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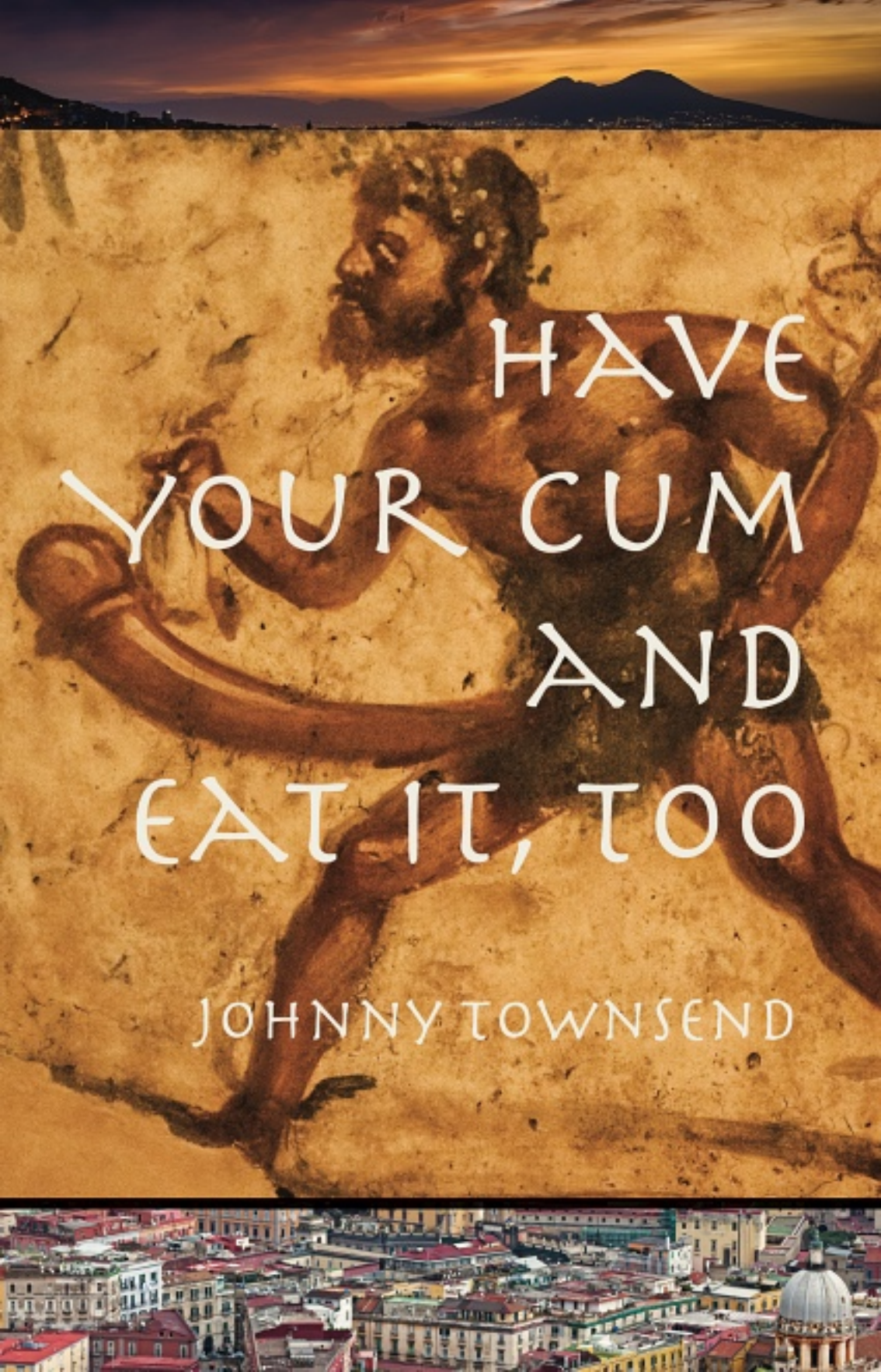
Have Your Cum and Eat It, Too

By Johnny Townsend

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HAVE
YOUR CUM
AND
EAT IT, TOO

JOHNNY TOWNSEND

Have Your Cum and Eat It, Too

It's 1981, and two Mormon missionaries randomly assigned to work together as "companions" in Napoli find themselves in trouble. They're falling in love, but the Church forbids gay relationships. As missionaries, they can't date anyone at all, much less other men. If they're found out, they'll be excommunicated, sent home in disgrace, and cast out from their families.

In the aftermath of a devastating earthquake, against a backdrop of poverty and repressive mission culture, Elders Grant and Mortensen knock on doors, endure violent assaults, and face the ultimate challenge—will they be crushed by dedication to their beliefs or will love provide a way for them to escape?

Praise for Johnny Townsend

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*

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

Let the Faggots Burn: The Upstairs Lounge Fire is “a gripping account of all the horrors that transpired that night, as well as a respectful remembrance of the victims.”

Terry Firma, *Patheos*

“Johnny Townsend’s ‘Partying with St. Roch’ [in the anthology *Latter-Gay Saints*] tells a beautiful, haunting tale.”

Kent Brintnall, *Out in Print: Queer Book Reviews*

Selling the City of Enoch is “sharply intelligent...pleasingly complex...The stories are full of...doubters, but there’s no vindictiveness in these pages; the characters continuously poke holes in Mormonism’s more extravagant absurdities, but they take very little pleasure in doing so....Many of Townsend’s stories...have a provocative edge to them, but this [book] displays a great deal of insight as well...a playful, biting and surprisingly warm collection.”

Kirkus Reviews

Gayrabian Nights is “an allegorical tour de force...a hard-core emotional punch.”

Gay. Guy. Reading and Friends

The Washing of Brains has “A lovely writing style, and each story [is] full of unique, engaging characters....immensely entertaining.”

Rainbow Awards

In *Dead Mankind Walking*, “Townsend writes in an energetic prose that balances crankiness and humor....A rambunctious volume of short, well-crafted essays...”

Kirkus Reviews

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Chapter One:

Lovers' Lane, Naples

Even the Bucaneve cookies and a triangle of milk with the other elders hadn't cheered up my companion. Neither did a long shower. After we brushed our teeth, we retired to our room and said our evening companion prayer, in Italian, of course, and then stripped to our garments. Anziano Grant preferred the cotton variety, but I liked the silkier bemberg. The few minutes each day when we walked around in our Mormon underwear was the closest I could ever get to seeing Elder Grant naked. Sometimes, I could see something flopping around in front. Other times, when he leaned over, the slit in the seat would reveal just a little of his crack.

