



THE
TYRANNY
OF
SILENCE

JOHNNY TOWNSEND



An Artificial Intelligence tries to lead Mormons astray. A bereaved widow listens to the radio hoping to hear love songs from her departed husband. A high school teacher is stalked by one of her students. An ex-Mormon earns a living selling Mormon underwear online to non-members. A young man fakes a two-year mission. The Church reels after a leak that children of gay couples can no longer participate in its saving rituals and ordinances. Don't miss author Johnny Townsend's other popular titles as well!

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Johnny Townsend

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A Knife to the Heart

Processing equity loans was a challenge under the best of circumstances. Patricia had been thrown into the Mortgage department of the credit union when her teller position was eliminated. The company had been good enough not to kick her into the street but instead help her find something else to do. She started out simply logging and filing trailing documents—Deeds of Trust, Notes, and other items. Eventually she began training as an equity processor. At the time, she didn't even know what escrow meant. Or what qualified as a strong credit score.

Reggie had taken care of all the money issues.

When he'd grown ill, instead of spending more time with him, Patricia had been forced to leave the house and find a job of her own. Then when he'd fallen into his most critical state, she'd been forced to switch positions and concentrate on training for her new job.

And then he'd died, the day after Patricia's first month's loan goals were tabulated. Two hundred thousand dollars short, so she'd only taken one day off to mourn, afraid of being fired.

"Patricia," said Rodney, the equity closer, "this loan is Ready to Draw Docs, and the insurance binder still isn't in yet."

She'd been processing now for a little over a year, and Rodney had done nothing but complain the entire time. "I'll follow up with the insurance company," she said.

“That’s not good enough. You know I don’t like it when loans go to signing and all the docs aren’t in.”

Patricia looked at her underwriter, Mark, one desk over. He was rolling his eyes. Sometimes, he commiserated with her, and sometimes with Rodney, so Patricia never knew where she stood with him. Mark shaved his head, and her gaze was always drawn to the deeply indented scar on his scalp from his car accident a decade before. “That’s on the loan originator,” she replied, turning back to Rodney. “It’s in the Conditions that they aren’t to sign till the binder is in. I can’t hold up processing waiting on a binder.”

Rodney stood up and walked in a huff over to the file cabinet next to the printer. He grabbed a red Twizzler out of the jar and slapped the plastic lid back on. He’d grown up on Long Island riding in equestrian shows. He was over forty, rail thin, with a big nose. He moaned every day about trying to find the right girl, but he was always so prissy Patricia had thought he was gay. She couldn’t imagine either a man or a woman who would want him. “I’m going to report you if you keep doing this,” he said. He took a savage bite of his Twizzler.

Patricia looked at her computer screen. Another new loan had just popped up. She could adequately handle two or three new loans a day, but six, seven, sometimes even ten or more loans were being submitted, day after day. She closed her eyes. “Reggie, why did you leave me?” she whispered.

At least Heavenly Father had been good enough to wait until their two kids had finished college. She supposed that was kind of Him. Mary, in Colorado now, was married with one child, and Clark was working in California and soon to be engaged. Patricia was alone in Seattle, fifty-five, with another ten years of this drudgery ahead of her.

Had work been drudgery for Reggie, too?

She'd never really thought about it.

Patricia turned back to her new loan and looked at the Notes to see if the loan purpose had been entered yet. Then she checked the Liabilities screen and Real Estate Owned screen to make sure they were filled out accurately. They never were. Of the thirteen loan originators in various branches, only one came close to preparing his loans correctly before submitting them to her. She tinkered with the various fields now and hit Save. Next came checking the Automated Value Model so she could verify the Loan to Value was correct, which affected whether or not the rate was correct. At that point, Patricia could finally generate Disclosures and put them in the mail. She technically had three days to do this step, but she tried to take care of it on the first day. If she didn't, by day three there would be two dozen loans to disclose.

Suddenly, Patricia stopped moving, her hands poised over the keyboard. From the beginning, her manager had agreed to let her turn the radio on softly at her desk, and "You're Still the One" came drifting now to her ears. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Reggie never failed to send her messages to remind her he still loved her. They'd been married in the Provo temple while attending Brigham Young University, so theirs was an eternal marriage. The words "till death do you part" didn't exist in Mormon ceremonies because death wasn't the end of anything, much less true love sealed with Heavenly Father's approval.

This past year, Reggie had sent Patricia message after message as she slaved away at her equity loans. "You're Every Woman in the World." He wasn't looking in the Spirit World for more wives. "Eternal Flame." His love for her would never

die, even while they were apart. “Love Will Keep Us Together.” They were still a couple, even if she went to bed alone every night.

Patricia checked the Virtual Loan Folder to see if the loan originator had saved any documents yet. She blinked in surprise. There was a tax assessment *and* a tax bill. So many of the originators only saved one or the other, but she really needed both. There was a first mortgage statement also, showing their first was escrowed. That was always a relief. It meant Patricia didn’t have to add taxes and insurance into the liabilities, and, more importantly, it meant there was no danger of having to escrow the loan, always a pain in the butt.

“Patricia,” said Mark, “do you have a second?”

“What’s up?”

