

Two Mormon missionaries in Italy discover they can both emit pheromones on demand.

## Wake Up and Smell the Missionaries By Johnny Townsend

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# WAKE UP AND SMELL THE MISSIONARIES

JOHNNY TOWNSEND

## 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?

### 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 was 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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Print ISBN: 978-1-64719-423-9 Epub ISBN:978-1-64719-453-6 Mobi ISBN:978-1-64719-454-3

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida, U.S.A.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc. 2021

First Edition

Cover design by Todd Engel

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## Chapter One: Passing the Sniff Test

"I'm not a superhero," I typed. "As you'll soon see, I'm not a hero at all. I wasn't bitten by a radioactive bug. I wasn't struck by lightning. I didn't even have a special hammer like Thor, only a vial of consecrated olive oil on my keychain so that as a Mormon priesthood holder, I'd be ready to bestow blessings whenever necessary."

"Are you really going to do it?" Brian asked, looking over my shoulder. "You're going to tell everyone our secret?"

"Afraid they'll lock us away?" I turned in my chair and pulled my husband close to give him a peck. Suddenly, without warning, I wanted nothing more than for him to take me on top of my desk. "Stop it," I said.

"You sure, Jeff?" He batted his eyes.

"Don't distract me while I'm writing our story."

He looked at me with a Mona Lisa smile.

"You're killing me," I groaned.

"OK, OK." He laughed, waving his hands in the air between us. "I'll open a window and let you get back to work." I shut the door after he left my office, a spare bedroom looking out over the front pathway, and opened a bottle of rose perfume that I kept on a bookshelf for emergencies. One tiny sniff, then a moment leaning out the window to take in the forest air, and I started to calm down.

"Perhaps my DNA had simply undergone a random mutation," I typed. "I realized shortly after reaching adulthood that I had a special talent, a superpower that could be used for either good or not so good. Always a late bloomer, I was still young and immature, soon well on the road to becoming a supervillain, when on my first time through the temple, I had 'a vision' of that future and decided to change direction."

I stopped typing and looked at my computer screen. I hated including all the religious stuff, since I was no longer a believer. But I couldn't tell my story—*our* story—without it.

It was possible Brian was right, anyway. We were already seen as freaks by our families, by almost half of society. I remembered a scene from an episode of *La Porta Rossa* Brian and I had watched last night, when a teenage girl in Trieste discovers she can talk to a murdered police officer and is afraid her friends will think she's crazy.

"Some dogs can smell cancer," I continued typing. "A woman realized recently that she smelled her husband's Parkinson's disease years before he developed obvious symptoms, and she then went on to diagnose

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others. I've never had a particularly sensitive nose. What I did have, I discovered during my first year in college, was the ability to emit pheromones on command, a scent undetectable on a conscious level but which affected other people—other *men*—almost instantly."

I moved over to the window and looked outside. Brian and I had retired just before the pandemic started and moved to the outskirts of Roslyn. The smell of firs and cedars and spruces and redwoods was intoxicating. We spent a great deal of time outdoors even in the rain and snow.

Nature smelled good.

When it wasn't on fire.

I walked over to my office door and banged against it. "You stop that now, Brian," I said, trying to sound angry, "or I'm going to put a chip clip on your nose later while you suck me off!"

Most couples lost their lust for one another not long after their honeymoon period. But even after forty years, we were incapable of losing ours. So I couldn't complain *too* much.

"Oh, all right," I said, opening a speakeasy door at waist height and pulling my chair up next to it. Brian poked his erect dick through, I sucked him off, and finally, he left me in peace for a bit. I closed the speakeasy door and returned to my computer.

Neither of us had ever experienced a mid-life crisis because we were perpetual teenagers.

It was almost like having a resurrected body.

Except that the other day when I'd wiped the fog off the bathroom mirror to brush my teeth, I gasped at my reflection. "What?" asked Brian, peeking around the edge of the shower curtain.

"I'm losing telomeres right and left," I said.

Brian had stepped out of the shower and, without even drying off first, had hugged me from behind, kissing me on the neck. "I didn't fall in love with you for your telomeres," he whispered.

He'd pulled my boxer briefs down, grabbed some hair conditioner, and fucked me before returning to his shower.

And even though I *knew* that I knew the answer, I'd asked myself the same question every wealthy or beautiful or famous person did: Does he really like me for *me*?

Just as frightening was the accompanying question: Do I really like him for *him*?