A spaccaculo, if you will.

I'd always found it frustrating, even as a young boy, that Batman didn't wear more form-fitting tights. The Superman movie that came out my senior year of high school wasn't much better. No form-fitting tights for Christopher Reeve, either. Superheroes weren't really brave if they had to hide their bulges.

Elder Grant and I knelt beside our beds and offered individual prayers to “nostro Padre Celeste.” Heavenly Father had been human once on another world, which meant he’d sinned at some point before progressing to godhood. It was impossible not to hope he’d liked looking at other men’s cracks as well. If he could still eventually reach the Celestial Kingdom, then I could, too.

My companion pulled back the sheet on his cot with a sigh, his eyes looking guiltily in my direction for a split second before turning away. He sat down but didn’t slide underneath the covers.

Every time I returned his gaze and he didn’t look away, I started hearing Air Supply’s “Lost in Love” and had to force myself not to sing along. I’d never understood all those ridiculously sentimental lyrics when the song was released a few months before my mission.

When I’d heard it yesterday during Dual Study, it had taken me a moment to realize the sound was coming from our neighbor’s radio.

“Lights Out, I guess,” Elder Grant said, giving me a barely perceptible nod. His hair was too dark to be called sandy but too light to be considered brown, too short to move when he bobbed his head.

I walked over to the switch near the bedroom door. It aggravated me that mission rules forbid us from locking that door, or the bathroom door, or the door to the prayer closet where we kept our stock of Church magazines. The zone leaders sometimes popped into any of these rooms

without warning, “just to check” on us. Once, Elder Murdock, the senior zone leader here in Napoli 2, had sneaked into our bedroom at 3:00 in the morning and leaned over my bed.

“Are you dreaming worthy dreams?” he shouted. He was trying to be funny. He’d told us over lunch earlier that the mission president didn’t want to hear any more elders confessing to masturbation. When I’d frowned in response, he’d teased, “Feeling guilty, Elder? I didn’t say it wasn’t a sin, just that the prez is tired of hearing about it. I can always keep track of your sins myself.”

When Elder Murdock had shouted at me in my sleep, I’d awakened terrorized and then sat up so quickly my head busted his lower lip. He hadn’t pulled any more middle of the night inspections, but there was always the possibility he’d try again, perhaps at a slightly less vulnerable distance from my cot.

“Anziano Grant,” I said, “I think we need to have Companion Inventory.”

He wrinkled his nose. “Now, Anziano Mortensen? It’s almost 10:30.” He glanced toward the door.

“I’ll turn out the lights so they won’t know we’re up past bedtime.” I flicked the switch. Because we’d already lowered the serranda over the window, the room was now pitch black. The lack of even a sliver of light under the door from the hallway revealed the other two companionships had also retired in the last couple of minutes.

I moved slowly over to Elder Grant's cot and sat beside him. The springs creaked unhappily.

"Down at that Lovers' Lane earlier," I said, "you looked so forlorn. I couldn't tell if you were sad for the souls of those people or..."

"You know perfectly well why I was sad." Elder Grant and I had both been out long enough that we enjoyed speaking Italian even when off duty. Of course, so many Italian words were virtually identical to their English equivalent. "Perfettamente" instead of "perfectly" wasn't much of a stretch. After scoring so high on the language aptitude test when I filled out my mission papers the year before, I'd expected to end up in Finland or Taiwan.

Was it too much to hope that Heavenly Father had sent me to the Italy Rome mission expressly to meet Elder Grant?

"Sì," I said. "Lo so." I closed my eyes, though it made no difference in the darkness. My companion had just told me he wanted to share a Cinquecento with me. I felt myself trembling. But if he could be brave, I had to step up, too.

"Do you ever m-masturbate?" I whispered.

I heard a sigh. "You know I do." Of course I knew. Almost every evening immediately after Lights Out, I could hear rustling from my companion's bed, his arm brushing against his sheet loudly as he began beating off. He'd start to moan ever so softly, just loud enough for me to hear but not the other companionship in the next room, or the zone

leaders down the hall. When he ejaculated, he'd sigh the tiniest fraction of a decibel more loudly.

I'd wait until I heard him wiping his hand on his sheet before I conducted the exact same performance for him.

But we'd never acknowledged our bedtime activities in any way. When the alarm went off the following morning, Elder Grant's first comment was always, "Another day full of opportunity to serve the Lord."

We'd give our morning companion prayer and then start our day like the missionaries we were.

"Anziano Grant," I continued, shifting on his cot so that our thighs almost touched, and causing the springs to creak once again. I could feel the proximity of my companion's thighs if not their warmth. "Jacking off isn't a terrible sin, is it?"

There was a long silence.

I'd crossed a line and I knew it. Good Mormon boys didn't talk about such things out loud. I started to shift away.

Elder Grant put his hand on my thigh. "No," he said, "it's not." His voice was so weak I could barely hear him. "But what I *want* to do..."

I put my hand on top of his, and we sat on his cot in silence for another few minutes. If this was the most that ever happened between us, it was already the most incredible experience of my life. Better even than baptizing Massimo back in my first district in Quartu.

Nothing could be better than bringing someone into the gospel.

“I wish...” Elder Grant whispered.

Even when I thought of Massimo, I didn’t remember him in his suit during his confirmation after the baptism when he was given the gift of the Holy Ghost. I remembered his thirty-year-old figure climbing out of the font with his white clothes clinging tightly to his body.

Thin white clothes.

Too bad Batman never had to be baptized. Or Robin.

“I’ve got an idea,” I said, squeezing my companion’s hand. What I was going to suggest was clearly sinful, but I hoped not *too* sinful, perhaps like fantasizing about my Home Teachers back in New Orleans.

“What?” Elder Grant asked immediately. He was from Santa Rosa. Close enough to San Francisco maybe to have a gay person in his ward.

“Sex would be a sin, obviously. We’d be sent back to the States. Excommunicated.”

“And your idea?”

“It’s not sex if I touch your hand.” I squeezed it again. “It’s not sex if I touch you on your elbow.” I fumbled around for it. “Or your ankle. Or your ear.”

Elder Grant made a grunt that wasn't English and wasn't Italian but which still fully conveyed his lack of satisfaction with my idea so far.

"Why don't you stand up?" I suggested. "Face your bed, pull your p-penis out your front slit, and start stroking yourself." I'd looked up the word for "penis" my first month in Sardinia.

"I don't understand."

