

Mark faces isolation during the COVID pandemic but discovers he can help others address urgent needs. He cuts a glory hole in his door to service mail carriers, delivery drivers, and assorted neighbors without exposing anyone to the virus. It's not traditional volunteer work, but Mark wants to pitch in as best he can during the ongoing crisis.

Glory to the Glory Hole!

By Johnny Townsend

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Glory to the Glory Hole!

Johnny Townsend

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*

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

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

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

Stephen Carter, editor of *Sunstone* magazine

The Circumcision of God “asks questions that are not often asked out loud in Mormonism, and certainly not answered.”

Jeff Laver, author of *Elder Petersen’s Mission Memories*

“Told from a believably conversational first-person perspective, [*The Abominable Gayman*’s] novelistic focus on Anderson’s journey to thoughtful self-acceptance allows for greater character development than often seen in short stories, which makes this well-paced work rich and satisfying, and one of Townsend’s strongest. An extremely important contribution to the field of Mormon fiction.” Named to Kirkus Reviews’ Best of 2011.

Kirkus Reviews

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

Niki D’Andrea, *Phoenix New Times*

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

Kirkus Reviews

“The Buzzard Tree,” from *The Circumcision of God*, was a finalist for the 2007 Whitney Award for Best Short LDS Fiction.

Glory to the Glory Hole!

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

A.J. Kirby, *The Short Review*

“The Rift,” from *The Abominable Gayman*, is a “fascinating tale of an untenable situation...a *tour de force*.”

David Lenson, editor, *The Massachusetts Review*

“Pronouncing the Apostrophe,” from *The Golem of Rabbi Loew*, is “quiet and revealing, an intriguing tale...”

Sima Rabinowitz, *Literary Magazine Review*, NewPages.com

The Circumcision of God is “a collection of short stories that consider the imperfect, silenced majority of Mormons, who may in fact be [the Church’s] best hope...[The book leaves] readers regretting the church’s willingness to marginalize those who best exemplify its ideals: those who love fiercely despite all obstacles, who brave challenges at great personal risk and who always choose the hard, higher road.”

Kirkus Reviews

“Johnny Townsend’s...keen observations on the human condition come in many shapes and sizes...reflecting on both his Jewish and Mormon backgrounds as well as life in the vast and varied American gay community...His perspective is sometimes startling, sometimes hilarious, sometimes poignant, but always compassionate.”

Gerald S. Argetsinger, Artistic Director of the Hill Cumorah
Pageant (1990-96)

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

Kel Munger, *Sacramento News and Review*

“*Selling the City of Enoch* exists at that awkward intersection where the LDS ideal meets the real world, and Townsend navigates his terrain with humor, insight, and pathos.”

Donna Banta, author of *False Prophet*

The Golem of Rabbi Loew will prompt “gasps of outrage from conservative readers...a strong collection.”

Kirkus Reviews

“That’s one of the reasons why I found Johnny Townsend’s new book *Mormon Fairy Tales* SO MUCH FUN!! Without fretting about what the theology is supposed to be if it were

Glory to the Glory Hole!

pinned down, Townsend takes you on a voyage to explore the rich-but-undertapped imagination of Mormonism. I loved his portrait of spirit prison! He really nailed it—not in an official doctrine sort of way, but in a sort of ‘if you know Mormonism, you know this is what it must be like’ way—and what a prison it is!”

C. L. Hanson, *Main Street Plaza*

Zombies for Jesus is “eerie, erotic, and magical.”

Publishers Weekly

“While [Townsend’s] many touching vignettes draw deeply from Mormon mythology, history, spirituality and culture, [*Mormon Fairy Tales*] is neither a gaudy act of proselytism nor angry protest literature from an ex-believer. Like all good fiction, his stories are simply about the joys, the hopes and the sorrows of people.”

Kirkus Reviews

“In *Let the Faggots Burn* author Johnny Townsend restores this tragic event [the UpStairs Lounge fire] to its proper place in LGBT history and reminds us that the victims of the blaze were not just ‘statistics,’ but real people with real lives, families, and friends.”

Jesse Monteagudo, *The Bilerico Project*

Johnny Townsend

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

In *Let the Faggots Burn*, “Townsend’s heart-rending descriptions of the victims...seem to [make them] come alive once more.”

Kit Van Cleave, *OutSmart Magazine*

Marginal Mormons is “an irreverent, honest look at life outside the mainstream Mormon Church....Throughout his musings on sin and forgiveness, Townsend beautifully demonstrates his characters’ internal, perhaps irreconcilable struggles....Rather than anger and disdain, he offers an honest portrayal of people searching for meaning and community in their lives, regardless of their life choices or secrets.” Named to Kirkus Reviews’ Best of 2012.

Kirkus Reviews

“The Sneakover Prince” from *God’s Gargoyles* is “one of the most sweet and romantic stor[ies] I have ever read.”

Elisa Rolle, Reviews and Ramblings, founder
of The Rainbow Awards

Glory to the Glory Hole!

“*Let the Faggots Burn* is a one-of-a-kind piece of history. Without Townsend’s diligence and devotion, many details would’ve been lost forever. With his tremendous foresight and tenacious research, Townsend put a face on this tragedy at a time when few people would talk about it....Through Townsend’s vivid writing, you will sense what it must’ve been like in those final moments as the fire ripped through the UpStairs Lounge. *Let the Faggots Burn* is a chilling and insightful glimpse into a largely forgotten and ignored chapter of LGBT history.”

