

A gay Mormon missionary in Italy struggles to become straight as he faces an earthquake, organized crime, a serious bus accident, and evil mission leaders. Then one day, he meets another missionary who loves him, and his world changes forever.

## **The Abominable Gayman**

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/4546.html?s=pdf>

The  
Abominable  
Gayman

Johnny Townsend

Copyright 2010 Johnny Townsend

ISBN 978-1-60910-118-3

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, events, and dialogue are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Booklocker.com  
2010

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Cover design by Todd Engel

## Contents

The Abominable Gayman of Mt. Olympus.....	1
The Neapolitan Bump Syndrome.....	55
The Rift.....	76
Coping with the Camorra.....	98
The Letter.....	115
The Shepherd Boy.....	130
The Happiness Approach.....	149
The Ditch.....	173
The 9:20 Express Train to Hell.....	182
Let There Be Light.....	194
Being Bravo.....	211
Killing Babies.....	230
Pissing in Peace.....	243
As a Man Thinketh.....	257
Bus Surfing.....	275
Washing Dishes.....	288
A Wife of Whoredoms.....	311
Bloodletting.....	328
Almond Milk.....	349
P-Day Man.....	378
Transfer Cookies.....	386

## The Rift

“Elder Anderson, if you ever turn that light on again before I’m up, I’ll break your fingers.” Elder Mosby glared at me from his bed, his voice low and menacing. He meant what he said. Stunned, I turned off the light and left our bedroom.

It was 7:00. I’d already been generous in leaving the room right at 6:30 when we were supposed to be up. And earlier in the mission, we’d had to get up at 6:00 every day. Elder Mosby had been in bed until 7:00, and I’d already eaten breakfast and taken my shower. There was nothing left for me to do but get in my required two hours of study this morning before we left for work.

I stood in the hallway looking at my door as the other four missionaries in the apartment bustled about. Two of them were wrestling in their underwear, bouncing on the bed and floor. It seemed a little juvenile. Sometimes, when one or the other bent over while wrestling, the Mormon undergarment he wore would be pulled tight over his behind, pulling the slit open and revealing the crack in his behind. One of the elders was good looking, so after my first couple of glimpses of their wrestling, I made a point of never looking into their room when the bumping and grunting sounds of their playing started. At night as I went to bed, I tried not to fantasize about one of them pinning me down.

The other two elders in the apartment were our zone leaders. Only the two mission assistants up in Rome were higher ranking, and these zone leaders were in charge of all the missionaries here in Naples, frequently reminding us that they were the ones God had chosen to guide us here in Napoli. How could they just let Elder Mosby stay in bed all morning? If I was so much as two minutes late coming out of my room, they’d stick their heads in to check on me.

THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN

There was a tiny closet at this end of the hall where we stored ten years' worth of *Ensign* magazines from the Church. I went in the closet, turned on the light, and closed the door. There were still a few issues here I hadn't read yet. A couple of articles had been torn out of a few of the issues, which irritated me. Since almost every missionary apartment had a complete set of the magazines, I couldn't imagine why it had been necessary to damage them, and I wanted eventually to have read everything the Church ever published, without even the tiny gaps these missing articles might leave. Reading the *Ensign* would still count as study time, even if it wasn't technically the scriptures. I pulled down an issue and began reading. There were no articles on how to get along with a difficult companion.

One article was about communication in marriage, but I wasn't sure the same rules applied to companions. Our goal wasn't to be together forever or to love each other but only to work together for a couple of months. Sometimes, not communicating seemed better. If Mosby had been angry at me about the light but had said nothing, would we be worse off than now? I certainly would feel better not worrying about broken fingers. Then again, if he could have communicated without the anger, simply said that he knew it was against the rules but he was going to sleep in, and would I mind studying elsewhere, there wouldn't be a major problem, either. So how could I communicate to my senior companion in a non-threatening way that I didn't like being threatened?

