. I know that's a long trip.”

“Oh, I hitchhiked. Just one old fat man who drove me the whole way, and all he wanted in return was a blow job.” Sweeney laughed again.

“What?”

“Oh, I didn't give him one, of course. How gross. I have my standards.”

Jeff looked at the young man, not knowing what to say to all that. He suddenly felt very protective of this boy and wanted to punch the old man for trying to take advantage of him. “Some people just wallow in filth, don't they?”

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“Oh, live and let live, I suppose. But I certainly wouldn’t have sex with a strange man in a car.” He smiled again. “I’m still a virgin, but I have to admit, when I found out a couple of months ago how I was conceived, I did go to the sperm bank and donate a couple of times.”

“Like father, like son, is that it?” Jeff smiled.

Soon they both had their blood drawn and were told it would be several days before the results were in. Jeff had to get back to work but asked Sweeney if he wanted to have dinner with him that evening.

“Sure! I’ll just do some sightseeing by bus and meet you at the restaurant. What time?”

“6:00.” Jeff paused. “But how about dinner at my place?”

“Your wife won’t mind?”

“Oh, I’m not married, though I did just get engaged.”

“Congratulations. That’s wonderful. I’m engaged, too.”

“And you’re still a virgin?” Jeff laughed. “Isn’t that a little retro?”

“You disapprove?”

“Oh, no. Kristen and I are waiting till we get married.”

“We are, too.”

What were the odds that in today’s world, Jeff would have a son who had any kind of moral standards at all? Maybe he could get him into the Church. Maybe they could be sealed together. He smiled again.

A couple of times that afternoon, Jeff’s coworkers had to ask him to stop whistling while he tossed bags around, but he

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was just in too good a mood. He hoped the DNA results matched.

Sweeney showed up right at 6:00, and Jeff gave him a tour of the house. Sweeney laughed when he saw Penelope burst through the pet door, but he petted her affectionately, and she seemed to like him, too. Not that she didn't like most people, of course. Though she never did seem to take to Kristen, he thought. Probably just jealous.

Jeff had the dinner almost ready before Sweeney arrived, so it didn't take long to get it on the table. But when he saw Sweeney's face, he grew concerned. "What is it?"

"You're serving pork chops," said Sweeney. "I should have told you earlier. I don't eat pork. I'm sorry."

"Are you Jewish?"

Sweeney nodded. "I'm not very observant, but I won't eat pork. This salad looks good, though. I'll be fine."

"You sure? I have vegetable soup in a can."

"No, no, I'm good. As a rule, I'm not very demanding."

They started eating, and Sweeney asked for Jeff's life story. He talked of his boyhood with three brothers, and of his days as a missionary in Thailand, and of his unsuccessful first marriage. He decided to omit the fact that he had a bit of a strained relationship with his own father. The man had often tried to humiliate him in front of others. "Can't you mow the lawn like a real man?" he'd say while Jeff's brothers watched. "Don't throw the ball to Jeff. He can't shoot." And that time they were in the sauna at the YMCA, and Jeff's towel had fallen off. His father had laughed and said, in front of two other men, "If it gets any smaller, Jeff, it'll just disappear." Jeff could never

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quite forgive his father for that one, and they didn't talk much these days.

But Jeff did tell the story of the time his father had sent his mother to a fat farm, not because he was upset with her weight, but because it bothered her so much. She'd actually gained two pounds while she was there, but when she returned, his father had made a fuss about how good she looked. He even had her go out and buy a new dress so they could have a professional portrait taken together.

Jeff told a few other pleasant anecdotes, and then he asked for Sweeney's story.

"An idyllic childhood, too," he said, and Jeff wondered if he was editing as well. "Though I was always getting in trouble at school."

"For what?"

"For punching kids who made fun of me."

"You were teased a lot?"

Sweeney shrugged. "Comes with the territory, I suppose. It wasn't as bad as getting kicked out of the house by my father two months ago."

Jeff paused with a half-eaten bite of pork chop in his mouth. He quickly swallowed. "Why on earth did he kick you out?"

"I told him Jeremy and I were engaged."

Jeff stared.

"When I told him I was gay, he told me I wasn't welcome there any more. That's when he told me how I was conceived, and I decided to look for you."

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“Where are you living? Are you doing okay?” Jeff wasn’t going to get sucked into supporting this stranger, but he still couldn’t help but feel concerned. This might really be his son.