Robert Camina, writer and producer of the documentary *Raid of the Rainbow Lounge*

“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*

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

Gay. Guy. Reading and Friends

The stories in *The Mormon Victorian Society* “register the new openness and confidence of gay life in the age of same-sex marriage....What hasn’t changed is Townsend’s wry, conversational prose, his subtle evocations of character and social dynamics, and his deadpan humor. His warm empathy still glows in this intimate yet clear-eyed engagement with

Mormon theology and folkways. Funny, shrewd and finely wrought dissections of the awkward contradictions—and surprising harmonies—between conscience and desire.” Named to Kirkus Reviews’ Best of 2013.

Kirkus Reviews

“This collection of short stories [*The Mormon Victorian Society*] featuring gay Mormon characters slammed [me] in the face from the first page, wrestled my heart and mind to the floor, and left me panting and wanting more by the end. Johnny Townsend has created so many memorable characters in such few pages. I went weeks thinking about this book. It truly touched me.”

Tom Webb, judge for The Rainbow Awards (A Bear on Books)

“The struggles and solutions of the individuals [in *Latter-Gay Saints*] will resonate across faith traditions and help readers better understand the cost of excluding gay members from full religious participation.”

Publishers Weekly

Dragons of the Book of Mormon is an “entertaining collection....Townsend’s prose is sharp, clear, and easy to read, and his characters are well rendered...”

Publishers Weekly

“The pre-eminent documenter of alternative Mormon lifestyles...Townsend has a deep understanding of his characters, and his limpid prose, dry humor and well-grounded (occasionally magical) realism make their spiritual conundrums both compelling and entertaining. [*Dragons of the Book of Mormon* is] [a]nother of Townsend’s critical but affectionate and absorbing tours of Mormon discontent.” Named to Kirkus Reviews’ Best of 2014.

Kirkus Reviews

“Mormon Movie Marathon,” from *Selling the City of Enoch*, “is funny, constructively critical, but also sad because the desire...for belonging is so palpable.”

Levi S. Peterson, author of *The Backslider* and *The Canyons of Grace*

In *Gayrabian Nights*, “Townsend’s prose is always limpid and evocative, and...he finds real drama and emotional depth in the most ordinary of lives.”

Kirkus 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]

Johnny Townsend

displays a great deal of insight as well...a playful, biting and surprisingly warm collection.”

Kirkus Reviews

“Among the most captivating of the prose [in *Off the Rocks*, in a piece reprinted from the collection *A Day at the Temple*] was a story by Johnny Townsend illustrating two Mormon missionaries who break the rules of their teachings to spend more time with one another.”

Lauren Childers, *Windy City Times*

Gayrabian Nights is a “complex revelation of how seriously soul damaging the denial of the true self can be.”

Ryan Rhodes, author of *Free Electricity*

Gayrabian Nights “was easily the most original book I’ve read all year. Funny, touching, topical, and thoroughly enjoyable.”

Rainbow Awards

Lying for the Lord is “one of the most gripping books that I’ve picked up for quite a while. I love the author’s writing style, alternately cynical, humorous, biting, scathing, poignant, and touching.... This is the third book of his that I’ve read, and all

are equally engaging. These are stories that need to be told, and the author does it in just the right way.”

Heidi Alsop, Ex-Mormon Foundation Board Member

“If you like short stories and you’re interested in the lives of Mormons, you should be following the work of Johnny Townsend. Since he writes from an ex-Mormon perspective, believers often dismiss Townsend’s work as biased—or as *a priori* ‘an attack on the church’—but I think that’s a mistake. Johnny Townsend writes his characters with a great deal of compassion and empathy, whether they’re in the church or not...or somewhere in between.”

C. L. Hanson, *Main Street Plaza*

“Townsend is a wonderful writer with a wry but sympathetic eye for humans’ frailties, and the ways in which religious belief both exacerbate and console them. [*Despots of Deseret* contains] more vibrant parables about doubts and blasphemies that hide beneath a veneer of piety.” Named to Kirkus Reviews’ Best of 2015.

Kirkus Reviews

In *Lying for the Lord*, Townsend “gets under the skin of his characters to reveal their complexity and conflicts....shrewd, evocative [and] wryly humorous.”

Kirkus Reviews

In *Missionaries Make the Best Companions*, “the author treats the clash between religious dogma and liberal humanism with vivid realism, sly humor, and subtle feeling as his characters try to figure out their true missions in life. Another of Townsend’s rich dissections of Mormon failures and uncertainties...” Named to Kirkus Reviews’ Best of 2015.

Kirkus Reviews

In *Invasion of the Spirit Snatchers*, “Townsend, a confident and practiced storyteller, skewers the hypocrisies and eccentricities of his characters with precision and affection. The outlandish framing narrative is the most consistent source of shock and humor, but the stories do much to ground the reader in the world—or former world—of the characters....A funny, charming tale about a group of Mormons facing the end of the world.”

Kirkus Reviews

Townsend’s “works are on a cutting edge of history.”

Walter Jones, Assistant Head of Special
Collections, Marriott Library

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

Rainbow Awards

“Townsend’s collection [*The Washing of Brains*] once again displays his limpid, naturalistic prose, skillful narrative chops, and his subtle insights into psychology...Well-crafted dispatches on the clash between religion and self-fulfillment...”

Kirkus Reviews

The Last Days Linger was awarded Second Place for Best Gay Contemporary General Fiction in the 2017 Rainbow Awards

“While the author is generally at his best when working as a satirist, there are some fine, understated touches in these tales [*The Last Days Linger*] that will likely affect readers in subtle ways....readers should come away impressed by the deep empathy he shows for all his characters—even the homophobic ones.”