"I'm going to kneel behind you," I explained, "and pry open your back slit."

"But that—"

"We're not going to have sex," I assured him. "My penis won't get anywhere near you. And I won't touch yours." I hesitated. "I'll just lick your asshole while you masturbate." I switched to English with that last sentence. Breaking a mission rule. My heart started beating faster.

"That's perverted." Elder Grant switched to English as well, even though "pervertito" was an easy word.

"It's just a body part," I said. "It's not a sex organ."

"Can't you lick my elbow?"

"Anziano," I said, "I want to feel intimate with you. As intimate as possible without sinning. If we can't have sex, licking your asshole is the next best way to feel a connection." On the bus on the way home earlier, I'd already made a mental list detailing quite a variety of ways

to achieve physical intimacy, but this was what I wanted at that moment.

“I-I’m afraid, Elder Mortensen.”

“There’s nothing in the scriptures against licking your best friend’s asshole.”

I stood up and reached for my companion’s hands in the dark, pulling him to his feet as well. I turned him away from me and dropped to my knees, tugging at his rear slit. I brushed my face against his cheeks.

“Oh my heck.”

“Catch your semen in your hand,” I whispered. Then I took a deep breath and pushed my face as deep into his crack as I could, licking everywhere until I found his hole. I could feel my hands on his waist trembling until I heard him groan softly. Then all fear disappeared.

Elder Grant’s body began rocking in a manner that let me know he was following my command to beat off.

We weren’t having sex. He was masturbating, and I was touching part of his body that wasn’t a sex organ.

Of course, a hand wasn’t a sex organ, either. I’d fantasized so many times about sliding my penis inside Elder Grant. An asshole could become a sex organ if it interacted with a penis. Just like a mouth. As long as I didn’t touch Elder Grant’s penis, though, his asshole would remain just an asshole.

Elder Grant's body convulsed, his asshole clenched, and I knew he'd come. Before he could do anything else, I whirled him around, grabbing his cupped hand. I pulled it toward my face in the dark and licked his palm clean. I almost gagged, having never even managed before to swallow my own semen, but I got every last drop off his hand. Then I stood up.

"It-it's not sex if you swallow my load?" Elder Grant whispered with a note of despair.

"Not if I don't get it straight from your dick." If he could use sex words, I could, too. That still didn't make it either oral or anal intercourse. The fact that what we'd done didn't fit into either category proved it wasn't sex.

He pulled me against him, and we hugged tightly for almost a minute. Then he whispered in my ear. "What about you?"

"I'll just jack off like usual."

"Really? You don't want me—"

"Turn around."

I dropped to my knees again and resumed licking my companion's asshole while I beat off into my hand. It didn't take long. I stood up and turned Elder Grant back toward me again.

"I don't think I can..." he began.

"Let's just smell my cum together," I whispered. I raised my hand, and I could feel my companion's breath in

the darkness. I wasn't able to face eating my own load after ejaculating, but I felt something more was needed to cap the experience.

"Turn around," I said.

"Again?"

I positioned him facing his cot once more and again pried open his back slit. This time, though, I wiped my palm covered in cum up and down his crack.

He gasped.

I closed his flaps, pulled him close, and kissed the back of his neck. "Buona notte, caro," I whispered.

"S-sogni d'oro," he whispered back.

The color of my dreams, though, was slightly darker than sandy but lighter than brown.

After I reached over to turn off my alarm the next morning, I lay in the dark for another few minutes until Elder Grant pulled up the serranda and let the early morning light in. I was afraid to look at him. What if he was sorry about last night? What if he felt compelled to repent and call the mission president? We'd only masturbated, but I knew President Kimball in Salt Lake was disgusted by gays. I'd read *Il Miracolo del Perdono* in English before my mission and in Italian again here. Elder Packer in the Quorum of the Twelve downright loathed us. Even if Elder

Grant and I hadn't done anything *really* bad, I understood that life as I knew it could be over by the end of the day.

"Buona mattina," I ventured, grateful my voice didn't crack.

Spaccavoce.

Elder Grant walked over to my cot and leaned down. "Ciao, caro," he whispered before giving me a peck on the lips. Morning breath was incredible, I realized. It meant someone loved me enough to get close even at his worst.

How could life ever get any better than it was right now?

If only Heavenly Father could kill me before I loused everything up.

"Another day full of opportunity to serve the Lord."

I sat on the edge of my cot and watched as my companion headed to the bathroom. I brushed a couple of ants off my arm and thanked Heavenly Father for the wonderful day ahead.

Chapter Two:

David Hedison's Referral

Mornings after we left the apartment at 9:30 were dedicated to 24-hour work. Even being rebuffed by man after man with no interest in our message couldn't bring me down today. What was difficult was not dragging Elder Grant into an alley to make out with him. I wondered if it would be okay to return to Lovers' Lane some evening and beat off together while we watched all those cars with newspapers taped over their windows rocking back and forth.

I'd been infatuated with Elder Grant from the first day I arrived in Napoli. Most missionaries arriving in an area had to find their new apartment on their own, hard enough even if we weren't carrying everything we owned in two huge suitcases. But Elder Grant had been waiting for me—alone—at the station. It wasn't long before I noticed other qualities: every time he emptied the trash can beside his desk, he'd empty mine as well; and our very first P-Day a week after we met, he spent the day writing out the most important verses from the Book of Mormon in large print for an elderly member with poor eyesight.

We wandered around Piazza Plebiscito this morning, past the shops in the glass-covered Galleria, and even into the old castle along the waterfront which was used these days as Napoli's City Hall.

“Non mi interesse.”

“Scusate.”

“Ho fretta.”

The translation was always the same: “Get lost.”

Being torn down like this virtually every moment we were out of the apartment left most of us so fragile I wondered if other companionships found unorthodox ways to cope with the stress. I knew Elder Bennett liked going to the roughest neighborhoods in Cagliari to provoke hoodlums he could then try to beat up. Elder Swanson had been caught twice with straight porn in his suitcase after traveling alone during transfers.

I almost *wanted* an unpleasant confrontation with a stranger on the street so Elder Grant and I would have more stress to relieve later.

But as the hours passed without any exceptionally rude interactions, all I could think about was getting my companion behind closed doors again. I selected a few postcards I hoped would always remind me of this incredible day, the day after yesterday evening's incredible night, in this incredible place. The Mergellina lit up at dusk, Castel Sant'Elmo protecting the city, and the funicolare creeping its way uphill.

We'd sung "Funicolì, funicolà!" in Culture Capsule every Sunday night in the Missionary Training Center.