"Turning other men on," I typed now, "might not seem like much of a gift to a young Mormon about to serve two years as a missionary, but it helped me find the man I'd spend the rest of my life with...and survive the night that almost killed us both."

## Chapter Two: The Smell of Library Books

I could barely stand it. I'd sent off my papers almost two months earlier and still hadn't received my mission call. I'd expected to leave by my nineteenth birthday, and that day had come and gone. I'd quit work last month to enjoy my remaining days of civilian life, but I found myself pacing across the front porch every morning around 11:00, waiting for the mail carrier.

And there he was. I watched as his tiny Jeep pulled to the curb four houses down. Our last mail carrier had been tall, thin, and gangly, a lay preacher for some nondenominational church. I'd greeted him one day with a homemade praline, and for some reason, he'd suddenly raised his right hand to heaven and exorcised me.

Well, it hadn't been just "some reason." The guy wasn't particularly attractive, but he did wear his pants tight, and that lump in his crotch looked pretty darn good. I hadn't meant to do it, but sometimes, I emitted strong sexual signals without realizing.

I'd discovered my hidden talent shortly after starting my first semester at the University of New Orleans. I'd been studying for Western Civ in a tiny cubicle in the library when I noticed a cute student maybe a year older than I was pass and sit in the cubicle in front of me. In just the few seconds I'd watched before he sat down, I'd gotten a good glimpse of his ass, firm and hard against the seat of his jeans.

I wanted to grab it, grab him. I wanted to hand him a slip of paper with my name and phone number, say, "Oh, I think you dropped this," and watch him realize what I'd just given him. I wanted—

I couldn't believe my luck when less than a minute later, the other student stepped out of his cubicle, walked back a few steps to mine, and unzipped.

After only a few more incidents, I finally pieced together what was happening. Somehow, when I got turned on, I sent out "vibes" of some sort that any man within a six-foot radius could detect.

I conducted a few experiments—at a shoe store buying shoes for my mission, at JC Penney buying my mission suit, and during a job interview to earn a last bit toward my mission fund—and learned I could shoot out those vibes even when I wasn't turned on. I could deliberately excite other men enough to make a pass at me, even if they were straight. And the vibes I generated seemed to have no effect on women.

"Thank you, Heavenly Father," I prayed. But surely this ability was the work of the Devil. How in the world was I ever going to marry a woman in the temple after my mission so I could make it to the Celestial Kingdom? When I was sexually excited, though, *and* I tried to focus my vibes as strongly as I could, the result was nothing short of miraculous. The doctor conducting my mission physical was the first man ever to enter me. Even after he finished, he knelt down and devoted the next several minutes to making sure I left the appointment satisfied, too.

He even asked for a follow up visit the next week. That time, he had me enter him. Afterward, he thanked me and confessed he'd known for years he was gay but had never worked up the nerve to come out. He apologized for abusing our professional relationship, asked if I'd be good enough not to report him, and suggested I see another physician in the future.

But he still gave me one last kiss before he sent me out of his office.

When I went to talk to my bishop about the "problem," he grew disgusted and threatened to tell my parents. He'd advise them, he said, to disown me, declaring that only the most profound suffering could save me. I stared at him until he stopped talking, watching him button his suit jacket to better cover his crotch.

"Wouldn't it be terrible, Bishop," I said, "if you embarrassed yourself in front of the Relief Society president." I stood up and took a step toward him. "Or on the pulpit in front of the entire congregation."

He never spoke to my parents, waived my last mission worthiness interview, was always too busy to

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shake my hand when I entered the chapel for Sacrament meeting.

I felt a little like Gary Lockwood in *Star Trek*'s "Where No Man Has Gone Before." I didn't want to become a monster.

"Here you go, Jeff." The mail carrier handed me a bundle of mail. I quickly flipped through the phone bill, several pieces of junk mail for my mom and older sister, and then I saw—an envelope from the First Presidency in Salt Lake.

"This is it!" I waved the envelope in the air and did a little dance. The mail carrier laughed and shook his head. He wasn't Mormon, but at least he wasn't a fundamentalist preacher, either. He was a Black guy around thirty with adorable eyebrows and a permanent smile, his laugh lines pronounced around his eyes even at such a young age.

"Well, open it up," he said. "You've moaned about this long enough. Even my wife wants to know where you're going now."

I slipped a finger under the flap on the back and tried to open the envelope without tearing it. Then I pulled the letter out, unfolded the paper, and scanned the first few lines.