Kirkus Reviews

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

Johnny Townsend

“‘Mormon Communists with Temple Recommends’ [in *This Is All Just Too Hard*] is nominally about politics, but it’s so much bigger than that.”

Evan Derkacz, *Religion Dispatches*

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Contents

Glory to the Glory Hole!	20
Chapter One: Using the Right Tool at the Right Time.....	21
Chapter Two: Dutch Door Intimacy	33
Chapter Three: Friends, Acquaintances, and Anti-Strangers	46
Chapter Four: Jane Austen for Dinner.....	61
Chapter Five: The Zoom Terrorist.....	74
Chapter Six: The Stupid Never Stops.....	92
Chapter Seven: Taking a Knee	107
Chapter Eight: Falling Out of Bed.....	122
Chapter Nine: Like a Dick in the Night.....	138
Chapter Ten: Polyamory for Two.....	152
Chapter Eleven: The Nightmare of My Dreams.....	166
Chapter Twelve: Offering the Right Love at the Right Time.....	184
About the Author	196
Books by Johnny Townsend.....	199

Chapter One: Using the Right Tool at the Right Time

“What do *you* want?”

The man leaning over the engine of his Ford F-150 looked back at me in disgust. He was about forty—my age—with dark, thick hair and a hint of stubble on his chin. His chest was firm and trim in his red T-shirt, the bas-relief of a beaded ring over his right nipple. His ass looked just the right size underneath tight, black jeans.

“Thank you for asking,” I replied matter-of-factly, adjusting myself so slightly someone who wasn’t gay might not have noticed.

The man standing beside his truck noticed.

“I’d like to fuck you and then suck you off.” I let my little finger toy with the tab on my zipper. “The other way around is OK, too.”

The man dropped whatever tool he’d been using into the engine. I knew nothing about tools, at least that kind, so it could have been a screwdriver as easily as a socket wrench. I wasn’t paying particular attention to his hands.

“Will that work for you?” I continued. “I always carry a tiny bottle of lube.” I pointed to the bulge in my crotch which, if one looked closely enough, clearly suggested there was more beneath my underwear than at first met the eye. A travel-sized bottle of hair conditioner, to be exact. It was as effective as

Crisco and not nearly as messy. The slightly unnatural shape this added to my box routinely led to a brief discussion carried out through an exchange of glances which led, more often than not, to an exchange of bodily fluids.

“Looks like you have some grease on your hands,” I pointed out, looking at them now. His long fingers could be useful in multiple ways. “That’ll do just as well.”

“Fuck!”

“Oh, not here on the street.” I smiled and gestured in the general direction of what I assumed was his house. I’d been HIV+ for almost twenty years, so I was OK with the risk, if the guy I was spending time with was OK with it, too. “Shall we?”

“Goddammit, I’m late for work!” But Randy introduced himself briefly, said he was leaving his torque wrench wherever it had fallen under the hood, and ushered me inside. Reading his greasy hands and angry expression, I’d assumed he’d want his sex rough. In fact, I encouraged him to take his frustration over being late out on me once he leaned me over the footboard of his bed. Instead, he’d been the gentlest lover I’d ever had.

Well, that first day, anyway.

He called an Uber and asked if I’d come back again later. Evening sex, apparently, was another thing entirely.

That was twelve years ago. Randy and I had lived “semi-contentedly ever after” until six weeks ago, when he was deliberately run over by an irate driver during a Black Lives Matter protest in Seattle. When two officers came to our house to tell me he’d been killed, I knew we’d made a terrible

bargain. Randy and I had agreed to participate in alternate rallies and protests so that one of us would always be home to bail the other out of jail if necessary, one of us would remain healthy enough to keep going to work, even if the other was shot with a less-lethal bullet or pepper sprayed in the face.

But now I had to live knowing I hadn't been there to hold him during his last moments. Growing up a Reform Jew, I'd never felt a strong belief in God, but even as an excommunicated Mormon, Randy had often talked about us being together "forever." He'd meant it literally, but I hadn't even managed to stay with him 'til death did us part.

I'd lost my job at the adult video store shortly after the pandemic broke out. It paid just pennies above minimum wage but had been a fun place to work, other than cleaning up piss and cum and, occasionally, shit-covered paper towels and condoms. The boss forbid employees from fooling around with the customers, even off site, but the flirting alone had been enjoyable.

Now I had only my second part-time job, at a local home improvement store, where I'd finally been forced to learn about real tools. Randy liked to be dildoeed with the handle of his favorite screwdriver, getting a kick out of italicizing the name. "*Screw my slot with that slotted screwdriver!*"

We all had our kinks.

I'd been feeling a lump in my throat every day I showed up for work these past few weeks and was forced to pass the torque wrenches on the way to my station.

The only thing I'd never been able to get into was bondage, although whenever Randy achieved something

significant at work, I let him tie me up when he got home. I suspected he wasn't really receiving so many accolades for his projects and reports, but when I playfully threatened to verify his latest accomplishment with his boss, he promptly shoved a gag into my mouth and fucked me silly.

With everyone wearing face masks and trying to stay six feet apart since March, flirting had disappeared from my life months before Randy's murder. I'd never hear his voice again from the kitchen as he walked in the front door. "Mark, I brought someone home for you!"

Whoever thought I'd miss being fucked with the handle of a plastic serving spoon lying on my back on the kitchen table while a stranger shot onto my face?