“I’m staying with a friend. Not Jeremy,” he added quickly. “That would be too hard since we can’t get to California to be married for a few more months yet.”

Jeff looked at the boy, a sweet, attractive young man. He hated to see his life ruined by this filth. “You haven’t had sex at all with another man yet?”

“No.”

“Then don’t open that door. You can still find a good woman and have a good life.”

Sweeney’s eyes narrowed. “Are you going to kick me out of your life, too?”

Jeff looked down at his plate for a moment. “No,” he said slowly. “But I would like you to get some help. I can pay for a psychiatrist.”

Sweeney laughed. “I’m just fine, Jeff. Really. But thanks for the offer.”

Sweeney switched the subject then, talking about his work rehabilitating mentally retarded adults and his hope to get a degree in Special Education, to teach the kids nobody else wanted. Jeremy taught sign language, and taking a class in sign was how Sweeney had first met him.

Jeff offered Sweeney the spare bedroom but told him he’d have to leave early in the morning when Jeff left for work. Sweeney nodded, smiling.

It took Jeff a while to get to sleep. It was his worst fear. Having a kid who was making some very wrong decisions. But

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how could you be loving and supportive and yet try to guide someone to take the right path, too? Door number one led to one prize, but door number two led to a completely different one.

Jeff felt a pain he'd never felt before over any of his step-children. He'd truly tried to be a real father to the others, but somehow, this was different. He wanted to make everything right for Sweeney.

In the morning, Sweeney shook Jeff's hand and gave Penelope a scratch behind the ears. Jeff drove the boy to the interstate and then headed on to work. He moved about in a daze most the day, but he wasn't whistling. He called Kristen on his lunch break and left a message on her machine.

When he saw the light flashing on his own when he got home, he smiled in anticipation. Kristen hardly ever called him. She must finally be loosening up.

"Hey, Jeff," said the machine. It was Sweeney. "I'm afraid I got in trouble. I was picked up for hitchhiking. Could you come get me at the police station?"

Jeff closed his eyes and groaned. What in the world was he being caught up in?

Jeff drove down to the police station Sweeney had given him the address for, and soon they were on their way out of the building. Sweeney literally ran when he got to the door. Jeff caught up with him outside.

"I normally like a man in uniform," Sweeney said. "But that police officer was a real jerk."

"Let me take you to the bus station," said Jeff wearily. "I'll get you a ticket."

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“I’m sorry, Jeff. I didn’t mean to cause any trouble. You must be regretting you ever met me.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

Jeff saw Sweeney off and then drove back home slowly. There was still no message from Kristen, and Jeff didn’t feel like calling her again. But he thought more about that vasectomy reversal. Maybe it wouldn’t be a bad idea to have more than one kid. Maybe at least one of them would turn out okay. Mormons weren’t supposed to gamble, but there seemed to be some value in hedging his bets.

So the next day on his break at work, Jeff called a doctor and made an appointment for an evaluation. He was excited that the appointment was only two days away. God obviously knew he needed some good news right now and was giving it to him. Heavenly Father was a good father.

That evening, Jeff picked Kristen up so she could show him the ring she’d picked out. They went to the mall and stopped in what looked to Jeff like a dangerously expensive jewelry store. Even a plain band here probably cost \$2000. Kristen might have gone over her limit a little. But if she had found something she liked here, it had to be reasonably modest in design to fall within the range he’d given her. Jeff was a little surprised that she was going to show some restraint. Tasteful but simple. He felt bad for doubting her.

Kristen gave her name to the saleswoman, and she went immediately to the ring Kristen had selected earlier. When the woman put it on the counter, Jeff felt he’d been kicked in the groin.

“Do you like it?” asked Kristen.

“How much is that?”

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“Jeff, you said you’d always put me first. How can you be so crass?”

“How much is that?”

“This ring is \$20,000,” the saleswoman said. “That’s with a 20% discount. A steal.”

Jeff’s knees almost buckled. “Kristen, I absolutely can’t afford something like that.”

“But it’s the ring I want. This is the marriage that’s going to take, and I want something to show it’s permanence.”

“Emma Smith didn’t have a ring like that.”

“This is the ring I want,” she repeated. “If you’re serious about committing yourself to me, you need to put your money where your mouth is.”