"Buon giorno," Elder Grant said, stopping a gentleman in a tailored wool business suit that clearly cost more than our off-the-rack polyester ones. The man looked a bit like David Hedison from *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*. "Siamo rappresentanti della Chiesa de Gesù Cristo—"

How could I have a crush on Captain Crane when I was only six years old? Two years before the age of accountability?

The man held up a hand and started to walk past. I gave a little shrug to encourage Elder Grant not to take the rejection to heart. Elder Young in Cagliari had had a nervous breakdown over his feelings of rejection, sitting down in the middle of the street crying, and had quickly been sent back to Boise. It was technically an "honorable release," but we all knew the cool reception he'd receive in his home ward.

A moment later, David Hedison turned back toward us.

"Look," he said, "I'm not interested. I don't believe in God." He shook his head rather smugly. "But my sister might want to talk to you. She's a devout Catholic, but she's been very depressed lately, and if you can cheer her up a little, maybe what you're doing isn't entirely useless."

Just *mostly* useless, I realized he was saying. It was still nicer than a lot of comments we heard.

“Her name’s Elisabetta,” the man continued, jotting down an address. “I’m afraid she’s in the Quartieri Spagnoli.”

At least it wasn’t the Rione Sanità.

“Do you think she’s home now?” Elder Grant asked.

“Unless she’s out buying some tomatoes. It’s good to try her during the day, though. That neighborhood’s not very nice at night.”

“Thanks, Signor...?”

The man started to walk off again but hesitated one last time. “She likes aranciata.”

We watched him continue whatever errand he’d been on for another few moments until he was lost in the crowd. “Good job,” I said. “He could see the Spirit in your eyes.”

“Thank you, Anziano Mortensen, but if he was responding to the joy in my countenance, it’s because you put it there.”

Words like that weren’t sappy when the person you loved said them about *you*. “I saw a picture of you in E.U.R. from one of the other elders before we ever met,” I said. “And you already had a beautiful countenance.”

“Aw, shucks.” Elder Grant laughed. “Flattery will get you a handful of cum.”

“Ottimo,” I returned. “Your shoes are polished nicely, too. And that tie is really sharp. And you ironed your shirt quite well. And—”

“Per carità! How much cum do you think I have?”

I tried to think of a clever reply but couldn't. “Well,” I said, “you do have limited storage capacity, so we'll have to keep emptying you out to give you a chance to refill.” If only I could tell him I had plenty of room in my rectum. But that would be sex, and we couldn't do anything that sinful.

“If we pop into a bar to get an aranciata for Elisabetta, we can use their bathroom.” Elder Grant paused. “Do you have someplace to put what I've got stored up right now?”

I licked my lips. “I'll think of something.”

Elisabetta lived only a few streets over from Spaccanapoli, the long, straight thoroughfare that had sliced directly through old Napoli for centuries. From the right vantage point up on the hill, one could look down and understand immediately why the street had acquired its nickname.

Some areas along the infamous street were reasonably nice, while others, like the part nearest Elisabetta's apartment, were subtly depressing. Subtly only because one grew accustomed so quickly to the garbage and filth everywhere. Relatives who came to visit my family in New Orleans often commented on how much trash lay on the

streets of the French Quarter. But the garbage level of Napoli was three orders of magnitude more severe. Perhaps someone could come up with a Mercalli scale for filth and decay.

I didn't want to imagine what the city must have looked like back in 1656 when over 150,000 people, almost 60% of its residents, had died of the plague.

When I'd sent some photos of the present-day Forcella neighborhood home to my parents, Mom had commented that Napoli seemed rather quaint.

"No, Mom," I'd written back, "it's not quaint. It's only quaint if the image is four by six inches in front of you. When it's *everywhere*, it's brutal." Yet these days, only a few weeks later, I hardly thought about it anymore, only if something struck me as unnaturally dirtier than usual. Like the elderly woman in front of us who slipped on some dog feces and then sat down hard on the rest of the mess not clinging to her shoe.

"Merde!" she shouted.

True enough.

Elder Grant and I hurried to help her up, and she instinctively reached back to rub her sore behind, pulling away her hand in disgust.

My companion retreated a step. Fortunately, I carried a cloth handkerchief with me at all times, something my trainer in Quartu had taught me. It was an easy way to

appear helpful when you really hadn't done anything all that difficult.

Elder Grant picked up the woman's bag of groceries—three rosette and a couple of etti of salami. He tried to be nonchalant while inspecting the bag for evidence of contamination, but the old woman could see his searching gaze and grabbed the bag from him. "Grazie," she muttered, not sounding at all grateful, but then there was no reason she should be. Who wouldn't be angry in her situation?

"Possiamo accompagnarle a casa?" I asked.

Her eyes flitted from my nametag to Elder Grant's. "No."

And who could blame her for feeling suspicious as well? A cousin of mine doing his mission in Illinois told me the missionaries there tried to recruit teens to play basketball but then used that to pressure them to come to church. An RM in my ward told me that on his mission to Japan, they "taught English," but the words they taught were things like "church," "gospel," "atonement," and "tithing." In Quartu, Elder Cornett and I did a weekly radio show. We'd play pop songs like Barbra Streisand's "Woman in Love" or ELO's "All over the World." In between songs, we'd read a few minutes from our missionary discussions.

No listeners ever called the station and asked us to come teach them the rest.

The old woman tossed the soiled handkerchief onto the street and walked away. A young boy, maybe five, threw

down the cigarette butt he'd just picked up and grabbed the handkerchief instead, running off with his find.

Sometimes, it was easier to handle the things I witnessed by pretending I was Will Robinson in an episode of *Lost in Space*, exploring life on a newly discovered planet.

I wondered if the director had meant for Dr. Smith to seem so gay?

While I identified with Nellie Oleson's brother in *Land of the Giants*, I felt nothing for his bank robber friend. It was Don Marshall I couldn't keep my eyes off of. But I told my parents I watched the series every week because one of the flight attendants was Mormon.

We knocked on Elisabetta's door a few minutes later. She lived two flights up in a building with yellow paint fading to gray in places. The stairwell showed what appeared to be unhealthy cracks, but as inspectors hadn't insisted on adding beams to support it, I assumed the damage was only superficial. Against the outer wall of each landing, someone had set up a memorial for a deceased loved one. Almost all of the photos were of young men.