“I’m underwriting this loan you just sent me, and you’ve omitted one of the liabilities. It’s \$300 a month. That’s going to ruin his Debt to Income when I add that back in.”

“The member’s son pays for that loan. She just cosigned on it, but he makes all the payments. I saved six months of bank statements showing that. It’s all in the Notes.”

Mark frowned but returned to his computer. He challenged Patricia on everything, which she supposed was his job, but it could be annoying. It wasn’t as if she didn’t make any mistakes, of course, like that time she ignored the fact that the property in question was on Indian land. She simply didn’t know that was an issue. There were always new things like that cropping up. It was just that Mark seemed to take delight in catching her in some error. He complained all the time when Rodney caught

him in an error, of course. People only thought about themselves.

And then there was Joseph, the compliance officer, across the room. It was certainly his job to make sure there were no mistakes, but when Patricia had been out on her annual vacation for a week last month, he'd made a point of writing in all her loan files, "Disclosures not sent out by the processor before the third business day. So I generated disclosures and mailed them."

Now, if he was going to go to the trouble of handling the disclosures for her, why did he wait until after they were already late, and then go out of his way to criticize her performance? Especially when he knew she was physically incapable of addressing the issue. It just seemed petty. But then, he also grumbled when it rained. In Seattle. He was in his thirties, obese and bald, and always talked about how silly his girlfriend was. There was no doubt he was bright, but Patricia expected he let his girlfriend know it pretty often.

Reggie had always made Patricia feel special. Back when he was working, he took her out to dinner once a week. Another night each week, he'd cook the meal himself. And on weekends, no matter how exhausted he might be, he always made a point of helping with the laundry or the grocery shopping. He laughed when she left a trail of cookies from the sofa to the bedroom. He clapped when she learned "Give Said the Little Stream" in French, the language of his mission. He stayed by her side while they put together 1000-piece puzzles of cats, even though he was allergic and could never have the actual animal in the house.

And he never complained about work. In fact, Patricia wasn't exactly clear on what he'd actually done. It was his job to have a job, just like she vacuumed and dusted every week.

But then, he also helped out with the dusting and vacuuming once in a while, too.

He even took care of himself most of the time he was ill those last several months. Only once did he ask Patricia to go out in the middle of the night to a 24-hour drugstore and pick up some Aspercreme for his back.

His back was sore a lot near the end. The doctors refused to prescribe morphine. But Reggie never cried.

Except when he told Patricia he loved her.

Those first weeks and months after Reggie died, Patricia threw herself into her job. Learning all the ins and outs of the new position kept her mind occupied. Perhaps too occupied. She shoved down a quick can of soup most nights and then plopped into bed by 7:30. But no matter how much she longed for sleep, she always made sure to listen to her favorite radio station for at least half an hour each evening. She wanted to keep a conversation going with Reggie.

He told her about “The Power of Love.” He promised her that in the Celestial Kingdom, they’d still be “Slow Dancin’...Swaying to the Music.” That they’d “Always” be together.

After one particularly rough day at work, Patricia almost didn’t turn on the radio at all before bed. She forced herself to do it, though, and the first song to play was “Don’t Forget Me When I’m Gone.”

She never made that mistake again.

Patricia kept looking through the Virtual Loan Folder. She was downright shocked to find that the loan originator had

already saved income. Sometimes, the loan was almost ready for underwriting, and she was still waiting on income. This was a key point, as she couldn't manually calculate DI until after those docs were fully verified. And as she'd unhappily discovered three months into her new job, the computer program didn't always calculate Debt to Income accurately, so a manual calculation was essential.

Patricia wrote down the hourly rate the member earned, multiplied by 40 and then by 52 and finally divided by 12. The figure the loan originator had written in the Income field was slightly off, but not by much. She corrected it and then immediately put the loan into Processing. Once in that stage, the originators couldn't go in and change any information without her knowing. So many times, if she wasn't careful, they'd go in and erase what she'd already put into several fields, and she'd end up needing to verify ten pieces of information all over again. Irritating. Though after one such incident, Reggie had once sent her a message: "This Guy's In Love With You." And suddenly, nothing else much mattered.

Patricia ordered the Flood Certificate and the Title and the Property Condition Report, and then she moved on to the next loan.

No income docs on this one, and the stated income put the DI at over 47. Patricia wouldn't be doing anything on this file until some figures were confirmed. That was actually harder than "ordering out," because it meant she had to check the file twice a day every day for up to three weeks, waiting and waiting and waiting till every last bit of information came in piecemeal.

Of course, the hardest files were the ones where the members were self-employed. Rental income alone was a pain

in the neck. Patricia had finally figured out how to calculate income from Schedule C on tax returns, but anything other than that was beyond her. Mark had to help with S Corps and other income, and both he and their manager were on Patricia's case every week to take some webinars and get up to speed. But when was there ever time to take a webinar? Patricia was skipping breaks and working during her lunch as it was.

"Patricia," said Rodney from across the room, "it's almost 3:30. You need to take the mail upstairs."

She knew Rodney meant to be annoying by "reminding" her of her other job duties, but it was honestly rather helpful. She pretended to be miffed just so he'd keep it up every day. Walking up the stairs gave her what little exercise she had, and a break from the department. As she climbed the stairs, she thought about Reggie. He got her through every day. While she'd gained ten pounds in the last year, he'd kept himself in good shape all that time they were together. It seemed unfair for Heavenly Father to make him sick.