Jeff sighed and tried to bargain with the store manager. “Trying to Jew us down?” asked the manager, smiling politely.

“No, I’m trying to Mormon you down.” He was able to get the price reduced to \$10,000, but rather than feel good about it, Jeff was still miffed that he was spending twice what was already an overly generous amount. He did want Kristen to feel loved, and he understood that this was symbolic for her rather than just an aesthetic decision. But he still felt miffed.

As they left the store, Kristen held onto Jeff’s arm and whispered in his ear, “Now you have too much invested in me to ever leave me.” She giggled to show she was joking, but somehow, it didn’t seem funny to Jeff.

When he got home, Jeff took his mother’s wedding ring out of its box and looked at it. It was a modest ring, and he’d known Kristen would never go for taking that one. Jeff had always loved his mother, who’d been nothing but good to him. He’d

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been devastated when she died five years earlier of breast cancer. So he always kind of hoped he'd have a son or daughter he could pass the ring on to.

Now he took out his digital camera and took several pictures of the ring and posted it on eBay. He wouldn't get enough to make even a dent in the extra \$5000 he'd just spent, but he had to start somewhere. He'd have to start working overtime more often, too.

Jeff sat glumly looking at his computer screen, wondering what was happening to him. He was getting married and maybe about to have a good life for a change, and yet somehow, he didn't feel happy. Was he just upset about Sweeney?

Well, he didn't know yet if Sweeney were even actually his son, but there was the possibility that this was the only child he'd ever have, and that his DNA stopped right there. Even if Sweeney really did donate sperm and it was used, Jeff would never know his grandchild. The chances that that child would look for Sweeney twenty years from now were pretty slim, and even if he did, Jeff would be in his 60's by then. What kind of sense of family could you have under those circumstances? He certainly didn't want to go through that door. He'd simply have to try harder with Kristen's kids.

The doctor took a biopsy from one of Jeff's testicles to see if there were viable sperm, and then he did an MRI of Jeff's groin. After looking at it carefully, said, "It looks promising, Jeff. I think we can do it."

"I told them fifteen years ago I might want to reverse it one day, so I think they were extra careful."

"Well, there are no guarantees, and fifteen years is pushing it, but I have a cancellation four days from now. That's

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normally too soon, because we have to make sure you haven't taken any aspirin or ibuprofen for at least two weeks. Have you?"

"No, I hardly ever take pain killers. Nothing in a couple of months."

"Do you think you're up then for some minor surgery that soon?"

Jeff nodded, and they set up the schedule. There was no time to think, but you needed to take advantage of an opening when you had the chance.

When he got home from work, Jeff saw there was a message on his machine. It was his Dad. He wished he could call him and talk to him about everything that was happening, ask for some advice. And his father had seemed to make an effort at being nicer to him these last few years.

But he deleted the message and went to fix something to eat.

Two days later, the DNA results were back. Jeff didn't know if he should be happy or sad. He called Sweeney in Houston.

"Hi, Sweeney. How are you, son?"

"Son? You mean it?"

"That's right. I just got the results."

"That's fabulous news. You'll have to send me your picture so I can put it in my wallet. I'll send you one of me, too. That is, if you want one."

"Yes, I want one."

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“I’ll send you one of me and Jeremy together, too. After all, in four months and three days, he’ll be your son-in-law.”

Jeff felt as if he’d been kicked in the stomach. Even after the revelation that he had a gay son, it had never occurred to him that there might be even more included in the package.

“Sweeney, I know after only four minutes as your father, I’ve hardly earned the right to give you advice.”

“But...”

“But I think you’ll have a better life if you don’t behave like an animal.” Jeff was afraid that sounded too harsh, but how could he stand by and let his son open the door to hell and rush right in?

Sweeney laughed. “I *do* behave like an animal,” he said, still laughing. “I just read a book from the library called *Biological Exuberance*. It talks about how there is documented homosexuality in over two hundred other species.”

“Really?” Jeff was intrigued despite himself.

“Even pigs,” said Sweeney. “Your Penelope might be a lesbian.” He laughed again, that sweet laugh, Jeff noticed. “But maybe I shouldn’t go there.”

They talked about other things then and stayed on the phone another 45 minutes. Sweeney was really a pleasant young man. Jeff wasn’t sure he could accept the homosexuality, but he didn’t understand how the boy’s other father could just kick him out, either, or how his mother could have permitted it.