"Hey, Mark, Tom's out sick today." My manager, Tabitha, rolled her eyes. She pronounced her name Ta-BEETH-ah and snapped at anyone, even new acquaintances, who said it incorrectly.

"COVID?" I asked.

"You know that's not a real disease." She wasn't allowed to wear her MAGA hat at work, but we all knew she had one. She only wore a mask, featuring an American flag, because of the governor's mandate, even though she "accidentally" let it slip below her nose whenever she could.

I shrugged. "Lots of new cases in Thighland," I said. Tabitha hated when I mocked Donald Trump. But really, it was irresistible. Who didn't know how to pronounce Thailand, surely more common than Ta-BEETH-ah?

“Jews always think they’re so smart,” she said, unfazed. We’d actually gotten along fine until 2016, after which she’d become increasingly difficult. I’d reported her once and been reprimanded by the head of HR, so I just took notes to document the ongoing situation and hoped something better would eventually come along.

It was hard to care about the future much at all these days.

At least Trump repeating, “Yo! Semite!” over and over had been amusing. If Jews had learned anything over the centuries, it was how to laugh at things that weren’t funny.

Future generations, if there were any, would look back and think all the real video from this period had been destroyed or doctored. No leader this stupid could possibly enjoy all the support he did.

“I’ll let you know if I experience any ‘new confusion,’” I said.

“Huh?”

It looked like Tabitha might be experiencing one of the latest known symptoms of COVID, too.

I had the next Monday off, and it began cool, cloudy, and misty, wonderful for a mid-July morning in Seattle. I sat on the front porch in one of the two vintage metal lawn chairs Randy and I had bought at a garage sale years before and spray-painted mauve.

The other chair was already growing dusty.

I watched two or three varieties of bees enjoying the blue thistles and orange *Crocoshmia*. Several buzzed about the cherry tomato blossoms and red clover as well.

I remembered the time I'd found Randy in the front yard, still as a statue, the hose spraying in a constant stream against the lavender.

"Does it need that much water?" I asked. I was afraid he might be having a stroke. His blood pressure had been high his last two check-ups, so I had to be careful how I worded my concern. It was only a matter of time before he'd need to go on dialysis. None of this was related to anything specific—he still looked more fit than most men at twenty—but Randy's father had started dialysis at fifty-one, and Randy had just turned fifty-two.

"Shhh," he'd whispered. "Look at my left hand."

Was it trembling? Was he about to have a seizure?

I squinted and saw a hummingbird not six inches away from him, hovering at first so that it took a while for me to realize it was there at all, only catching its movement when it slowly darted forward to dip its feet in the stream of water. It backed out and returned to dip its feet again, repeating the movement several more times before finally dipping its long beak into the stream. It repeated that action several times, too, before finally flying off.

"Wow," Randy breathed. "Wow."

The man I watched hardcore porn with three times a week always made sure our hummingbird feeder was full.

I didn't see any hummingbirds today. But the rhododendron was full of wrens. A few were hopping along the

ground, and several flew up to the internet cable draped from the telephone pole to the house.

Just before 10:00, I heard the mail carrier heading toward me past the California lilac bordering the sidewalk between our house—*my* house now—and the neighbor's. The carrier today was mixed race, Filipino and African American. We'd chatted a couple of times in the past, pre-COVID. He was one of three or four semi-regulars on this route. Carriers kept their distance these days like everyone else.

"Nice mask," I said. Henry's cloth mask jutted out slightly, the muzzle of a dog painted onto it.

"Yours, too."

Mine featured vampire fangs. Randy and I had wanted to make the pandemic a little more bearable since it promised to hang around for a while. We had masks with rainbow colors, one with the leather pride flag, another with a tongue sticking out petulantly from between purple lips, one illustrated with the Great Wave of Kanagawa woodcut, and a variety of others. Even on walks through the neighborhood, or sitting here on my porch, I kept a mask down around my chin so I could pull it up the moment I needed it.

"Thanks."

In the latest news I'd heard last night, the Postmaster General insisted that mailed ballots be charged the full 55-cent First Class rate rather than the usual 20-cent bulk rate, in yet one more attempt both to disrupt voting and to push the postal service closer to bankruptcy. Randy's grandfather had been a mail carrier, so we'd talked often about the Republican goal of privatization.

“How are you dealing with the attacks on the USPS?” I asked the carrier as he pulled down the drawer on the mailbox. No more handing mail directly to the resident. I knew it was dangerous to talk politics, but compared to being run over, what, really, was I risking? Years ago, a mail carrier who discovered I was gay had tried to exorcise me. But I guess since I wasn’t a believer, the magic didn’t work.

“It sucks,” Henry said.

I didn’t mean to, but I let my eyes dart to his crotch when I heard the word.

“Uh...”

“Yes?” I returned my gaze to his face and hoped he hadn’t noticed. He was perhaps 5’5”, with a slight paunch, not magnetically attractive but not bad.

“We’re not supposed to ask this...” he said, his voice trailing off.

Did he want me to give him a blow job? I could feel myself hardening and realized I’d only beaten off twice since Randy died.

Henry glanced about before continuing. “I really need to piss.”

“Oh.”

He held up a hand and motioned as if erasing his comment. “I mean, if you have a bucket out back,” he mumbled, “or a bush...”

“Come around to the side door,” I said, waving him to the narrow pathway. The neighbors to my left had no windows on the side of their house facing me, and Randy and I had planted two quaking aspens and some bamboo. One of Randy’s

fetishes was urinating outside, so we'd made sure he could do it without anyone seeing.