Next week would make one year since he had died.

One year, and she had so many more to endure without him.

But last night on the radio, Reggie had told her, "You Light Up My Life" and "You're the One That I Want." His love for Patricia wasn't dying, even while he was on the Other Side learning all sorts of wonderful new things every day. Talking with Peter, James, and John. And Joseph Smith and Karen Carpenter.

Patricia didn't listen to her songs. They were too sad. She liked Celine Dion.

Patricia's heart would go on, too. Last week, she'd actually started feeding two stray cats in her neighborhood. Since they weren't feral, she'd even bought carriers and taken the animals to be "fixed." It was almost like being part of the world again.

And Reggie had told her the night after she brought the cats inside, "It Must Have Been Love." She wasn't quite sure what he meant, considering she had allowed herself to feel again for something that wasn't him, but it had still been calmly comforting.

Two envelopes from State Farm were in the department mailbox. Most of the mail arrived by 10:00 in the morning, but somehow, throughout the day, a few other pieces always drifted in. These two would be for their loan servicer to handle. Patricia grabbed them and headed back down the stairs. It smelled like urine in the rear stairwell, the back door to the building leading out into a downtown alleyway. Some of the other employees went out there to smoke.

Reggie was a righteous man.

When their friends, the Parkers, left the Church, Reggie still stopped by once a month to do his Home Teaching, even if he only talked about the Mariners. When the Church admitted Joseph Smith had married a fourteen-year-old girl, she and Reggie knelt together and prayed until they could find peace in their hearts. When Reggie was diagnosed with his terminal condition, the first thing they did was fast to know Heavenly Father's will.

"I'll stay as long as I can," Reggie had promised, "and I'll never leave you even after they bury my body."

Patricia hugged him and cried for an hour. And then she started working on her resumé.

She handed the loan servicer the two insurance statements and sat back at her desk. Mark was on the phone with his wife, a school bus driver. He called her twice a day to tell her he loved her.

And he wasn't even Mormon.

Josh Groban began singing "February Song." Patricia knew it was Reggie's way of reminding her of all the wonderful Valentine's Days they'd shared over the years.

The rest of the afternoon dragged by. Patricia was left on hold with an insurance company for ten minutes while trying to order a binder. Wasted time, and so utterly boring. When she almost shouted into the phone to the automated voice, "I'm not a member!" and "Representative!" Rodney and Joseph laughed. They knew exactly which company she was calling. Mark rolled his eyes and shook his head. He offered Patricia a Cheerio. She thanked him but declined.

At ten minutes to five, a new loan came in with seventeen rental properties on the Real Estate Owned screen. Patricia groaned. Getting all the docs necessary for each property was going to be an absolute nightmare and would have to wait till morning. Still, by this point, she at least knew she could handle the mess. She just wished she didn't have to.

"Reggie, when can we be together again?" she whispered, looking at the radio.

Patricia clocked out at 5:00 but stayed at her desk to try to hear one more song before she headed home. "Key Largo"

came on and made her smile. Lauren Bacall had to wait several decades before she saw Bogie again.

But Patricia's relationship with Reggie was just as magical. And *they* were sealed.

She frowned as she stood up. Surely, Bogie and Bacall were back together again, too, whatever their religion. Could even God stop a love like that? And what about Joanne Woodward and Paul Newman?

Patricia couldn't really think of any other Gentile couples who seemed outstanding. One or the other was always cheating or being cold and cruel, or something. But there were always those few...

Well, the good ones would probably end up Mormons after their work was done for them in the temple, and at that point, their marriages would become eternal. Heavenly Father wouldn't leave true lovers out in the cold. He didn't stab people in the back.

Patricia looked at Joseph's empty desk.

She picked up her purse and walked out the front door, the one always left unlocked so people could access the ATM in the vestibule between the street and the lobby. Andy, the homeless guy who sold Real Change newspapers on the corner, was talking to people who were in too big a hurry getting home to linger with him.

The light was against her, so Patricia stopped and smiled. Andy began telling her about the pain in his leg. She opened her purse and handed him a dollar.

“I don’t want any charity!” he said, waving her away with a laugh.

Patricia didn’t understand. She wanted all the charity she could get.

Andy opened his backpack and pulled out a loaf of cheap bread he’d probably bought across the street at Rite Aid. He began flinging pieces onto the sidewalk, and a dozen white and gray seagulls immediately swooped down to grab them. She thought about the miracle in Salt Lake.

“There’s always someone worse off than you,” he said with a smile. The light turned then and Patricia continued on to the transit tunnel.

Within five minutes, the light rail pulled up, and she climbed on. She never took a seat if she could help it, enjoying the opportunity to stand for the twenty minute ride. A black teenage girl was listening to some raucous music, loud even though she had earbuds.

The girl was not going to hear any whisperings of the Spirit like that.

At the next stop, Transit Security boarded and checked everyone’s tickets and passes. They got off at the following stop, and a thin white man in his early thirties boarded. His clothes were slightly dirty, as if he worked as a laborer. He sat on the bench for the disabled and started picking at his forearm.