"Chi é?" asked the woman who answered the door. She wore a plain black dress. Women in southern Italy often wore black after the death of their husband or a parent. Mormons in America might wear black to a funeral and keep their mourning clothes stored away until needed again. I knew a Jewish family that had mourning rituals, something to do with a mirror, if I remembered correctly,

that lasted a whole week, with some other kind of commemoration at the end of a year. But southern Italian women often wore black *every day for the rest of their lives*, even if they started at the age of thirty. They'd discard all of their previous clothing and only buy black from that point on. Times were changing, but they would never change for some people, and I sensed Elisabetta was one of them.

"Buon giorno," Elder Grant said. "Il suo fratello ci ha chiesto di visitarle."

"Davvero?"

"He said you were having a bit of a hard time and might like someone to talk to."

At that, the woman laughed. "Talk?" She chuckled again, but it quickly turned into a sigh. "Sure. Why not? Come on in."

Elders were never supposed to be alone with women. Sister missionaries were never supposed to be alone with men. But sometimes, we did what we had to do.

I handed Elisabetta the bottle of aranciata we'd purchased. Fanta. She took it with a smile, but she looked wary, not pleased.

Her apartment was simply furnished, though everything appeared to be in good condition, and the place looked spotless. On one wall was a framed print of Mary holding baby Jesus. To the left, several inches lower, was a photo of a man about Elisabetta's age, taken in a portrait

studio. To the right, at the same height as the photo of the forty-year-old man, was a photo of a twenty-year-old man, also taken professionally.

I recognized the young man from the memorial out on the stairwell landing.

On a tiny table underneath the portrait of Mary sat a simple ceramic vase, blue, that held three fresh daisies—happy, cheerful flowers. Maybe her brother was wrong about her. Perhaps she was already recovering from her loss.

Elder Grant and I sat on the sofa. Before she would take a chair near us, Elisabetta asked if she could offer us anything. My companion deferred, but I'd learned that being a slight imposition was more polite. "Un bicchiere d'acqua, per favore," I said, wanting her to keep the aranciata for herself. Elisabetta disappeared into the kitchen and returned shortly with a glass.

Mineral water, I recognized from the bubbles. I loved the stuff, but I'd hoped for tap, since mineral water could be expensive. I usually only splurged on it once or twice a month myself. I smiled and took a sip.

Porca vacca. It was Acqua Ferrarelle, probably the most expensive mineral water out there, with an unmistakable flavor. Elisabetta had just served me the equivalent of champagne, something clearly reserved for special guests.

I felt like a heel.

“Signora...?” I began.

“Coticelli,” she said.

“Signora Coticelli, quest’acqua é proprio incredibile.” I figured it best to pretend it was my first time, making her sacrifice more meaningful.

“Le piace?” She smiled.

“Mi da le palpitazioni.” It was a bit over the top, but the David Hedison lookalike had asked us to make his sister feel better, and that was always the right thing to do, whether she was depressed or not, whether or not she was interested in the Church.

“You speak Italian so well.”

Elder Grant rolled his eyes at my undeserved praise. It wasn’t hard to sound educated. Almost any word in English ending with -tion was essentially the same in Italian, only with a -zione at the end instead. Inclina^zione, maturazione, perturbazione, and, of course, masturbazione. I could use a “big word” in Italian I’d never seen or heard even once just by making an educated guess.

I sometimes used “big words” in English, too, without meaning to sound snooty. I’d mentioned something in Elders’ Quorum once about carcinogens in New Orleans drinking water.

“Ooh, carcinogens,” the first councilor said in a mocking tone.

I'd had no idea that was a pretentious word. I just tried to use words appropriate to the topic at hand. I'd been using the impurity of New Orleans tap water as a metaphor.

"Ooh, metaphor," the first councilor mocked when I explained.

"Thank you, Signora," I said. "But we'd really like to hear what *you* have to say. Your brother said life's been difficult lately."

Elisabetta sighed again, but not as heavily as before. "It's not just lately," she said. "Ernesto cheated on me all the time. He...brought things home." She closed her eyes for a moment. "It was a relief when he left."

I saw her eying my glass of mineral water and wished I had something useful to offer her.

"Your husband left you?" Elder Grant repeated.

"He didn't come home one evening." She shrugged. "I never heard from him again. He either ran off or got killed by some other woman's husband. But I never heard from the police, so who knows?"

I was amazed sometimes at the things perfect strangers would tell us. While we were out tracting one day, a woman had confided, standing right in her doorway, not even inside with her door closed, that she'd had an affair with the portiere in her building. A man told us he'd stolen money from his brother-in-law and asked us for advice on how to resolve the rift in his family. An elderly woman asked if we

thought she should tell her middle child, in his fifties, he had a different father from his siblings.

“Not knowing what happened must have been difficult,” I said, looking from Elisabetta to the photo of her husband. He reminded me of Michael York’s best friend in *Logan’s Run*. I’d been shocked by a sex scene in the novel I’d purchased after seeing the movie. Logan was forced to have sex five times in a row and was in agony by the end.

“It was hard on Enea,” she said. “He was only eleven.”

Signora Coticelli went on to talk about her son’s truancy, then his shoplifting, then his introduction to housebreaking, low level drug dealing, and finally doing things for the Camorra he could no longer tell his mother about.

“He wasn’t a bad boy,” she said. “He just knew I needed the money. And I *did* need it. So what could I do?” She looked at the photo on the wall. “I let him do those terrible things. And it killed him.” She absentmindedly fiddled with a crucifix hanging from a thin necklace. “If it was wrong for Ernesto to cheat on me, what I did to my son was a hundred times worse.” She sighed. “A thousand times.”

Elder Grant and I exchanged glances. I could see him mouthing a suggestion we give her a blessing, but I shook my head. We needed to do something that could provide a more tangible benefit.

“My brother is worried I’m unhappy.” Elisabetta laughed again but without mirth. “I deserve to be unhappy.”

“Signora Coticelli,” Elder Grant said softly, “the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring peace and forgiveness to everyone.”

I could feel my companion shift into missionary mode. Every week, we had to turn in our stats to our zone leaders, who then sent them to the mission president in Rome. In addition to the number of hours worked—sixty; lessons taught—seven; hours spent in individual and companion study—twelve and six, respectively; we had several other hard and fast quotas not to be missed under any circumstances: get addresses from fifteen random people we stopped on the street, bring at least one person to church, have at least one person committed to baptism, and baptize at least one person. The next week, we had to bring yet another new person to church, the person who had come to church the previous week we now needed firmly committed to baptism, and the person committed to baptism the week before now had to physically be baptized. We were ordered to keep that pipeline flowing without any clogs.