"No peeping on my peeing," he'd said.

I went inside and met Henry at the side entrance at the back of the house. When I opened the door, I held out a tall, empty glass.

"What—?"

"It's easier to empty than a bucket, and there's too much ammonia if you piss right on the plants. They get stressed this part of the summer as it is." I looked up at the gray sky. "It'll be warm again tomorrow."

"Oh." Henry took the glass uncertainly. "OK." He looked about, wondering how to proceed.

"If you don't mind," I said, "could you stand right there while you piss? I'd like to watch."

"Goddamn."

Henry set his bag down, unzipped, and pulled out his dick, short and fat, but then, it was flaccid. He closed his eyes to concentrate, and after about thirty or forty seconds, a thin stream began dribbling out, slowly growing stronger until he had a full flow going. After another minute, he shook the end of his penis to fling off the last drops.

"Uh..."

"I'll take it," I said, reaching for the glass. I backed up a couple of feet, pulled down my mask, and put the glass to my lips. Looking Henry straight in the eyes, I drank the warm liquid down. Piss had never been my thing, still wasn't, but Randy had liked water sports enough that I'd learned to tolerate it, and at this point, what else could I do that allowed two

strangers to become intimate while keeping our distance? Not many men could shoot six feet.

“Fuck.”

I remembered my first time with Randy and felt a wave of regret. But I forced a smile anyway. “The cup’s empty now,” I said, faking a tone of concern. “Do you have anything else you can fill it with?” Henry hadn’t put his dick away yet, and it was noticeably larger now.

“Uh...”

“I need a chaser of *something*.” I smacked my lips and made a face.

Henry looked about warily again and started beating off. I’d need to have a saucer or another shallow dish ready next time. The right tool for the right job.

After I swallowed what little of my chaser I could coax to the rim of the glass, I pulled my mask back up over my face, but not before I let the mail carrier watch me slowly lick the last of his cum off my lips.

“I’m not always home when you pass by,” I said, “but if I’m not on the porch, feel free to knock to find out.”

“S-sure,” Henry said, lifting his bag again. “But next time, I’m going to want a mouthful of something refreshing, too. Like you said, it’ll be warm again soon.”

I knew from experience that sex didn’t always make a person feel alive. Kind of a Schrödinger’s Orgasm. Sometimes, it could make me feel lonelier than ever. But in the midst of so much horror day after day, I felt a flutter of hope. On

Wednesday morning on my way to work, I bought a Hit Five lottery ticket, just for the hell of it.

When I won the \$120,000 prize in the drawing later that evening, I decided that even if there had never been a God, or if God was dead, as my grandfather insisted, a deity must have sprung into existence just for the day. And even though it had certainly now dissipated again, that momentary divine spark had allowed me a new life, for whatever time I had left. Given my age—I'd turned fifty-three the week after Randy was murdered—right-wing promises to gut Social Security and Medicare, the hunger of white supremacists to start another civil war, and the still out-of-control coronavirus, the money probably wouldn't need to last more than a few years. But since Randy and I had paid off the mortgage on our tenth anniversary, "a few years" would likely be enough. I wasn't sure I *wanted* to live in a world facing an ever-worsening climate crisis, even apart from all the other troubles.

After the money was wired into my account, I called Tabitha and told her I was sick.

"AIDS?" she asked. "Hepatitis? Anal cancer?"

"No," I said, "just sick and tired of you. I quit."

Could she have made that any easier?

Joining the other protesters at City Hall, I held up my sign. "Amnesty for rent payments! Amnesty for landlord mortgage payments!"

I had my swim goggles ready in case a tear gas cannister came flying our way.

The following Monday morning when Henry stopped by for his third visit, I had a bowl of warm, soapy water near the side door so that after I sucked him off, he wouldn't have to use alcohol to disinfect his dick before continuing on with his day.

Chapter Two: Dutch Door Intimacy

It didn't take long to realize I needed to make some changes to my cum delivery system. Reminiscing about a trip Randy and I had taken to the Netherlands, I went to a home improvement store—not the one I'd worked for—and purchased a Dutch door to replace my rear side door. Though the two men who came to deliver and install it both seemed straight, I thought it might be a good idea to test the door with someone I knew I'd never be seeing again.

160,000 deaths from COVID-19, at least half of them unnecessary, could lead people to be obsessively cautious, knowing no one else was looking out for them, or it could lead people to throw caution to the wind. Which decision folks made often depended on their political party.

Or which stage of grief they were going through at the moment.

“Thanks, guys,” I said. “Either of you want to help me try it out?”

The men looked at each other. One was Black, in his upper thirties, with a short scar on his scalp leaving an empty trail through his hair. The other was white, in his early twenties, with dirty fingernails. His dull brown hair was rather shaggy, a handful of it wrapped with a rubber band, giving him a knot on the top of his head.

Kids these days.

“We already opened and closed it a couple of times,” the younger man reminded me. To him, I probably looked old enough to be senile.

“Have either of you ever been to Amsterdam?” I asked.

They glanced at each other again and shook their heads.

“I’m trying to recreate a kind of ‘sex club’ feel.”

The older man backed up a few inches, his brow furrowing, and the younger guy tilted his head in confusion.

“People are under so much pressure lately,” I continued, musing that Freddie Mercury’s hit should be assigned as the theme song for 2020. “You heard about the biker festival in South Dakota? Over a quarter of a million people partying without masks. It’s worse than Spring Break in Florida.”