Reggie had always driven to work, but Patricia could no longer afford the car after he left. She looked out the window at the graffiti painted on the warehouse walls as they rolled

through Sodo. Reggie, she thought, why did you leave me alone?

There weren't even any Social Security checks to inherit. Or pension. Or anything.

Except their photo album, which she looked at every Fast Sunday.

Patricia thought of the song she'd heard on the radio last Saturday. "Because You Loved Me." All she could think was that if Reggie had really loved her, he would have found a way to stay.

She glanced back at the man picking obsessively at his arm. He pulled out a pocketknife and opened the blade. No one seemed particularly alarmed. The train was still a full minute away from the next stop, so there was nowhere to go if he lunged at anyone. But the man directed the knife at himself. He started digging tentatively at the spot he'd been picking at. He dug a moment, then squeezed as if trying to pop a zit, and then dug again. There were a few drops of blood, but not as much as Patricia would have expected.

No one else seemed to be paying any attention at all.

She had been waiting for almost a year now to hear her favorite song on the radio that would prove to her beyond any doubt that Reggie was waiting for her, washing and cleaning their heavenly mansion in preparation for her arrival. Yet "We Are Love" never played. Patricia had the CD, but it would have been cheating to listen to it.

Would it really have been such a terribly difficult miracle for Heavenly Father to allow her to hear a love song on a station that only played love songs?

The black girl was bouncing her head to the music inside hers. An Asian man was texting someone on his phone. Two Hispanic or Latina girls—Patricia never knew which term to use—were chatting away happily.

The white man was still digging into his arm with his knife. There was a little more blood now.

The train stopped, several people walked off and a couple more walked on, one with a bicycle which he bumped into several people without apologizing. They started again.

Patricia's Visiting Teachers never came to see her anymore. Mary and Clark only called maybe once a month. The sisters in Relief Society turned away whenever she talked about the radio.

She watched as the blade of the pocketknife grew dull from blood. An elderly white woman across the aisle was finally looking at the man in concern, pulling her purse up over her chest.

Patricia thought of all the equity loans she would have to process the next day. And those seventeen rental properties. And Rodney.

They rounded a corner as they came to the next stop, and some people held on to steady themselves. Patricia moved over and sat down next to the white man who was still having his John Nash moment. She put her hand on his to still the knife. He turned to look at her, frowning.

“It’s going to be okay,” she said, forcing a weak smile. “It’s going to be okay.”

He didn’t say anything in return, but he stopped digging and put the knife away. They sat in silence ten more minutes. The white woman lowered her purse. The man with the bicycle bumped into yet another passenger without apologizing. The black teenager kept moving her head. Then Patricia stepped off the train at her stop and walked the last seven blocks home, humming an *Il Volo* song softly along the way.

With Friends Like These...

“Oh, my God! Carey! Did you see this?” I waved at my husband to come into my office to look at the computer. He was watching Chris Hayes and didn’t want to leave the sofa. When a commercial came on a few minutes later, he walked over.

“What’s all the fuss, Arthur? I’m already watching the news. Do you have news that isn’t on the news?”

I pointed to the screen. Carey leaned forward and squinted. “What?” he said again.

“Someone leaked the new Bishop’s Handbook,” I explained.

“So?”

“It bars the kids of gay parents from being baptized, from getting a name and a blessing, from the boys getting the Aaronic Priesthood.”

Carey looked at the screen and then at me. “Good,” he said, “then gays stupid enough to want to raise their kids as Mormons won’t be able to do it. It’s a win/win.”

“Carey,” I said, “that’s like saying Jews shouldn’t want to be in any old nasty country club that doesn’t want them.”

“They shouldn’t.”

“Okay, okay, go back to your show.” Carey did so willingly, and I frowned as I watched him go. While I was a liberal, Carey was a Communist. I was supporting Bernie Sanders for President, but Carey felt Bernie was too right-wing. It wasn’t

that my husband had a better candidate. He just thought it would be best if Trump or Carson or Cruz won, because then maybe “the people” would rise up and overthrow the government. I thought it a healthier move to vote for the best people, and keep pushing “the best” to more and more liberal policies. But Carey had no patience for that. Just as he had no patience for my hope of gradual improvement in the Mormon Church. He’d chucked it decades ago and never looked back. I still hoped the Church could eventually be a place of love and inclusion.

Carey didn’t give a fuck.

I checked out what was happening on Facebook. Several folks from the Ex-Mormon group I belonged to had posted comments about the leaked handbook. The children of gay or lesbian parents could only be baptized once they reached eighteen, and only if they publicly denounced their parents’ marriage as invalid. If the child was still living at home after the age of eighteen, perhaps because he or she was going to college, they couldn’t be baptized until they had moved out of their parents’ house to distance themselves from them.

Not only the Ex-Mormon group but also Q-Saints, the gay Mormon group, were up in arms.

“Jesus wants me for an apostate,” someone wrote, amending the children’s Primary song.

“I stand all amazed at the hate Jesus offers me,” another person posted, altering the Sacrament hymn.

And one woman from the Ex-Mormon group changed the words to the most famous Mormon song about the sanctity of family. “There is beauty all around when your 18-year-old

children tell you your love for each other isn't real and reject you as their family."