But after everything that had happened this week, it was a relief to be back in church on Sunday. Kristen didn’t have to work that day, so he picked her and the kids up, and they were all able to sit together. Kristen went around showing everyone

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her engagement ring and describing in detail the wedding ring she'd soon have. All the women were congratulating her, and all the men were congratulating him. And they were all teasing the kids about having a "new father."

The bishop, a heavysset man, pulled Jeff aside. "We'll need to set up an interview to make sure your temple recommend is still valid. Wouldn't want you to find the temple doors closed in your face." He chuckled. "So let's set up a time to talk in the next couple of weeks. You know *my* door is always open to you."

Jeff started worrying again about getting in trouble for fathering a son, and having a gay son to boot. Would he get in trouble for not disowning him?

The surgery later that week took just over two hours, performed on Jeff as an outpatient, and he had one of his home teachers from church give him a ride home afterward. He'd had the doctor take a sample of his sperm during the procedure and freeze it, just in case the surgery wasn't successful. His scrotum was very tender, and he was going to have to wear a jockstrap at all times for at least a month, and while at work for a month more. He decided to wear it on the outside of his garments, not wanting anything to come between him and his Mormon underwear.

The surgery cost Jeff another \$8500, so he felt a little guilty. His credit card was maxed to the limit, all because he was wasting so much money on vanity. He didn't *need* more biological children. Even if he and Kristen wanted a child together, they could always adopt. His cousin had adopted a baby through the Church. They could, too.

Jeff didn't see Kristen for a couple of days. He was afraid he'd get aroused if he saw her, and it was too soon to let that

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happen. He wasn't supposed to even ejaculate for a month, so he certainly didn't want to start having erections for a while.

Kristen called him on Friday night. "Have you forgotten about me, Jeff? You aren't getting cold feet, are you? You can always warm them up on that damn pig of yours, can't you?" She laughed, but somehow, the joke didn't seem funny.

"No cold feet," said Jeff. "You and the kids want to go to dinner tonight?"

Jeff didn't mention the surgery to Kristen over dinner. He didn't know why. He'd tell her soon, of course, but not yet. And he didn't tell her about the DNA results, either. She needed this time right after their engagement to think about herself. Jeff felt a little funny, though, about keeping such important information from her. Weren't you supposed to share everything with your partner? Well, he would, soon enough. Just not yet.

Jeff tried extra hard to connect to the kids tonight, but Tim looked sullen, and Lizbeth yawned right in his face when he asked her a question. What was he doing wrong?

It was ten days after the surgery before Jeff could go back to work. So much for getting overtime. He was afraid of pulling or tearing something and wanted to be careful, yet he was never a loafer at work and couldn't help but toss more than his fair share of bags once he got back.

That night, Jeff finally decided to tell Kristen about the surgery, over supper at Denny's. "Well, that's wonderful, Jeff. Does it take right away? Does it hurt?"

"Yes, it's still tender. And the doctor said it could be three months before any sperm appear in the semen." He felt a little funny saying all this in front of the kids, but they seemed oblivious. "It should be okay by the time we get married."

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“And just when do you think that will be? You haven’t given me a date yet.”

Jeff hesitated. “Well, it depends on how long the bishop will want you to wait after you start obeying the Word of Wisdom.” He looked at the glass of tea next to Kristen’s plate.

“So you’re going to use this as an excuse not to get married? That’s pretty low. The bishop doesn’t need to know everything.”

“I’ll know. The marriage won’t be valid in God’s eyes if we’re not worthy to go to the temple.”

Kristen made a disgusted snort. “Okay, okay, Mr. Holier Than Thou. I’ll stop drinking tea.” She picked up her water glass and took a sip of water. “Jeez.”

Jeff smiled. “I’ll talk to the bishop this week and see what kind of timeline we’re looking at.”

Kristen’s eyes narrowed slightly, and then she looked off at a waiter walking by. “Whatever.”

Jeff hated to see Kristen upset, but since she was already mad, he decided he may as well tell her all the bad news at one time, and he knew she’d see the next part as bad, too. “You never asked,” he said, “but I got the DNA results back the other day.”

Kristen quickly looked at him again. “Yeah?”

“It looks like Sweeney really is my biological son.”