"Let's have it," the mail carrier demanded.

"Oh my heck," I breathed.

"Yeah?" The mail carrier chuckled. "You going to Haiti?"

I looked at him, the most beautiful man I'd ever seen. Everything was beautiful now. The boxwood hedge, the trash can next to the curb, even the wasp nest on the porch column. "I'm going to Rome," I said.

I spread my arms as if...I didn't know why I spread my arms. But the mail carrier seemed to understand. He put down his satchel and hugged me tightly. Then, after a long moment, he kissed me, thrusting his tongue deep into my mouth. I could feel something hard in his crotch pressing against something hard in mine.

I hadn't meant to vibe him.

"Damn," he said. He kissed me hard one more time before pulling away. "I've read about this kind of thing."

I frowned.

"You ever heard of pheromones?"

I shook my head.

He laughed and picked up his bag. "Man, you are going to be one helluva missionary." He nodded and continued on his route. In all these months, I'd never even asked him his name.

It was summer and I wasn't taking a summer course. But the next day, I drove half an hour to the university library and looked up pheromones. Then I performed a little experiment in the faculty bathroom of the Biology building. The Endocrinology professor could have passed for Roy Scheider's brother. And I really wanted to be in a couple of sequels with him.

I was going to have to change my major when I got back from Italy in two years.

## 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

Johnny Townsend

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 Glory to the Glory Hole!

Wake Up and Smell the Missionaries

My Pre-Bucket List

Blessed Are the Firefighters

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 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 stepfather 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? 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? 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.

### **Despots of Deseret**

In this collection of Mormon short stories, a man learns to forgive his mother for an unspeakable atrocity. An uncle awaits word on his niece caught up in the 2004 tsunami. A bereaved man receives an unexpected gift from his deceased husband on Valentine's Day. A stake president threatens to revoke a couple's temple marriage. A young woman faces a shocking tragedy while serving as a missionary in Paraguay. A Mormon teenager wants to be named Best Christian Example at his Baptist high school. An anti-Mormon mob threatens a church outing. A virginal gay man takes out a contract on his own life to protect his virtue.

## Sex among the Saints

Clean-cut Mormons may preach purity and wholesomeness, but sometimes repressing sexual instincts forces those feelings to erupt in unexpected ways. Here, two young women vie for the sexual affections of the same missionary. An elderly farmer marries his best friend's mistress in order to feel closer to both of them. A woman is dumped by the husband who gave her HIV. A woman fantasizes about her sex life as one of Jesus' future wives. These tales are not for those who deny the reality of sexuality, but the rest of us will enjoy getting a glimpse into the Mormon bedroom.

#### **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 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 elders find an frustrated 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. 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-yearold 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.

## **God's Gargoyles**

These tales of gay Mormons reveal abominable yet delightful secrets. A gay couple steals from the rich to provide for their favorite charities. A celibate 38-year-old dates a promiscuous porn reviewer. A schizophrenic man accustomed to hearing voices suddenly starts to receive real revelations.

#### **Mormon Fairy Tales**

In these stories, we discover how the Three Nephites from the Book of Mormon cope with their frustrated sexuality when their wives aren't immortal as they are. A deceased sinner plots to break out of Spirit Prison. A polygamist in 1855 Utah is ordered to take a fourth wife, when all he really wants is to be with another man. A disappointed wife plots revenge when her temple worker husband sues the Church for an on-the-job injury. Aliens visiting the UN reveal that God really does live on a planet orbiting Kolob.

#### The Mormon Victorian Society

A Victorian enthusiast has a startling sexual revelation to make at his monthly Society meeting. Two men find love in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. 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.

## Lying for the Lord

In this collection of Mormon short stories, a missionary in Italy makes a break for freedom on Christmas. A youth outing for priests at a shooting range doesn't go as planned. Mormons create a theocracy in America and rename the country Zion. A conflicted father wonders how to deal with a transgender daughter. A bishop devises a novel method to make sure his congregants pass Tithing Settlement. Parents hire men to pose as the Three Nephites to teach their children the Book of Mormon is true. Ex-Mormons unwelcome at home for Christmas band together for their own holiday celebration.