Of course, that pipeline was filled with nothing *but* clogs. Clogs that could only be cleared, we were told at every zone conference, if we demonstrated more faith.

I held up a hand and said, in English, without taking my eyes away from Elisabetta’s pained face, “We’re going to help her in whatever way works best for *her*.”

“But having the gospel—”

“Is more painful for some people than not having it.”

I often daydreamed about what it must be like to be gay without knowing it was wrong. The Church taught that we were only responsible to live up to the amount of truth we had. Sometimes, I wondered if sending missionaries out into the world wasn't the absolute worst thing the Church could do for humanity.

Signora Coticelli frowned, probably suspecting we were saying something bad about her. One of the mission rules was that if we ever did need to speak English, we weren't to do it in front of Italians.

"Signora," I said, "is there something you do that brings you even a few minutes of happiness?" I wasn't sure what to say, what to ask, but I wanted to talk about something, anything, that wasn't the Church.

"Happiness?" She shook her head. "My brother sends me postcards from the cities he travels to for work. I like looking at all the different places he's been."

I wanted to ask if she had a photo album she could show us, but I was afraid she might never have been able to afford one, and the request would be insensitive. What if I asked if she had a box of photos and postcards, and she felt insulted I didn't expect her to have an album?

What if sharing her photos was simply too personal an act?

"Sometimes," she said, "I listen to the radio. Or I walk past the flower stalls. Or I go up to Vomero and look down on the city. It's so pretty...from a distance."

I laughed, causing both Elisabetta and my companion to frown. “Can I quote you on that?”

“Non capisco.”

“I was just saying something similar to my mother.”

Signora Coticelli smiled sadly. “Are you close to your mother?”

And suddenly, I knew what to give Elisabetta. “Yes, it’s hard being away for two years. We can’t even call.”

“You can’t phone her on her birthday? On Christmas?” Her eyes narrowed as she glanced at our scriptures and flip charts.

“We write once a week.”

Elisabetta’s shoulders relaxed a little. “You write your mother?” she asked. “Every week?”

“Every week.”

She turned to look at the photos on her wall.

“What was Enea’s favorite meal?” I asked.

“Anziano...”

Signora Coticelli frowned again. She studied our faces for several more seconds. “He liked lasagna.”

I smiled. Of course he did. So expensive and time-consuming to make it was often the special holiday meal for Christmas. “Signora Coticelli,” I said, “how do you feel about us dropping off all the cheeses and meats and

everything else you'll need? We can bring it by Thursday morning and then stop by for dinner later so you can tell us some stories about Enea."

Elisabetta's smile looked genuine. I could tell by the crinkles next to her eyes. Polite smiles didn't make crinkles.

Books by Johnny Townsend

Thanks for reading! If you enjoyed this book, could you please take a few minutes to write a review online? Reviews are helpful both to me as an author and to other readers, so we'd all sincerely appreciate your writing one! And if you did enjoy the book, here are some others I've written you might want to look up:

Mormon Underwear

God's Gargoyles

The Circumcision of God

Sex among the Saints

Dinosaur Perversions

Zombies for Jesus

The Abominable Gayman

The Gay Mormon Quilter's Club

The Golem of Rabbi Loew

Mormon Fairy Tales

Flying over Babel

Marginal Mormons

Mormon Bullies

The Mormon Victorian Society

Dragons of the Book of Mormon

Selling the City of Enoch

A Day at the Temple

Behind the Zion Curtain

Gayrabian Nights

Lying for the Lord

Despots of Deseret

Missionaries Make the Best Companions

Invasion of the Spirit Snatchers

The Tyranny of Silence

Sex on the Sabbath

The Washing of Brains

The Mormon Inquisition

Interview with a Mission President

Weeping, Wailing, and Gnashing of Teeth

Behind the Bishop's Door

The Moat around Zion

The Last Days Linger

Mormon Madness

Human Compassion for Beginners

Dead Mankind Walking

Who Invited You to the Orgy?

Breaking the Promise of the Promised Land

I Will, Through the Veil

Am I My Planet's Keeper?

Have Your Cum and Eat It, Too

Strangers with Benefits

What Would Anne Frank Do?

This Is All Just Too Hard

Blessed Are the Firefighters

Wake Up and Smell the Missionaries

Racism by Proxy

Orgy at the STD Clinic

Life Is Better with Love

Please Evacuate

Let the Faggots Burn: The UpStairs Lounge Fire

Latter-Gay Saints: An Anthology of Gay Mormon Fiction (co-editor)

Available from BookLocker.com or your favorite online or neighborhood bookstore.

Wondering what some of those other books are about? Read on!

The Washing of Brains

A world-weary man becomes a widower for the third time. A non-Mormon couple allow their teenage daughter to be baptized but are then shocked when she rejects them and moves in with a more righteous

family. A man awakens to celebrate a milestone birthday only to discover that horrifying world events demand his attention instead. A budding feminist tries to make a political statement by giving birth to her “illegitimate” son in church just before Mother’s Day. Missionaries in Rome try to prevent a terrorist bombing. The Prophet devises a plan to reverse global warming. A Salt Lake bishop is overwhelmed by his congregants’ secrets. A gay Mormon man devastated by the breakup of his marriage to a closeted Hasidic Jew considers returning to the fold. An unhappy bartender reminisces about the affair he had with his mission president in Paris. A returned missionary takes a job in an adult video store. A young woman befriends the dungeon master who lives above her. A BYU student working as an escort finds love.

Invasion of the Spirit Snatchers

During the Apocalypse, a group of Mormon survivors in Hurricane, Utah gather in the home of the Relief Society president, telling stories to pass the time as they ration their food storage and await the Second Coming. But this is no ordinary group of Mormons—or perhaps it is. They are the faithful, feminist, gay, apostate, and repentant, all working together to help each other through the darkest days any of them have yet seen.

Gayrabian Nights

Gayrabian Nights is a twist on the well-known classic, *1001 Arabian Nights*, in which Scheherazade, under the threat of death if she ceases to captivate King Shahryar's attention, enchants him through a series of mysterious, adventurous, and romantic tales.

In this variation, a male escort, invited to the hotel room of a closeted, homophobic Mormon senator, learns that the man is poised to vote on a piece of anti-gay legislation the following morning. To prevent him from sleeping, so that the exhausted senator will miss casting his vote on the Senate floor, the escort entertains him with stories of homophobia, celibacy, mixed orientation marriages, reparative therapy, coming out, first love, gay marriage, and long-term successful gay relationships. The escort crafts the stories to give the senator a crash course in gay culture and sensibilities, hoping to bring the man closer to accepting his own sexual orientation.