“Yeah, I know how they feel,” the white guy interjected, tugging at the bottom of his mask.

I tugged at the bottom of my mask to mirror him. It was manipulative, but hell, I was asking for service above and beyond. Maybe an analogy would help, too. I remembered a Mississippi band named Chicken Pox Party. Randy and I often tried to introduce each other to new groups. “Back in the day,” I went on, “parents would bring their kids to chicken pox parties. They figured it was best just to get the inevitable out of the way.” I opened and closed the lower half of the door a couple of times. “But you know damn well parents were never stupid enough to host polio parties. And only fools have hurricane parties while a Category 5 is bearing down on them.”

I could tell I was losing them, so I hurried to my point. “I figure with this Dutch door, I can invite guys to the back of the house for a blow job without anyone getting sick. I can keep the top part closed, open just the bottom half, and suck a guy

off without either of us risking being infected with the coronavirus.” Assuming it was as difficult to contract through oral sex as HIV. My mask covered most of my facial expression as I shared my plans, so I shrugged to offer some body language that might help. “Mail carriers need to relieve their stress,” I said, “Amazon drivers, UPS drivers.” I paused. “Men who deliver furniture.” I waited another second. “Men who install doors.”

“Dear sweet Jesus.”

“How about you guys stand out on the landing?” I suggested. “I’ll keep the bottom half of the door open, and we’ll give this a trial run.”

The two men stood motionless for a moment before looking at each other. I couldn’t quite read their expressions with their own faces half covered, either, but the younger guy spoke up first. “Hell,” he said, “I *am* stressed.” He nodded at his partner. “You OK if...?”

The Black guy took another step backward and shook his head. “I’m going out front to have a smoke. I don’t need to know what you do on *your* break.” He started off toward the front of the property, muttering one more “Dear sweet Jesus” as he walked away.

Then it was time to address the winner (loser?) of my proposition.

The temperature was in the mid-80s, and my house clearly hadn’t been their first stop. The young man’s crotch was a bit musty with sweat.

But his cum still provided that lovely sweet/savory flavor I knew so well. At least he hadn’t eaten asparagus the night before.

I sat on my front porch after the installers left. In the late afternoon, the sun could be brutal, beating down on the front of the house. Randy and I had planted a service berry tree our first year together, and its branches helped shade part of the porch, but we really should have planted something with more potential. We'd been planning to put in a mini-split to help us through the summer, but the pandemic pushed all such plans aside.

I watched as an old white man in a motorized wheelchair slowly walked his aging dog up the street. Two Black kids in masks rode their bicycles down the hill. A short, Asian man, masked, walked up the opposite sidewalk. A short, Asian woman, also masked, trailed about ten feet behind.

A hummingbird flitted about our feeder, only half full.

I brought my fingers to my face and inhaled. When I'd sucked the young installer off, I'd dug my fingers into his pubic hair so the experience wouldn't be over as soon as he drove off. Smelling his musty odor again was only partially comforting, though, like a diabetic smelling fresh-baked sourdough bread she knew she couldn't eat.

Randy had almost always smelled a bit musty, especially his breath. He'd told me our second night together that when he'd taken shelter from Hurricane Katrina, he ended up in the convention center of New Orleans right next to the Mississippi River. "Oh my god!" an elderly Black man sleeping near him called out at one point a couple of days later. "You smell that? Someone else is dead!"

But it was just Randy's breath.

When he was finally rescued, he caught the first available plane, which brought him to Seattle, where he decided to make a new life for himself. Unfortunately, the change of scenery didn't change his oral microbiome.

I just pretended I was one of those people who could smell cancer in someone, smell a developing case of Parkinson's. What Randy was exuding, I told myself, was his own combination of pheromones signaling his desire for raunchy sex.

Randy had told me the only guys who would date him for very long were those who liked to rim, a fact he found more offensive than the usual reaction he received at work or while out socializing, when people would take a step or two back as they talked or casually maneuver to a position upwind.

"No amount of brushing or flossing or rinsing with mouthwash helps for more than a few minutes," he complained. He remained self-conscious about it for the rest of his life.

One of the first masks I bought for him back in April read, "If you can smell my breath, you're standing too close." That kind of humor was risky, but after staring at the mask a very long moment, Randy turned and kissed me, thrusting his tongue deep into my mouth.

I'd finally pulled away and then ordered him to drop his pants. "For some reason, I'm really in the mood to rim right now," I said.

"Motherfucker," he'd replied, pushing me up against the arch leading into the kitchen and fucking me with only a wad of spit. He'd pissed inside me that time after he came and then

ordered me to hold my water while he slowly sucked me off before allowing me to relieve myself in the bathroom.

From my seat on the porch, I watched for a moment as two crows argued atop the streetlight. Then I stood up from my mauve lawn chair, lifted the hummingbird feeder off its hook, and carried it to the kitchen to fill again with warm, sugary water.

“I don’t get Rump supporters,” I told Henry as he sucked me off at the back door. “I understand wanting a Messiah. Really, I do. But, my God, if Trump is what we’ve been waiting for all these centuries, I’ll...I’ll...”

Henry pulled his mouth off my dick for a moment, asked, “You’ll what?” and then took a deep breath and got back to work. With the top half of the door shut, and at least one of us always wearing a mask, it was often difficult to carry on a conversation. Especially since conversation wasn’t the primary focus of the encounter.

“Instead of a *Mutiny on the Bounty*, I’ll lead a *Mutiny on the Divinity* and send God and his Messiah to hell.” So there, Non-existent Being.