I didn't often post on either Ex-Mormon or Q-Saints. I might respond to something there, but my actual posts went on my own wall, not those of any group. I wanted *my* friends and family to see what I had to say, not people I expected already agreed with me on most things. I posted links to articles all the time about the need for free college tuition, for single-payer healthcare, for the abolishment of private prisons. None of my Mormon "friends" ever commented, so whether or not they were actually following me, I didn't know. I certainly received all their posts about how they were supporting this or that Republican candidate, their complaints about how liberals always wanted whatever the Bible said was evil, their insistence we needed to build a wall to keep out illegal immigrants.

They weren't convincing me in the slightest. Why did I think I was influencing them in any way?

Only half of my Facebook friends were Mormons, though. Many of the rest were gays and lesbians and straight people I'd become friends with over the years. Most of them never responded to anything Mormon I put up because they didn't know anything about Mormons and didn't care. We talked about normal things. Science fiction novels with Jack, recipes with Margaret, fossil hunting trips with Avi.

"Why do you keep those people as friends?" Cliff asked me once. "They're poison." I'd met Cliff when we both began singing in the Denver Men's Chorus ages ago.

"It's important to know what Mormons are doing," I told him. "Don't you remember Proposition 8? They were the primary funders behind that."

Cliff had shrugged. “Isn’t that what news websites are for?”

“I want to know what Mormons are thinking,” I said, and he let it drop.

Prop 8 had been mean and underhanded. The worst thing about it was its blatant theocracy. It wasn’t Mormons telling Mormons how to live. It was Mormons telling *everyone* how to live. Yet this handbook thing was just Mormons focusing on Mormons, so it should be better, I thought. A private club could make up whatever rules it wanted for its own members. So why did this feel so low?

A new post popped up. “What about the Second Article of Faith?” asked someone on Ex-Mormon. I searched back in my memory to when I was a child and had been required to memorize all thirteen articles of faith. I wasn’t sure of the wording now all these years later, but I remembered a phrase. “Punished for their own sins and not for Adam and Eve’s transgression.” Something like that.

I looked out at Carey, flipping channels when a commercial interrupted Chris Hayes. Carey hated commercials. Capitalist overconsumption.

I wrote a simple post, asking my Mormon friends and family what they thought of the new policy and calmly stating my unhappiness with it. Then I joined Carey on the sofa. After Chris, we watched Rachel Maddow. Then Carey wanted to watch Lawrence. I could only take so much politics and went out on the porch to read. I was halfway through *In Me an Invincible Summer*, a riveting novel about a closeted action movie star deciding to come out. It was dark outside, and our neighborhood was mostly quiet. At one point, Jose, the kid down the block who wanted to study horticulture when he

started college next year, rode by on his bike. The Stevensons drove past in their new Subaru. Our neighbor Elena walked by with her Yellow Lab. She waved from the sidewalk.

The front door opened. Carey must have finally gotten his political fix. “Ready to watch an episode of *Madam Secretary*?” he asked. I closed my book and went in.

When the show was over, Carey changed the channel to C-SPAN and spread his legs. He loved getting blow jobs while watching politicians. I knelt in front of him. After I finished, we watched an episode of *Strangest Weather on Earth*.

“The comrades and I are handing out leaflets tomorrow,” Carey said. “You have any plans for the day?”

Carey worked all week in a downtown investment office and spent most of his weekend selling subscriptions to his Party newspaper *Revolt* or planning a protest or promoting their cause in one way or another. We’d been together seventeen years, and we’d always had separate activities. I loved singing in the chorus with my gay friends and quilting with the Mountaineer Quilting Club. The women there were mostly conservative but they’d eventually taken to me after an initial coolness. I was working on a quilt depicting the Salt Lake temple right now. I designed all my own quilts, and whatever one might say about Mormonism, there was no denying that the Salt Lake temple was an extraordinary piece of architecture.

Plus, I couldn’t help but hope on some level that my Mormon friends and family would think better of me when I posted a picture online of the finished product.

Of course, that hadn’t happened when I posted photos of my other quilts—a path with an iron rod leading to the Tree of Life,

a hole in the ground revealing the Golden Plates, a covered wagon crossing the plains.

Carey refused to allow any of the quilts to remain in the house once I was finished. I donated them all to the University of Utah.

“Movies with the gang,” I replied in response to his question. A while back, I’d organized a movie group that met twice a month on Saturday afternoons. We rotated who selected the movie, and then we sat around discussing the film afterwards. Last time, I’d chosen the awful *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* just so we could discuss the blatant sexism of the imagined future society. The women astronauts still served all the food and beverages on the spaceship.

“Sounds fun,” Carey said, leaning over and giving me a peck.

“Not as fun as your missionary work,” I returned with an impish smile.

“Ooh, I hate when you call it that!”

Which was why I did it. I gave him a full kiss that lasted twenty seconds, and he was smiling again when I finished.

“I’m going to bed,” he announced, standing up and then heading to the bedroom.

“I’ll be in in a sec,” I replied.

I went to my office to check my computer one last time for the evening. Since Carey earned enough that I didn’t need to work, I spent most of my time at the house, a majestic 1895 mansion. I kept the yard nice, I did the cooking and cleaning.