Let the Faggots Burn: The UpStairs Lounge Fire

On Gay Pride Day in 1973, someone set the entrance to a French Quarter gay bar on fire. In the terrible inferno that followed, thirty-two people lost

their lives, including a third of the local congregation of the Metropolitan Community Church, their pastor burning to death halfway out a second-story window as he tried to claw his way to freedom. A mother who'd gone to the bar with her two gay sons died alongside them. A man who'd helped his friend escape first was found dead near the fire escape. Two children waited outside a movie theater across town for a father and step-father who would never pick them up. During this era of rampant homophobia, several families refused to claim the bodies, and many churches refused to bury the dead. Author Johnny Townsend pored through old records and tracked down survivors of the fire as well as relatives and friends of those killed to compile this fascinating account of a forgotten moment in gay history.

The Abominable Gayman

What is a gay Mormon missionary doing in Italy? He is trying to save his own soul as well as the souls of others. In these tales chronicling the two-year mission of Robert Anderson, we see a young man tormented by his inability to be the man the Church says he should be. In addition to his personal hell, Anderson faces a major earthquake, organized crime, a serious bus accident, and much more. He copes with horrendous mission leaders and his own suicidal tendencies. But

one day, he meets another missionary who loves him, and his world changes forever.

Marginal Mormons

What happens when a High Priest becomes addicted to crack cocaine? Should an unemployed bank teller take in a homeless protester from the Occupy movement? Do gay people have positive near-death experiences or unhappy ones? Is there a way to splice the empathy gene into the genome of every human? Can a schizophrenic woman on anti-delusional drugs still keep her belief in an intangible God? Will a childless biochemist be able to find fulfillment by taking part in a mission to Mars? Should a stay-at-home mom become involved in an international protest against fracking? Not every Latter-day Saint has a mainstream story to tell, but these soul-searching people are still more than the marginal Mormons headquarters would like us to believe.

Missionaries Make the Best Companions

What lies behind the freshly scrubbed façades of the Mormon missionaries we see about town? In these stories, an ex-Mormon tries to seduce a faithful elder by showing him increasingly suggestive movies. A

sister missionary fulfills her community service requirement by babysitting for a prostitute. Two elders break their mission rules by venturing into the forbidden French Quarter. A black Mormon deals with racism in the Church. A senior missionary couple try to reactivate lapsed members while their own family falls apart back home. A young man hopes that serving a second full-time mission will lead him up the Church hierarchy. Two bored missionaries decide to make a little extra money moonlighting in a male stripper club. Two frustrated elders find an acceptable way to masturbate—by donating to a Fertility Clinic. A lonely man searches for the favorite companion he hasn't seen in thirty years.

Dragons of the Book of Mormon

A supporter of Prop 8 is forced to attend his boss's gay wedding. A devout Latter-day Saint struggling to pay his bills wonders if he should keep paying tithing, even after being excommunicated. A reporter seeks the identity of Salt Lake's new superhero—a masked man wearing temple clothes who mysteriously shows up at crime scenes. A woman is murdered in the temple on her wedding day. A devoted husband loses his wife on their wedding anniversary. One of the Three Nephites is missing in Pasadena. Mormons survive the zombie

apocalypse because of their two-year supply of food storage.

Mormon Underwear

Mormon Underwear tells the stories of gay Mormons that mainstream members don't want to hear. Whether it is a young LDS man stripping to his Mormon underwear in public or a virginal 70-year-old finally giving in to temptation, a straight son who discovers his father kissing another man or a group who plots to put gays into positions of power within the Church, these are the stories too shameful or shocking to be told among traditional Saints.

The Golem of Rabbi Loew

Jacob and Esau Cohen are the closest of brothers. In fact, they're lovers. A doctor tries to combine canine genes with those of Jews, to improve their chances of surviving a hostile world. A Talmudic scholar dates an escort. A scientist tries to develop the "God spot" in the brains of his patients in order to create a messiah. The Golem of Prague is really Rabbi Loew's secret lover. While some of the Jews in Townsend's book are Orthodox, this collection of Jewish stories most certainly is not.

The Mormon Victorian Society

A Victorian enthusiast has a startling sexual revelation to make at his monthly Society meeting. A father tries desperately to save his family from the imminent danger of global warming. Two men find love in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. A gay man attending his first Affirmation conference becomes embroiled in ex-Mormon politics. A home teaching assignment goes terribly wrong when a man whose father was murdered in a gay bar is confronted with a young gay cowboy. A Relief Society president is trapped on a plane next to a gay man flaunting his sexuality. A ministering angel to a young god tires of his position. Gay Mormons react when the Prophet has a new revelation about homosexuality.

Interview with a Mission President

Jason Kincaid is nearing the end of his three-year term as president of the Washington Seattle mission of the LDS Church. His service has been difficult, and for the first time in his life, he has doubts. During the last zone conference over which he presides, he does something he's never done before. In each of his interviews with the missionaries serving under him, he asks them to openly discuss their own doubts. He hopes that by building up their faith, he will rebuild his own.

What happens instead will rock the entire Church to its core.

The Last Days Linger

The scriptures tell us that in the Last Days, wickedness will increase upon the Earth. When leaders of the Mormon Church see a rise in the number of gay members, they believe the end is upon them. But while “wickedness never was happiness,” it begins to appear that wickedness can sometimes be divine. At least, the stories here suggest that religious proscriptions condemning homosexuality have it all wrong. While gay Mormons may be no closer to perfection than anyone else, they’re no further from it, either. And sometimes, being gay provides just the right ingredient to create saints—as flawed as God himself.

Mormon Madness

Mental illness can strike the faithful as easily as anyone else. But often religious doctrine and practice exacerbate rather than alleviate these problems. From schizophrenia to obsessive-compulsive disorder, from persecution complex to sexual dysfunction, autism to dissociative identity disorder, Mormons must cope

with their mental as well as their spiritual health on a daily basis.

Breaking the Promise of the Promised Land: How Religious Conservatives Failed America

By aligning themselves over the past 60 years with the most conservative wing of the Republican Party, Mormons became leading contributors to the cultural and moral decay of America. Mormon prophets have long declared that God set America apart for the righteous. It was to be a land of freedom, justice, and peace, a place where the Lamanites could blossom as the rose, a country so righteous that the affairs of the entire world would be conducted here during the Millennium.