Henry moved his head backward and forward faster and faster until I couldn’t contain myself any longer and shot into his mouth. He reached for the coffee mug I’d placed on the floor and dribbled a mixture of cum and spit into it, passing the cup over to me. I sucked the mixture up into the turkey baster I had waiting and handed it back to him, turning around so Henry could shoot my own cum up my ass.

Glory to the Glory Hole!

I sucked Henry off, spit everything out into the same coffee mug, and had him shoot a second dose of cum inside me.

“One of these days,” he said, studying the baster, “I’m going to be brave enough to do that without the middleman.”

I finally sold Randy’s truck, sucking off the new owner, a heavysset man about my age, after his wife drove off in their car to give him time to bond with his new vehicle. Then I lay on the sofa for a couple of hours listening to Pandora. Panic! At the Disco sang “High Hopes,” but I knew I’d be happy even with Ground Level.

I’d found that some guys felt too vulnerable with a large, unshielded space between their genitals and whatever might be going on below the top half of the door that they couldn’t monitor. So that afternoon, I went back to the store where I’d bought my Dutch door and made another purchase, a sheet of sanded, oak-laminated plywood. I had an employee cut off a portion that would fit perfectly underneath the top part of the door, and I bought a can of spray paint as well. I didn’t trust matching the color of the door itself, so I chose a complementary color, the door coral and the paint for the plywood teal.

Randy already had some tools in the basement I could use to cut out a respectable glory hole, along with a sander to smooth out the edges. While working, I remembered the time Randy and I had climbed into the bed of his truck at 1:00 in the morning after throwing down a sleeping bag. No one could see us below the sides of the truck when we were lying down, but

we didn't want to attract attention by making too much noise, so we'd beat off together looking up at the stars, at least the ones we could see with all the light pollution within city limits. After Randy had scooped the cum off of my stomach and licked his hand, I'd licked the cum directly off of his stomach. We'd kissed for three or four minutes, exchanging cum with our tongues the whole time.

I stared at my teal plywood and sighed.

Oh, Randy, why couldn't you have run faster?

That evening, I enlisted Sarah Cooper to help me stay sane. Or at least help me understand that insanity was the only way to survive these crazy times. Her video, "How to Person Woman Man Camera TV," using Trump's actual interview with Chris Wallace, in which Cooper lip syncs to Trump's bizarre boasting that he'd passed a dementia test, over and over and over, was both comedy gold and one of the saddest things I'd ever seen. Her "How to Medical," where she lip syncs to Trump's suggestion that we ingest or inject disinfectant or UV light to cure COVID, was something even the writers at *Saturday Night Live* couldn't have dreamed up.

But her videos about other craziness in the world of politics were just as good, like "How to Mayor of Las Vegas," where she lip syncs to the ramblings of a mayor who laments not being able to use her citizens as a "control group" by exposing them all to the virus. Of course, to be fair, even the clip of the real interview, where Anderson Cooper looks like he wants to drive a spike into his brain while he listens to the mayor's preposterous ideas, felt like watching a mashup of *Fawlty Towers* and *House of Cards*.

If only it were the U.S. that was going crazy, but I'd also seen reports on laws requiring airplanes empty of passengers to continue making ghost flights across Europe to qualify for pandemic aid. Almost as bizarre as Emirates airline offering passengers free funerals if they caught COVID on one of their flights.

"It's such a pretty day," Henry said when I met him at the back door. He'd asked last time if he could come on his day off and spend some extra time on our encounter. "I'd love to lie in a hammock to enjoy this warm breeze."

I couldn't see his face, with only the bottom half of the door open and the plywood in place, but I could see him unzip and watched as he slid his penis through the glory hole.

"You don't really seem in the mood for relaxing," I said, noting he was already hard, "but I do, in fact, have a hammock out back, behind that bamboo fence."

Henry's dick hit the side of the glory hole as he turned to look.

"I'll pull my mask on and take you out there."

Henry's dick retreated, and I soon joined him on the landing. He moved off to let me lead the way, following at a safe distance. When we rounded the corner of the bamboo fence, I gestured to the object before us.

"Is that...is that a *sling*?" Henry looked at me with wide eyes.

I nodded, pointing out the stirrups. "It's relaxing," I assured him. "All you have to do is lie back and let me do all

the work.” I pulled a condom and a bottle of lube from my pocket. “I’ll make sure my cock wears a mask, too.”

I pointed to a short table where he could place his clothes, and soon he’d hopped up onto the leather. I helped position his asshole and secured his feet in the stirrups. Dabbing some lube on his opening, I whispered softly through my mask. “Concentrate on that gentle breeze.”

I slid in slowly, so carefully I wasn’t sure Henry had even noticed. His forehead remained expressionless. I wondered if he’d already fallen asleep. Maybe he had narcolepsy. I slid in and out one time to gauge his response, and he whispered back to me. “I have a friend who used to teach at UW.” Disengaging wasn’t the same as relaxing. Was he going to recite his grocery list next?

“Yeah?” I pushed in and pulled out again, still slowly but more firmly.

“He retired early so he won’t have to go back to teach in the fall.” Henry groaned as I pushed in as deeply as I could. “Is it OK to tell him about you? He has a pretty big group of sex buddies. He might want to tell them, too.”

Ah, word of mouth. Even better than a business card, which I could clearly never hand out.

The first time Randy had brought a friend over was during our second month dating. “I hope you’re OK with Carlos joining in,” he’d said. “When I told him how good you were at blow jobs, he insisted.”