When my family had learned years ago during a holiday visit to Salt Lake that I didn't work outside the home, I could see their lips literally curling in disgust. Since I didn't have a job forcing me out of the house every day, the internet was essential to connect to the outside world.

I stared at the monitor, my mouth falling open. Facebook had exploded. Mostly, it was the Ex-Mormons and Q-Saints.

"The Church is so desperate," said one commenter. "It's like watching the fabled man on the Titanic put on a dress to get in a lifeboat, while leaving women and children behind. The Church will sacrifice anyone who gets in their way."

I hit Like, and then, after thinking a moment, I clicked Share as well.

"Look at their official list of apostates," wrote another. "You can be an attempted murderer. You can be a rapist. You can physically abuse your wife or children. But those don't require Church disciplinary action. If a loving same-sex couple marries legally, though, they are automatically deemed apostates and must be excommunicated."

I sighed. Then I hit Like and Share again. I usually only hit Like. I might share articles, but I rarely shared editorial posts such as these. Some of the "friends" writing these things were people I'd never even met.

Odd how I felt closer to them than to the Mormon friends and family I actually knew in person.

There were probably two dozen other posts about the leaked handbook, but I'd shared enough with my own friends now and

didn't share anything else, though I clicked Like on just about every other one.

Then I brushed my teeth and joined Carey in bed. He murmured as I slid under the covers, pushing his ass against me while I threw my arm over his chest. We always slept that way for the first hour of the night. He often talked in his sleep toward morning, but I could never understand what he was saying. Probably quoting Trotsky or something.

In the morning, I fixed coffee for Carey. I had never developed a taste for it, but he particularly liked it with almond flavoring, though hazelnut would do in a pinch. I had eggs, buttered toast, and a single piece of real bacon ready when he finished up in the bathroom. He turned on Melissa Harris-Perry, and I went back out on the porch to read. When the show was over, he poked his head out.

“I have time for a game of Boggle before I go,” he said.

I smiled and joined him at the coffee table. We'd adjusted the rules years ago so that while I could count any word of at least four letters, Carey's words had to contain at least five. Of course, even with so many more words available to me, Carey usually won and did so again this morning. He kissed me, grabbed his backpack, and headed out the door. I put the game away and then went to my office to check my computer.

More chaos. Lots more. I shook my head in wonder. Another twenty or so posts condemning the Church's position, from the Ex-Mormons and gay Mormons. But not a single one of my devout Mormon friends and family said a word against the policy. Denise Chung, who'd served with me in the Hamburg mission so many years ago, responded to my post from last night. “This policy isn't against gays,” she wrote. “It's

pro-family. The Church is trying to help those children not have to hear one thing at church and another thing at home. That would cause conflict in the family. The Church is being kind. Why do you have to interpret everything so negatively? Those who have left the Church are always so hateful.”

Back in the day, Denise had been one of my favorite missionaries. She'd made constant puns in German, always stayed out half an hour later than she was supposed to, and had once spit in the face of an obnoxious zone leader. In some ways, I was astounded that someone as strong-willed managed to stay in the Church all this time. She'd recently posted a picture of her grandmother tending to a wounded sailor during the Pearl Harbor attack. You could see smoke all around and planes flying in the background. It made me respect Denise more, though the photo wasn't of Denise.

Ted Parsons, from my old Singles ward, made a similar comment, including a link not only to Elder Christofferson's defence of the policy after the Church was forced to have one of the Twelve respond to criticism but also a second link to the apostle's gay brother confirming that the more righteous Christofferson was doing the right thing. My friend Ted was still single, in his fifties, never married. When I asked him point blank several years ago if he was gay, he simply replied, “Consider me straight.” Right.

I couldn't resist the opportunity to type a reply. “The apostle's brother seems like an Uncle Tom to me,” I said. “He hardly speaks for me or for all the other people hurt by this policy.”

That might not have been completely fair, I realized. I had a friend in Salt Lake who'd spoken with the apostle's brother on two occasions and said the guy seemed genuinely nice and

sincere. Of course, sincerely believing you deserved second-class citizenship didn't prove much more than that a person had been browbeaten into submission. I didn't suppose it helped that Salt Lake had just hosted the latest World Congress on Families, the group that had promoted the Uganda "Kill the Gays" bill.

I thought I might need more pleasant input to my neurons in the midst of all this and walked out to the living room to turn on the CD player. Carey had given me Josh Groban's latest disk for my birthday, though he didn't like the singer's music himself. He had a CD of union songs he played over and over while I sat outside on the porch. I supported unions, too, but how many times could you listen to "Which Side Are You On?" I listened now to "You'll Never Walk Alone" and felt a soft calmness wash over me.

I didn't reply specifically to Denise but instead wrote another post myself. "For all my Mormon friends and family," I began, "who keep insisting that the new handbook policy is 'for the children,' let me ask you a couple of things. Why do we need to protect the children of gays from 'conflict' when it is perfectly acceptable to baptize a child whose parents are Catholic? Or Jewish? Or atheist? Or unmarried heterosexuals living in sin? When you single out a certain group, it is discrimination, no matter how lovingly you phrase it. If you want to make all children wait until they are eighteen before getting baptized, that's probably a good idea. But this policy is unmistakably an attack on gays and those who love them."