Devotional was at 9:00, and though I didn't know when he finally got up, Elder Mosby sat in the kitchen smiling and eager to go over the day's plans. "Let's go take referrals in the ghetto today!" he said excitedly. Maybe he was okay now that he'd had enough sleep. We'd both gone to bed by 10:15 the previous evening, however, so unless something had kept him up, I didn't know why on some days he seemed to need extra sleep. "I always

*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

like working in the gut.” I nodded and as soon as the others all said their plans, the meeting was over.

Elder Mosby and I caught a bus down the hill into Napoli. I noticed a nice looking man halfway across the bus, but I felt it was wrong to approach someone because of his looks, so I tried to psyche myself into asking a heavy-set man near us if he'd like to hear more about the Church, but I ended up not talking to anyone. We got off the bus on Via Roma, not far from Piazza Dante. On one side of Via Roma was a crowded, poor section of Naples, and on the other side was a very old, crowded, and even poorer section, the ghetto. It wasn't a frightening place, like a ghetto might be in America. It was just dreary. One-room, cracked, decaying apartments lined many of the streets, blending into each other. It was amazing that any of them were still standing after that earthquake a few months earlier. I always tried to keep an eye open for places to hide if another one struck. We'd had several tremors, and the threat was always there that everything would come tumbling down around us.

While riding down from our area, I could see Vesuvius. It was really rather pretty, comforting in its beauty despite its threat. Still, I wondered how a million people could want to live so close to a live volcano. Herculaneum, on the Napoli side of the volcano, had been buried under six stories of ash. A stronger eruption, or a stronger southerly wind, could have easily sent the flow on to Naples.

On the other side of Napoli, the ground under Pozzuolli was rising because of magma, and I'd heard that a new crater might form there, that in fact Pozzuolli, with 80,000 people, was right in the middle of an ancient crater that was twelve kilometers wide, that 200,000 people lived in the crater. The area was called Campi Flegrei, which I thought sounded pretty until I realized it meant Fiery Fields, and that it had undergone periodic eruptions throughout the last several centuries. Another strong earthquake

*THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN*

like the one we'd just had could set off any of these volcanoes, even though the earthquake by itself would be awful enough.

How could people live here without knowing if two months down the line their homes and businesses and even their lives might be taken? Coming from Biloxi, I'd heard similar questions, of course. How could we live right on the coast when a category 5 hurricane like Camille was sure to strike again sooner or later? But unless you lived right on the beach where the storm surge hit, you could survive a hurricane. Even a tornado could pick and choose houses. But a superheated ash flow like that of Mt. St. Helens or Vesuvius just wiped out everything for miles, even if a million people lived in those miles. I hoped if Pozzuolli blew up, it wouldn't be while that nice Elder Collins was stationed there. I guess some of us didn't have much choice where we lived. Looking about me now, I realized that the biggest reason people stayed was because they were too poor to leave.

The dirty walls and heavy doors in the "historic center" of Naples joined the black, stone streets without any sidewalk to buffer the transition. People milled about, selling fish or bread, dirty children played in the street, and laundry was draped across every road, window after window, thousands of pieces of clothing dangling in the air. Inside the apartments were often clean, neat people who managed to make their tiny living spaces reasonably beautiful. It seemed strange to me that they had so little concern for the outside, although they probably saw it as hopeless. Maybe by setting the inside apart, they could pretend they didn't really live here in both the dirt and the danger.

"Good morning, sir," I said now to a man walking toward us. "We're from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and ..."

He was already past by the time I finished. "It's a shame the Church has such a long name," I said to Elder Mosby, smiling. He didn't answer.



*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

We kept on, roaming the streets and stopping any man who dared look at us. One man nervously gave us an address I knew wasn't real, but I accepted it and promised to come by. Then he hurried away.

One road we turned onto ended in a desolate, two-story apartment complex which looked four hundred years old. The faded yellow walls were cracked, the railing was missing in places, and trash was everywhere, as was the rule in Naples. Two teenage girls leaned dangerously over the balcony and waved sweetly at us. I nodded, and Elder Mosby waved back.

Then four little boys about six years old came up to us and began speaking in dialect. I couldn't understand Neapolitano, and the people here slurred so much even when speaking standard Italian that I had a hard time, so I just smiled and looked on as Mosby joked with the children. Suddenly, though, Mosby's face grew dark, and he hissed at one of the boys, "Tu sei un buco di tua madre!" The boy looked devastated, the others looked mad, and soon they all ran off.