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### Sex on the Sabbath

A missionary in Italy tries to rescue a woman enslaved in trafficking. A Salt Lake bishop is murdered in his office. A Mormon advice columnist gets into trouble with the Church. Parents arrange to kidnap their missionary son and force him into deprogramming. A disabled woman questions her Patriarchal Blessing's admonition to remain celibate her entire life. A husband chafes when his wife won't let him watch R-rated movies. A straight high school senior asks his gay friend to the prom. Even a neardeath experience doesn't convince a skeptic of the existence of God. A chaste Single Adult group ventures into the French Quarter on Mardi Gras.

### The Tyranny of Silence

An Artificial Intelligence tries to lead Mormons astray. The Church addresses the perils of inappropriate hair styles for men. A bereaved widow listens to the radio hoping to hear love songs from her departed husband. A prankster makes life miserable for his LDS boss. An ex-Mormon earns a living selling Mormon underwear online to nonmembers. A young man fakes a two-year mission to please his family. Another missionary targets potential converts on dating sites. A lonely husband pays the price for straying from his wife. The Church reels after a leak that children of gay couples can no longer participate in its saving rituals and ordinances. A depressed Santa reaches out to help his community.

## Selling the City of Enoch

In this collection of Mormon short stories, we see a mission president's wife murdered in Rome. An abused man learns to love for the first time. A mother plans for her role as a god in the hereafter. A descendant of Enoch tries out capitalism. A bishop disguises himself as a homeless man to teach his congregation a lesson. A lonely young woman rents a mother and father for Christmas. A young husband is horrified to learn he has married a pre-op male-tofemale trans woman in the temple. A group of ex-Mormons meet regularly to watch LDS movies in order to keep in touch with their culture.

## 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.

#### The Moat around Zion

A moat can work to keep bad guys out of one's sanctuary, but it can also act like a prison, trapping good people inside, and the stench from its fetid waters can often prove unbearable. In these tales of the trapped faithful, a woman is shunned when a hacker fakes her apostasy from the Mormon Church. A young missionary can't get permission to see a doctor about the lump on his testicle until he can convince his mission president he isn't masturbating. A lesbian couple wonder if their desperate financial situation is a punishment from God. A teenage girl impersonates her brother so she can perform baptisms for the dead in the temple. Two gay missionaries in Italy fall in love.

## **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.

### **Human Compassion for Beginners**

The battle to direct legislation and policy often seems to be a fight between greed and compassion. Emotions run so high that family members stop speaking to one another and long-time friendships fall by the wayside. But the problems being debated—climate change, universal healthcare, LGBTQ rights, gun regulation, economic inequality, and the separation of church and state—desperately need to be resolved.

### **Dead Mankind Walking**

Do you yell at the TV while watching the news? Do you repost maddening articles on Facebook? Do you find yourself overwhelmed by the 200 new political emails in your inbox every day? Left, right, center, far left, or far right, we can't escape the political battles of our time.

What this collection of essays and op-eds from *LA Progressive*, *The Salt Lake Tribune*, and *Main Street Plaza* can do is help us understand and address many of the concerns that affect almost every aspect of our lives: structural racism, gerrymandering, voting rights, regressive taxes, political infighting, the failure of capitalism, and the ever present overstep of religion in public policy.

But of all the issues covered here, the most urgent is climate change. If we can't address that one, the others don't much matter, since every one of us all too soon becomes nothing more than a tiny, inescapable part of *Dead Mankind Walking*.

#### **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.

## 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.

### I Will, Through the Veil

What gay man hasn't fantasized about hot sex with those repressed Mormon missionaries in their white shirts and conservative ties? But there's more to Mormon fantasy sex than curious young "elders." What about temple workers going at it in the baptismal font after hours? How about an ex-Mormon who throws a "pity party" (or "pity orgy") for men whose physical flaws prevent them from getting laid regularly? The ex-mo trapped by a snowstorm in an adult video store overnight? Or the one who offers "aid" to detectives investigating a shooting? And what collection of gay Mormon porn would be complete without an adventure involving the sexual practices the Three Nephites have perfected over two thousand years?

# 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?

## **Strangers with Benefits**

Two Mormon missionaries knocking on doors in New Orleans come upon a gay couple who help them unleash their repressed sexuality, leading them to begin a clandestine love affair carried out in the back rooms of gay bars and French Quarter bathhouses.

Knowing that excommunication means abandonment by family and friends, they race to save money by posing nude and dancing in stripper bars before they are discovered. Still intent on "serving" as missionaries, they take up escorting to give others their all.

But when disaster strikes, they must resolve their most challenging crisis of faith yet—can they be true to each other while leading a life of sexual service to their fellow man?