I closed my eyes. It was tiresome to be able to shoot out such a composed reply so easily. Tiresome because the ease came from practicing the skill dozens of times over the years. I

decided maybe I'd better log out and watch an episode of *Good Neighbors* on Netflix.

But before I could do so, I saw a reply pop up to my post. My niece Shannon in Salt Lake must have read it the second I hit Send. "Uncle Arthur, I don't know why you are so bitter toward the Church. It seems that is so often what happens to those who fall away. You are a wounded, pathetic person, and I honestly pity you. I love you, but I'm sad for you."

Every time she called me Uncle Arthur, I wanted to remind her that Paul Lynde had been gay. But she was too young to know who Paul Lynde was.

I kept looking at her comment on the screen in front of me and felt my chest tighten. I was so tempted to type back, "I'm glad this policy prevents conflict in families," but I thought it best not to reply at all.

I decided I needed something more demanding than television to distract me. As I headed for the sewing room to work on my quilt, I wondered if by posting my feelings about the Church I was needlessly subjecting myself to even further distress. It was downright begging for a confrontation. Yet if I wasn't convincing Shannon and she wasn't convincing me, what was the point of staying in touch with someone who felt hurt at my words and who in turn hurt me with hers? While she might get some perverse pleasure out of feeling superior to me, I certainly got none out of any feelings I had toward her.

I worked on the Angel Moroni today, the hardest part of the entire quilt. Two hours later, I looked at the finished section.

"What the hell am I doing?"

I went back to the porch and read about the closeted gay actor for another hour. Then I fixed myself a Swiss cheese sandwich and ate it while watching a few minutes on the Smithsonian channel about the *Secrets of the Vatican Museum*. I flipped to MSNBC and watched Jason Chaffetz from Utah say something horrible about poor people.

I turned off the television.

I wished I had more money to donate to the political causes I liked. Not having a job of my own meant that Carey handled our money for the most part. I had a separate checking account into which he deposited funds regularly, and my “allowance” was generous enough. But I was dependent on him. Even when I did contribute a few dollars to Bold Progressives and the Sierra Club, I couldn’t tell Carey for fear he would cut back the money he gave me. Not working was a type of freedom, but it was a type of captivity as well.

Odd how I’d ended up living the life of a Mormon housewife.

An idea suddenly flashed in my mind and I snapped my fingers. Friends here in Denver routinely gave me gift cards for birthdays and such. I probably had four or five cards with anywhere from two to five dollars still on them, the piddly amounts that were always so hard to spend at the end without having to add additional funds from my wallet when making a purchase. I went back to my computer and sent the last amounts from each card to Bernie Sanders.

Feeling euphoric at my \$16.23 donation, I sat back in my chair and looked up at my Nature Conservancy calendar on the wall. I had to leave for the movie group in a few minutes.

But I was at my computer, and I just had to know what was going on with Facebook. I logged back on.

There were two or three dozen new posts, analyses from this blog or that podcast, articles from several newspapers. Lots of comments by the Ex-Mormons and gay Mormons. Brian Andersen, the guy who produced the gay Mormon comic book *Stripling Warrior*, posted a picture with his husband and their baby girl.

I saw that my fellow tenor Cliff had added a line after that of my niece Shannon. “I love you, Arthur. And I’m happy for you.” I smiled.

There was a report of a planned protest in Salt Lake. An attorney who was donating his services to help process resignation requests said he alone had received over 1500 pleas from people wanting to have their names removed in the past couple of days. Requests on Mormon Resignation skyrocketed over 1600%. An admin for Life After Mormonism reported that activity on their Facebook page shot up over 17,000%. Someone else posted a sickening article by a woman raised by lesbians who praised the new policy. My aunt in Orem called me to repentance yet again and concluded with the statement that, “The wicked call evil good and good evil.”

I so wanted to respond, “You prove that every day,” but didn’t.

My sister Joyce said simply, “My heart breaks every minute of every hour because you’ve chosen the side of the Adversary. It saddens me to my very core that you take such joy in causing pain to those who love you.”

God, I was grateful my parents were dead.

I winced and rubbed my forehead. How fucked up was I to be happy about a thing like that?

A fellow Ex-Mormon reported that two bishoprics, one in southern California and the other in Utah, had resigned their callings in protest. A few people reposted the hateful things their own friends and family were saying. One Ex-Mormon wrote a long piece about how people shouldn't see this as a strategic error on the part of the Church. "The leaders know exactly what they're doing. They know more gays and gay allies will leave the Church over this, and they're okay with that. They *want* all liberals out of the Church. They see this as a surgical decision. The foot is cancerous, but they need to remove not only the foot but also a third of the leg, just to make sure every last bit of the cancer is eradicated. They are hoping that the members who remain will be more conservative, less likely to dissent on any issue. It's the only way to prevent those damned thinkers from infecting the rest and risk losing the whole church."

Another poster insisted the real reason was to create a legal justification for not allowing kids to live with their gay parents in any custody battle with the remaining TBM ex-spouse. Others thought the Church was trying to avoid being sued by gays for alienation of their kids. It would probably be months before we all knew the real reasons. If we ever did. It wasn't as if the Church had a history of being honest with its members. But everybody seemed to have something to say. Someone even posted a link to a Salt Lake Tribune article that had over 4000 comments already.