I had never heard the expression before. "You're a hole of your mother?" I asked. "Why did you say that?"

"They were making fun of us in Neapolitano, thinking we couldn't understand them. I wasn't going to let them get away with that."

"What did they say?"

Mosby turned and glared at me. "You don't have to know everything, do you, Elder Anderson? I'm your senior companion. You can show me a little trust."

"Well, sure," I said. "I was just curious." Of course, the fact was that Mosby was famous for misunderstanding the Italians. Once when a man had asked us jokingly if we understood what he was saying, Mosby had defiantly replied, "Si', capisciamo bene!" With that poorly conjugated proof, the man walked off

*THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN*

laughing. Mosby had been so furious that I never did point out his error, that he had conjugated a very common irregular verb as if it were a regular one.

Another time a teenage boy on a bus had nodded toward Mosby's watch as Mosby held onto a bar over our heads. "Ora?" the boy asked, wondering what time it was. But Mosby just smiled and shook his head. "No," he replied. The teenager looked shocked. I could see in his face the thought, "These guys won't even give me the time of day!" But there was never an opportunity to whisper to the guy that Mosby had thought he'd said "oro," asking if the watch were gold. I either had to let the guy leave with a negative impression of us, or I had to face Elder Mosby's uneven temper, so I decided the boy would never have been interested in the Church anyway, and that it didn't matter. Besides, Italians should realize we didn't always understand everything.

I still had plenty of problems myself with the language, but Mosby had been out here ages longer than I had and was only just now a senior companion for the first time. I expected some of his stress was related to finally being in charge, so I wanted to be patient and understanding.

With my last companion, kids had once jokingly pointed to me when I had my hands in my pockets, asking if I was playing with myself, if I were "going fishing." I hadn't understood but my companion had, and we'd laughed about it after he explained it to me. Another time, a couple of kids had yelled, "Finocchi!" at us and from a distance added that we were always together, so we must be married. My companion had explained that "fennel" was the slang for gay, and we'd laughed over that, too, though it had certainly made me nervous as well. I hadn't recognized "finocchio" from the kids today, but they might have slurred it or used another term, or Mosby might simply have thought they said

*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

it. Maybe he already suspected I was gay, and hearing other people say it made him feel he was suspect, too.

I looked at my watch. It was only 10:45. It was going to be a long day. When we'd first become companions only two weeks ago, Mosby had treated me to a stone oven-baked pizza, and the next day, he'd treated me to ice cream. He was pleasant and seemed willing to be friends, which was a rare event out here. Most elders seemed to want to be right or better or more important than others. I relaxed and thought maybe I'd have a pleasant experience this time, someone who could help me concentrate on the work rather than on surviving the relationship.

Yesterday, though, a couple of hours after lunch, we were standing at a bus stop waiting for the bus, and I was trying to work up my nerve to talk to a man standing closer to the sign. He was on the other side of Elder Mosby, and without realizing it, as I tried to steel myself for the approach, I was slowly inching over toward the man.

But that meant I was also getting closer to Elder Mosby. In a cold voice, he finally asked, "Why do you keep trying to get next to me?"

My mouth fell open, and I moved away a few feet, giving up approaching the other man. Did Mosby think I was actually making a pass at him in broad daylight in public, when we shared the same bedroom? At first, I thought he must have finally realized I was gay and felt uncomfortable, but his reaction seemed so odd. Was he really afraid of me? It was almost as if... as if he were afraid of himself. I wondered if he might be attracted to me, if maybe he was scared I might be gay because then something might happen between us.

But it wouldn't, would it? I was quite determined to beat this thing, and if he was a missionary, he must be, too. If he made an approach to me, I'd—

*THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN*

Wait a second. Just minutes before we went to the bus stop, we'd been in another gelateria, and Elder Mosby had put his hand on my shoulder after handing me an ice cream he'd bought for me. I'd pulled away instinctively despite liking the contact, and he'd been rather quiet after that. Had all these treats been his way of subconsciously courting me? I wondered. Perhaps I was reading too much into the whole thing. But that did seem like the moment when he began acting strangely again.