Kristen slammed her fork on the table, and the kids jumped. “You are not to see that boy again! I forbid it!” She took a deep breath and put her palms flat on the table. “He’ll come up with some sad story and try to suck all your money away. I know the type. He’ll have you wallowing in pity for him. I won’t have it.

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He'll distract you from your real family, which is us. We've known you longer than he has. You belong to us, not to him."

"I promised I'd always put you first, but that doesn't mean he can't be somewhere on the list."

"We need to go now. I'm getting a headache."

Jeff drove them home, and after the kids went inside, Kristen stayed with him at the door for a moment. "You know I love you, don't you?" he asked.

"I'm not sure I believe you."

"Doesn't the ring prove it?"

"That's just money."

"What do you need me to do?"

"I need you to close the door on your past and focus on your future."

Jeff didn't say anything. Then Kristen moved forward and kissed him slowly. She pressed her body against him, and for the first time, he felt her hand groping his manhood. He tried to pull back, but she had her other arm across his back. Within seconds, Jeff had an erection, and he felt terribly embarrassed.

Then she squeezed his sac, and he grunted in pain.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot it's still sore."

"It's okay."

"I'll see you in a couple of days. You go home and think about what I said. I need to know you love me. You do things for people you love that you know will make them happy."

Jeff sat on his sofa when he got home, staring at the floor. He thought Kristen was being unreasonable, but he remembered

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Abraham. He'd been asked to sacrifice Isaac to please God. He hadn't had to go through with it, but he didn't know that at the time. He had to be willing to do it, he had to accept the demand.

Jeff picked up the phone and called Sweeney.

"Hi, Dad."

"How're you doing? They ever give you any hassle at work for missing a couple of days when you were up here?"

"No, my boss is cool. I told her about your pet pig. Now she's thinking of getting one, too."

"It's nice to be a leader in the really important things in life."

Sweeney laughed. It was such a sweet laugh, Jeff thought.

"I know I'm being kind of pushy, Jeff, but I was wondering if next month I could come up for a couple of days. I'd like you to meet Jeremy. He's Jewish, too, so no pork. He's asked his rabbi to perform a commitment ceremony after we get back from California. I certainly don't expect you to come to California, but I did hope you could make it to the commitment ceremony here in Houston. But first I'd like to give you and Jeremy a chance to meet each other. Is it okay if we come up?"

How was Jeff going to tell Sweeney he couldn't see him anymore? He didn't want all this perversion in his life. And he had to be good to Kristen.

It was like pulling off a band-aid. You just had to do it.

"Sure, you guys can come up any time."

Sweeney told him more about his week, and they talked about this and that for another thirty minutes. He seemed so easy to talk to, and he always asked about Jeff, too, what his

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hobbies were, what shows he liked, what kind of music he listened to, how things were going with Kristen. Thinking about it now, Jeff realized he couldn't remember if Kristen had ever asked him about his hobbies. Jeff liked to collect old, vintage photographs. There was something pleasant about seeing all those quaintly dressed people in their sepia tones, and wondering if they were related to him, if there was another whole world he might be connected with.

Jeff had dutifully done his genealogy as he was commanded to do, and he'd gone to the temple to do work for many of his ancestors. He loved being baptized for them, but it was even more fun doing the marriages and the sealings, connecting people together throughout the centuries, making everyone into one huge family.

He could never be sealed to Sweeney, though, if Sweeney was both gay and Jewish. How could he really feel connected to this boy if there was always going to be that huge gap?

Jeff hung up after their conversation, feeling more confused than ever. He called and left a message for the bishop about setting up an interview for next week, and then he let Penelope get in his lap while he scratched her back.

The interview went well. The bishop wasn't upset that Jeff had donated sperm so many years ago, and he thought Jeff could be a positive influence in the young man's life, as he'd been with Kristen by getting her to give up tea.

A month after the surgery, Jeff was too curious to wait any longer and masturbated one night after dropping Kristen off, shooting onto his chest. Everything seemed to work okay, and he breathed a big sigh of relief and sent up a prayer of gratitude. "Heavenly Father, thanks for opening a new door in my life."

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Sweeney and Jeremy came to stay a couple of days the following week, and Jeff found himself liking Jeremy despite his better judgment. He tried to talk them into just staying platonic friends, but Jeremy took Sweeney's hand and said, "Do you just want to be platonic friends with Kristen forever?"

Jeff didn't know what to say to that.

"Jeremy wants to get in my back door."