### What Would Anne Frank Do?

In a world already plagued by the effects of latestage capitalism—economic inequality, voter suppression, healthcare inequality, racial injustice, and escalating climate crisis—how do we continue fighting for meaningful progress in the middle of a pandemic?

These essays and op-eds from the *Salt Lake Tribune*, the *Seattle Times*, and *LA Progressive* show us that unity can be divisive, morality can be immoral, and facts can be fabricated. But no one ever

said fighting against manipulation and willful ignorance was easy.

In this collection, author Johnny Townsend offers encouragement and insight gained from his own experience as a climate crisis refugee and human rights advocate.

### This Is All Just Too Hard

Raised to expect "the apocalypse" during his lifetime, author Johnny Townsend tackles the serious issues of our day using both his Mormon background and his secular humanist beliefs.

The only way to successfully deal with a global pandemic, or public health under any conditions, is to move to a system of universal healthcare. Additional ingredients for dismantling structural and institutional racism include ensuring tuition-free college and vocational training, universal taxpayer-funded childcare and pre-k education, fare-free public transportation, automatic voter registration, elimination of the Electoral College, ranked choice voting, plus nationwide vote-by-mail as well as inperson voting. If we are to improve the health of our citizens and our nation, we must reduce the extraordinary amount we spend on the military and police, and demand that the ultra-wealthy and corporations pay their fair share toward the public good.

Such policy changes are also essential if we wish to mitigate the worst effects of climate change, a global catastrophe that will impact virtually every person on the planet.

Townsend's essays show us that while societal progress is always hindered by inertia, the multiple crises we're facing provide us an opportunity to move forward.

### **Glory to the Glory Hole!**

After the murder of his soulmate during a human rights protest, Mark Himmelman faces both physical and emotional isolation amidst deteriorating political conditions during the COVID pandemic. But while trying to ride things out, he discovers he can also help others address needs of their own.

He cuts out a glory hole in the bottom half of his Dutch door at the back of the house. Without exposing anyone to the coronavirus, he's able to service mail carriers, delivery drivers, assorted neighbors, and even a police officer or two.

It's not traditional volunteer work, but he wants to pitch in as best he can during the ongoing crisis. Yet when one anonymous encounter unexpectedly leads to a fledgling relationship, Mark must decide if he's willing to risk losing love all over again...and maybe his life.

### **My Pre-Bucket List**

Sex isn't the way Derek Murdock experienced it when he first came out, when HIV was the most frightening possibility during any encounter. With COVID, even condoms might not protect. Simply being in the same room with another person could transmit the virus. And, given mask-resistant commuters, science-denying shoppers, and lax coworkers, that could even include a guy's own husband, if he's lucky enough to have one!

Which Derek doesn't. So what's an unattached, libidinous man supposed to do?

Especially in a political atmosphere where surviving the volatile election season in one piece isn't guaranteed.

Derek won't let his diagnosis of pre-leukemia force him to accept his fate any earlier than necessary, but he does grant that perhaps it's time to come up at least with a "pre-bucket" list.

And check as many men off it as he safely can.

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## **Blessed Are the Firefighters**

We don't need "affordable" healthcare. We need *universal* healthcare. We don't need "access" to education. We need tuition-free college and vocational training.

In these essays, Johnny Townsend erases the weasel words and gets right to the point. The only way any of us can live in a safe, healthy society is if we all do. Every worker needs a living wage. But more than that, we need a thriving wage, and Universal Basic Income is a practical starting point.

It's not enough to give coal miners and oilfield workers "good" pay. They also need jobs that promote the health of their communities and the rest of the country. Since we have no choice but to transition away from fossil fuels, we must provide both training and new work opportunities for those who will be displaced as we confront an everworsening climate crisis.

Pursuing gender and racial equality, LGBTQ rights, the elimination of for-profit prisons, the separation of church and state, and making peace more profitable than war form the core of any successful strategy for success.

# 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 and Velletri 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 their world falls apart during a massive earthquake and they find themselves 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?

### What Readers Have Said

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

"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

"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

*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 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

#### Wake Up and Smell the Missionaries

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

"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* 

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, 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

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

"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 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 selffulfillment..."

Kirkus Reviews

"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

"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



Two Mormon missionaries in Italy discover they can both emit pheromones on demand.

# Wake Up and Smell the Missionaries By Johnny Townsend

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