But when Mormons tired of being “a peculiar people” and chose to side with the most repressive evangelicals, they chose to make America the land of the imprisoned, poor, and oppressed. While declaring their allegiance to the Prince of Peace, they’ve chosen to support policies that have kept America at war almost non-stop for the last six decades.

Perhaps rather than continue following old men who tell them what an invisible God wants them to do,

they should consider doing what they can see with their own eyes the people all around them need.

Am I My Planet's Keeper?

Global Warming. Climate Change. Climate Crisis. Climate Emergency. Whatever label we use, we are facing one of the greatest challenges to the survival of life as we know it.

But while addressing greenhouse gases is perhaps our most urgent need, it's not our only task. We must also address toxic waste, pollution, habitat destruction, and our other contributions to the world's sixth mass extinction event.

In order to do that, we must simultaneously address the unmet human needs that keep us distracted from deeper engagement in stabilizing our climate: moderating economic inequality, guaranteeing healthcare to all, and ensuring education for everyone.

And to accomplish *that*, we must unite to combat the monied forces that use fear, prejudice, and misinformation to manipulate us.

It's a daunting task. But success is our only option.

Have Your Cum and Eat It, Too

It's 1981, and two Mormon missionaries randomly assigned to work together as "companions" in Napoli find themselves in trouble. They're falling in love, but the Church forbids gay relationships. As missionaries, they can't date anyone at all, much less other men. If they're found out, they'll be excommunicated, sent home in disgrace, and cast out from their families.

In the aftermath of a devastating earthquake, against a backdrop of poverty and repressive mission culture, Elders Grant and Mortensen knock on doors, endure violent assaults, and face the ultimate challenge—will they be crushed by dedication to their beliefs or will love provide a way for them to escape?

Wake Up and Smell the Missionaries

Two Mormon missionaries in Italy discover they share the same rare ability—both can emit pheromones on demand. At first, they playfully compete in the hills of Frascati to see who can tempt "investigators" most. But soon they're targeting each other non-stop.

Can two immature young men learn to control their "superpower" to live a normal life...and develop genuine love? Even as their relationship is threatened by the attentions of another man?

They seem just on the verge of success when a massive earthquake leaves them trapped under the rubble of their apartment in Castellammare.

With night falling and temperatures dropping, can they dig themselves out in time to save themselves? And will their injuries destroy the ability that brought them together in the first place?

Orgy at the STD Clinic

Todd Tillotson is struggling to move on after his husband is killed in a hit and run attack a year earlier during a Black Lives Matter protest in Seattle.

In this novel set entirely on public transportation, we watch as Todd, isolated throughout the pandemic, battles desperation in his attempt to safely reconnect with the world.

Will he find love again, even casual friendship, or will he simply end up another crazy old man on the bus?

Things don't look good until a man whose face he can't even see sits down beside him despite the raging variants.

And asks him a question that will change his life.

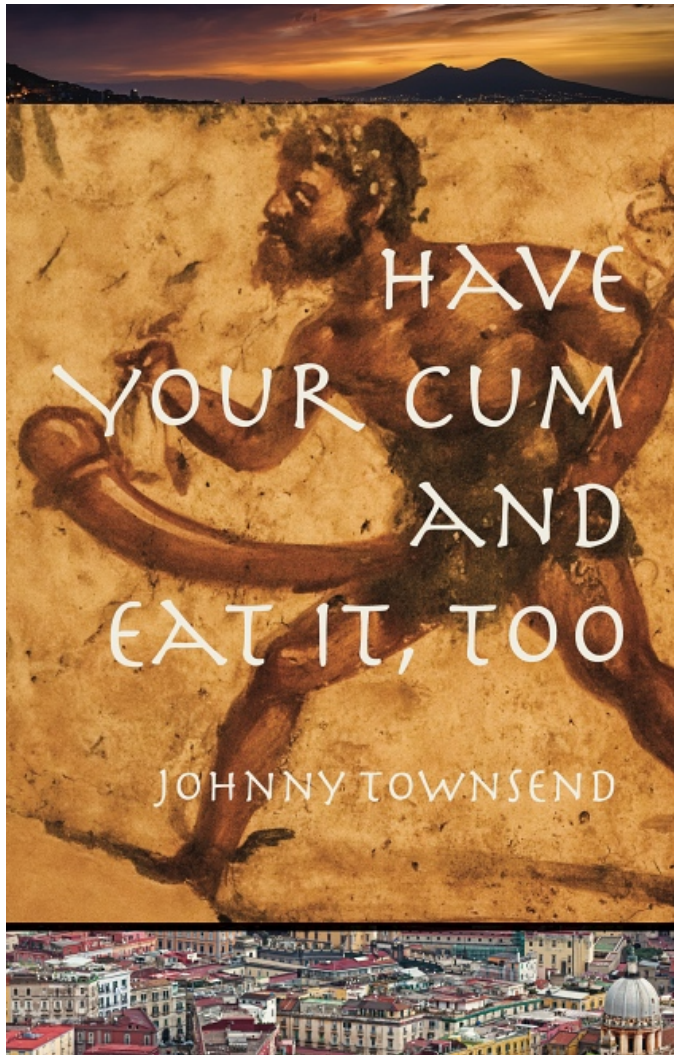
Please Evacuate

A gay, partygoing New Yorker unconcerned about the future or the unsustainability of capitalism is hit by a truck and thrust into a straight man's body half a continent away. As Hunter tries to figure out what's happening, he's caught up in another disaster, a wildfire sweeping through a Colorado community, the flames overtaking him and several schoolchildren as they flee.

When he awakens, Hunter finds himself in the body of yet another man, this time in northern Italy, a former missionary about to marry a young Mormon woman. Still piecing together this new reality, and beginning to embrace his latest identity, Hunter fights for his life in a devastating flash flood along with his wife *and* his new husband.

He's an aging worker in drought-stricken Texas, a nurse at an assisted living facility in the direct path of a hurricane, an advocate for the unhoused during a freak Seattle blizzard.

We watch as Hunter is plunged into life after life, finally recognizing the futility of only looking out for #1 and understanding the part he must play in addressing the global climate crisis...if he ever gets another chance.



It's 1981, and two Mormon missionaries randomly assigned to work together as "companions" in Napoli find themselves in trouble. They're falling in love, but the Church forbids gay relationships. Will they be crushed by dedication to their beliefs, or will love provide a way for them to escape?

Have Your Cum and Eat It, Too

By Johnny Townsend

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