"I need your man pussy."

"I can hardly wait."

"Uh, guys, you aren't alone in the room."

"Sorry, Jeff."

"No one thinks Maria von Trapp was a slut for having sex with her husband. And I'm not a slut for wanting to have sex with mine."

"Okay, okay. Let's talk about something else. How long have you been signing, Jeremy? How did you get interested in that?"

Jeff tried to get Kristen to have dinner with him and Sweeney, but she hung up the phone when he suggested it. He called her a couple of days later to see if he could make it up to her. "Want to go see a movie tonight? The new Harry Potter is playing. We could bring the kids, too."

They went to the Cineplex, and everyone seemed to have a good time. Kristen even let Jeff hold her hand throughout most of the movie. Then he drove them home, and the kids ran inside while Kristen stayed with Jeff at the door. "I was thinking of making an appointment at the Dallas temple for the 25th of the month after next," said Jeff. "Does that sound like a good day for a wedding?"

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“Oh, do we have to get married in Dallas? Our temple is so plain. Can’t we go to a pretty one? It’s not like we can’t get good flights.”

“Where would you like to get married?”

“I think the Hawaii temple is pretty.”

“Okay, I’ll see what I can arrange.”

“You’re not still planning to go to Sweeney’s Jewish wedding, are you?”

“I’m thinking about it.”

“You’re just condoning their deplorable lifestyle. If you encourage them to sin, you’re guilty, too.”

“I know. I’ve thought about all that. But what can you do? You can’t live other people’s lives for them. You can’t stop loving someone because they do something you don’t like.”

“I could.”

“Kristen, he’s my son. I love him. Don’t you love your kids even when they’re not perfect?”

“My kids are angels! Your kid is a dirty animal! You’re being nice to him just to upset me. You don’t really care about him, or you’d have tried to find *him*. You just have some juvenile macho need to think your sperm is better than other men’s.”

“Kristen, he’s a part of my family.”

“No, he’s not. He’s a complete stranger. Are you’re mean for putting me through this.”

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“You’ll feel better when we have a child of our own. Then you’ll be glad I’m not the kind of father you had, someone who will abandon his own kid.”

“You’re a beast.”

She went inside and slammed the door.

Jeff drove home slowly and sat on his sofa for a while, staring at the floor and scratching his ears absentmindedly. Maybe marrying Kristen wasn’t such a good idea, after all. Maybe he was wrong to think she’d eventually calm down. Maybe she would never come around. Maybe she was just a bitch.

Jeff immediately felt ashamed for judging her. No one was perfect, he realized, and he was trying her beyond her abilities right now. He had to be patient.

He called Kristen, and she answered on the second ring. “I think we ought to call off the engagement for a while,” he said. “Just till things get settled.”

Kristen hung up the phone.

Jeff walked slowly to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. It was time for the hard stuff. He took out a 16-ounce bottle of Coke and opened it. He kept the bottle in there for emergencies, for when he needed the forbidden caffeine. He turned the radio to a smooth jazz station and sat on the sofa, thinking. Penelope snuffled around his feet, and he patted her on the back for a moment.

Finally, around 10:30, Jeff trudged off to bed. 5:30 would come around soon enough. He had a hard time falling asleep, but sometime later, perhaps around midnight, he thought he heard something in the living room. It didn’t sound like

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Penelope, and Jeff tensed up. Had someone broken in? He had a gun, but he didn't know if it was loaded. What was he going to do?

He heard another noise, and then he saw a shadow in the doorway. His heart jumped in his throat.

The shadow moved toward him, and Jeff felt an almost uncontrollable urge to scream like a girl.

"I'm going to show you what you're missing."

It was Kristen, and she slipped into the bed next to Jeff, pulling his hand onto her naked breast.

"How did you get in here?"

"I crawled through the pig door."

"You're naked."

"My clothes are in the bedroom doorway. You want me to put them back on?" She put his hand on her crotch, and Jeff could feel the soft moistness.

"Oh my god."

Kristen crawled up on top of Jeff and pulled his T-shirt up over his head. Then she unstraddled him and pulled his shorts off, too. His penis was pointing directly skyward.

"I see you want me to stay."

Jeff never even thought about a condom until after they were finished, when Kristen said, "I should be ovulating now. If I get pregnant, you'll want to marry me before I start showing."