While the uproar was fascinating, I was growing tired of the whole thing. Not just this latest attack, but the fact that the assaults came one after another after another. And the

realization that they were never going to stop. Even when I saw a post that read, “Just a reminder, folks, that neither policy nor doctrine ever change because of ‘revelation,’ only from legal and societal and FINANCIAL pressure,” the thought of years and years more of emotional warfare left me feeling very weary.

Then I saw a post from my friend Garima two doors down about her mother visiting from India. I frowned for a second. How odd that the rest of the world didn’t give a hoot about what was happening with the Mormons.

I wondered if I could get any recipes from Garima’s mother.

I saw a Pat Bagley cartoon that showed a family in Sacramento meeting, with the speaker droning on and on at the pulpit. One of the young children looks at his parents in misery and says, “Why couldn’t you have been gay?” I hit Like and then Share. Then I saw that someone had posted “I heard the Three Nephites resigned yesterday,” and I laughed out loud.

I left my feed and looked at some quilts in progress on the Mountaineer Quilting Club Facebook page. I uploaded a picture of my Moroni and asked if anyone had any suggestions for adjusting it before it was too late. I remembered that Cliff’s birthday was sometime either this week or next week and shot him an IM asking if he wanted to go out for a beer after chorus rehearsal.

Then I saw a notice that I had a new post to read. My brother Dane had sent a comment about the damn handbook. I thought about not reading it but just logging off instead. Yet that was the problem with following people. You followed them. “The world only cares about being politically correct. *We* care about following the Lord. Sinners are offended so easily when we merely point out their sins. And don’t you think it’s

odd that the only church anyone attacks is the Mormons? Interesting, isn't it?"

Like no one ever protested the Catholic stance on gays or abortion or women in the priesthood. Whatever.

I remembered a post I'd seen a few weeks ago about ignoring comments that upset you and just living your life. No one needed to argue about every single issue. On the one hand, I felt the distance created by the internet allowed people to be nastier than they would be in person, but on the other, I believed that no matter how polite someone might be when shaking your hand, these were the things they were really thinking. I hated rising to the bait, but I couldn't seem to help myself. I wanted to tell a joke. I wanted to talk about the book I was reading. I wanted to remind everyone that global warming was real.

Instead, I dredged up a memory from a college course I'd taken decades ago and typed a post of my own, not in reply to anyone, just my own separate post.

"Does anyone remember the famous Milgram experiment, where the researcher asked subjects to deliver electric shocks to other subjects? Some people did it, no questions asked. Some started to give the shocks but stopped when the other subjects screamed in pain. And some refused right from the start. The experiment was really to test how much pain a person would inflict on someone else, just because someone in authority told them to do so. Do you remember that there were some people who kept delivering stronger and stronger shocks, even after the other subject had apparently either passed out from the pain or actually died? One has to wonder how most Mormons would do in such an experiment.

“Oh, wait, we don’t have to wonder. All we have to do is look at our Mormon friends and family now.”

It was a bit snarky, and I knew it would probably do more harm than good. But I hit Post anyway.

Shannon seemed to be online as much as I was and responded within sixty seconds again. “Uncle Arthur, I’m unfriending you. I can’t allow myself to be contaminated by your wholesale commitment to wickedness anymore.”

“It’s retail,” I replied.

There was no answer.

I sighed deeply and looked at Shannon’s comment a long time. I’d half expected that kind of reaction, and I realized now that part of me was perhaps hoping to provoke such a response. If my devout Mormon friends and family were the ones to dump me, I wouldn’t be the bad guy. But suddenly I began to wonder where I fit on the Milgram scale myself. It seemed I was delivering as much pain to them as they were delivering to me. And did my ridiculous hope of finally having a church-going Mormon approve of me make me an Uncle Tom, too?

I didn’t want to give up my family completely, though. Didn’t I love them anymore?

I wasn’t sure I did.

Maybe that proved I wasn’t the good guy I thought I was.

And if I cut them all off now, wasn’t I just as bad as they were for cutting me off? It seemed that no matter how I looked at it, I was more like the Mormons than I cared to admit.

My phone rang. “Hey, Carey,” I said.

“Taking a break and wanted to tell you I love you.”

“Sheesh, are you still at it?” I shook my head. He really wanted to change the world. “How about stuffed artichoke for dinner?”

“And now you know why I love you.”

We hung up, and I looked at my niece’s comment again. And my sister’s. And my brother’s. And those of my mission buddy and Singles ward pal. If I was already resigned from the Church, maybe it was time now to resign from Mormons themselves. I lingered over each of their names, took a deep breath, and hit Unfriend.

It didn’t feel liberating.

I went back to the Mountaineer Quilting Club page. Perhaps my next quilt should be of a waterfall surrounded by trees. Or a soaring mountain range. Or maybe the home I shared with Carey.

Maybe I could even start selling my quilts.

I looked at my watch and logged off the computer. Then I grabbed my car keys and headed outside. We’d be watching *The Theory of Everything* today. The discussion afterward should be interesting, I thought. I turned on the motor and put the car in drive.



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