After that, whenever Randy brought home either a friend or complete stranger, if the man had expressed interest to him about blow jobs, Randy would introduce him as a “cum of

mouth” referral. Other guys he introduced as “ass of cum” referrals.

“Are you sure no one can see us?” Henry asked while I pumped away.

“Too many trees,” I assured him, “even if I hadn’t put this fence around the sling.”

“What about drones?” he pressed.

I pulled all the way out and then pushed past his sphincter again and slid all the way back in. “You’ve got your mask on, but if someone did recognize you, you could always just add porn actor to the Miscellaneous section of your resumé.”

Henry chuckled. “Always a silver lining kind of guy, aren’t you?”

I shrugged. “More of a mucosal lining kind of guy.”

I felt a brief pang of regret that I was no longer able to work at the video store. *Mucosal Linings Playbook* sounded exactly like the kind of movie we’d carry.

The conversation was also making me miss Randy. He’d always gotten my humor, no matter how dark or odd, though he did tell me one time, “I’m surprised more people don’t just smack you in the head.”

Another mail carrier, Cliff, suggested I put a small window in the upper half of the back door so I could set up an iPad or some other device and stream porn to watch while he fucked me through the glory hole.

Ed, the retired history professor from UW, seemed to enjoy the screen, too, as did several of his friends. Their

addition to my daily routine was transformative. Instead of one encounter every other day or so, I now had two or three encounters day after day. It helped me suppress the temptation to order items online in the hope I'd have a chance at encouraging another delivery driver to the side entrance. Some drivers, after all, were women, and most drivers, even the horniest ones, simply didn't have time on their rushed schedules or insisted on conducting themselves professionally. I was able to ask a couple of them to return after work, but not many followed up.

I found I couldn't make myself buy anything I didn't really need because I knew that doing so crossed a line. Offering someone a hand job to help them out while putting themselves at risk every day to provide for their families wasn't the same as deliberately creating situations that didn't occur naturally. Adding either to their workload or their chances of exposure unnecessarily would be a step too far.

"I talked my supervisor into letting me do an extra day each week on this route," Cliff told me one day as he came to the side of the house. He was hard and lean, clearly a fan of the gym, and kept his pubes shaved close. He was also straight, married, and the father of two kids. He needed images of women on my iPad to stay hard when he fucked me. Women with big tits.

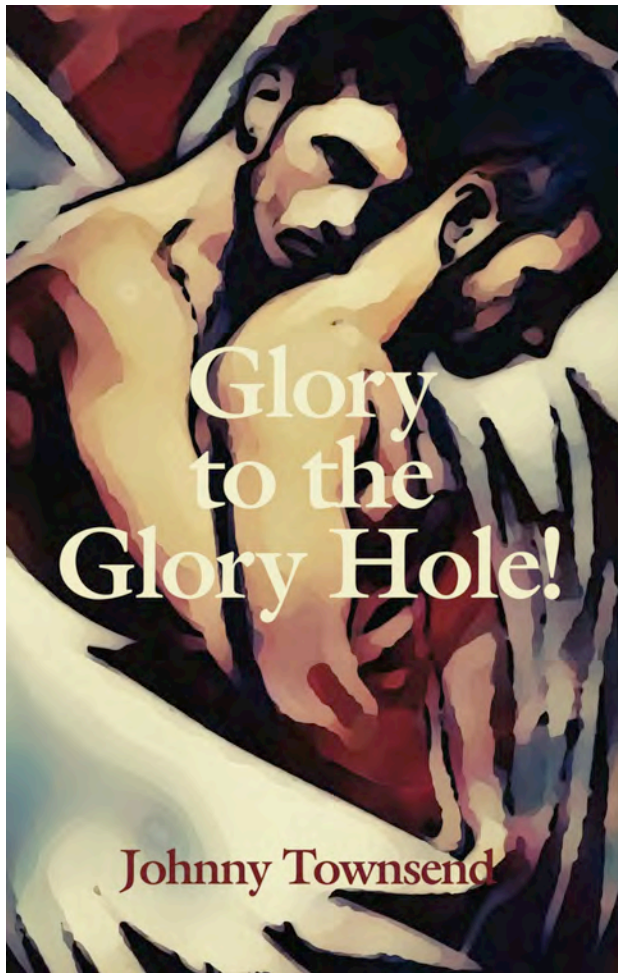
"Oh, good, more Special Deliveries."

Cliff pulled my ass toward him after I started streaming a movie he could watch. "You know the motto," he said. "We deliver through rain...and snow...and heat...and glory holes." He dabbed some lube on my ass and shoved himself inside me roughly. "My wife almost never lets me do this," he grumbled. "And even when I fuck her in the ass, she makes me wear a

condom.” He rammed me hard and fast. “You’d think she didn’t trust me or something.”

Two minutes later, with one last thrust, Cliff groaned and came to a stop. A few seconds after that, he slapped me on the butt and pulled out. “Thanks, buddy.”

As his footsteps receded past the side of the house, I sent up a prayer to my dissipated deity that Americans would come through and find a way to save the postal service—for Cliff’s sake. And for mine.



Mark faces isolation during the COVID pandemic but discovers he can help others address urgent needs. He cuts a glory hole in his door to service mail carriers, delivery drivers, and assorted neighbors without exposing anyone to the virus. It's not traditional volunteer work, but Mark wants to pitch in as best he can during the ongoing crisis.

Glory to the Glory Hole!

By Johnny Townsend

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