"Oh, my god, we're going to hell."

"No, we're getting married in the temple. And you're going to put me first, and our baby, just like you said."

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“I’ll lose my temple recommend. I’ll be disfellowshipped.”

“Not if you keep your mouth shut.”

Jeff suddenly remembered that the doctor said it might be three months after the surgery before he had much sperm in his semen. He hoped it was true.

“You need to leave now.”

“If you make a fuss, I’ll tell everyone you seduced me.”

Jeff looked at her in the dim light. He seemed to see her very clearly for the first time. This woman was just a low, unclean animal.

“You need to leave now.”

“Just like a man. You come, and then all you want to do is roll over and go to sleep. I don’t know what I ever saw in you.”

Jeff stood up and pulled his garments back on, even though he knew he wasn’t worthy to wear them any more. How could Heavenly Father love a person like him?

Kristen stood up, too, and started putting her clothes back on. “You’re not even any good,” she said savagely, zipping up her pants. “And you have a little dick, too!”

Better than having a small soul, Jeff thought, but he didn’t say anything. He turned on the light, and Kristen hurriedly pulled on her blouse. Jeff walked out to the living room and waited for her. He was just about to unlock the front door when Kristen stalked over and came right up to him.

“No wonder you have a faggot son. You’re not much of a man yourself. God only knows why your wife didn’t leave you sooner.”

Jeff looked at her calmly but didn’t say anything.

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“So now you’re not speaking to me? You have a bigger pussy than I do. I’m going to tell the bishop I came over to discuss our wedding, and you put something in my drink and hog-tied me and raped me. I’ll get you in trouble.”

Jeff pointed wearily toward the back door.

“If I go out that door, I’m not coming back.”

He kept pointing, and she clenched her jaws and stomped to the door. “The deadbolt’s locked. Unlock this door so I can leave.” She glared at him.

This time Jeff did speak. “You can go out the way you came in.”

Kristen’s face turned pink, and Jeff thought she was going to hit him. But instead she got down on her hands and knees and forced her way back out through the pet door.

Jeff left the lights on and went back to his bedroom. He got down on his knees and apologized to God, but when he stood back up, he thought maybe Kristen was right about one thing. He didn’t particularly feel he needed to talk to the bishop. Now that Kristen was out of his life, he somehow felt clean again. He could simply tell that God was okay with him. He climbed back into bed and was asleep within minutes.

The next day after work, Jeff got online and found a site for PFLAG, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. They met once a month, it turned out, at a church not too far away. They would meet next week. Jeff marked it on his calendar.

He sat on the sofa and opened the box with the new wedding ring and looked at it for a few minutes.

Well, he was prepared now if he ever did get married again, he thought.

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Or maybe, he considered, turning the ring so that it sparkled in the light, maybe Sweeney and Jeremy would adopt a child, and he could give his grandchild the ring one day.

Jeff picked up the phone and called Houston.

“Hi, Dad! How’re you doing?”

“Oh, I’m fine. And you guys?”

“We’re good, too. Trying to decide what neighborhood we want to live in once we get married and can share an apartment.”

Jeff thought for a moment.

“You will come visit us, won’t you?”

“Yes,” said Jeff. “But I was wondering. If you guys wanted to find jobs up here, you could stay in the house with me for a year or so, rent-free, so you could save up for a down payment on a home of your own. There’s plenty of room here.”

There was silence on the other end of the phone.

“Sweeney? You there?”

“Yes, Jeff.” There was another pause. “You know, Jeremy’s been telling me how as gays we really have to think about the difference between biological family and chosen family.” He paused again. “But sometimes, they turn out to be the same thing.”

“Well, you guys think about it for a while and then let me know.”

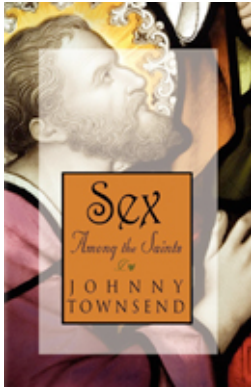
“We will, Jeff.”

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They talked for another half hour, about nothing of any real importance, Jeff rubbing Penelope's back as they chatted. After they hung up, Jeff turned the radio to some smooth jazz.

It wasn't good for man to be alone, he thought. But even if you weren't married, you were never really alone if you had someone in your life who you loved.

Jeff picked up the phone and dialed his father.



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