This was a five-week month, too. At best, I was still going to be with him three more weeks before transfers. I just hoped his paranoia at the bus stop wouldn't lead him to say anything to the other elders. I'd still never done anything gay in my life, and I was hoping my mission would cure me. I didn't need the others gossiping about me or trying to get me sent home before that happened. I'd have to be more careful around Elder Mosby to protect myself.

He hadn't said anything to the others last night, and today his thoughts clearly seemed somewhere else. But even so, he appeared set on giving me other worries. How could we pass the day productively without having him curse little children or doing anything else too weird? He obviously had a lot of tension building in him for some reason, but did yelling and cursing have to be the only way to relieve that pressure?

Maybe his yelling prevented a total breakdown. After all, in places like Naples, it was good to have small earthquakes or small eruptions. It let off the pressure gradually instead of letting it build up. And the pressure was there naturally. It was going to need release sooner or later. I wondered if it wouldn't be good to yell and punch a pillow every night for no real reason, or to deliberately set charges and intentionally set off earthquakes regularly before too much tension built up. It must be too hard to control that way.

*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

I thought about masturbating when I was back home in America. When the bug spray man would come to our house, I'd fantasize about him for hours afterward, starting to fondle myself and then forcing myself to stop, trying to make myself go back to my studies or whatever. But before long, I'd lose myself on the page and pretend the exterminator had brought in a spray can of anaesthesia, knocked me out, and "taken advantage" of me without my being aware of it, except of course since I was fantasizing I got to watch the whole thing in my mind. I'd start fondling myself again, then pray and force myself to stop, and this would go on and on until I finally realized I'd have to go ahead and masturbate or never be able to concentrate on anything else.

Some months, I didn't even put up a battle, just masturbating at the first urge so I wouldn't waste half the day fighting it. I did get a lot more accomplished during those months, but sometimes, I ended up masturbating twice a day. That just couldn't be right. It proved that giving in didn't help but only made things worse. So I repented and started fighting the temptations again.

Damn. I had an erection now. I glanced down to see if it were noticeable. Not really. I glanced at Elder Mosby, but he was ignoring me anyway.

"Come on, Elder Anderson," said Mosby a moment later, motioning toward some stairs. "Those girls are waving to us."

"You think we ought to be talking to teenage girls?" I asked. It was clearly against mission rules.

"Don't you like girls?"

Uh-oh. Was this a test? Did I have to break the rules to prove myself? "Isn't that the reason we're not allowed to talk to them?"

"You do what you like. I'm going up."

He could hardly tell the other elders about this, since he was the one breaking the largest rule of leaving his companion, but it

*THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN*

could still lead him to drop hints and start rumors. So I followed him, and soon we were on the cracked balcony, talking to two young teenage girls. One was blond, like Mosby, and said her name was Paola. She was fifteen. The dark-haired girl was fourteen and named Sofia. “Like Sofia Loren, from Pozzuolli.” The two teenagers were cousins. We talked about America and about American sailors who came to Naples, and then they invited us to their apartment.

“We really aren’t supposed—” I began.

“Sure,” said Elder Mosby. “I could use a glass of water.”

I followed the other three reluctantly, praying for a way out of all this. I was supposed to be a missionary spreading the gospel. I was here because I thought it was what God wanted of me. I wanted to do everything I was supposed to. And as much as I hated stopping people on the street to see if they were interested in the Church, that was about all we could do in the mornings, so I wanted to do it. It wasn’t bad enough that the job itself was so difficult, but extra obstacles had to come along every step of the way. Why did being good have to be so hard, to be so much harder than necessary?

The two mothers were in the apartment, fortunately, and as we all sat around the table, drinking water and talking of America, one of the women asked Elder Mosby, “Don’t you think Paola is pretty?” The girl smiled sweetly, and Elder Mosby grinned. “Why don’t you marry her? You both have blond hair. It’d be a perfect match.”

Then the other woman spoke up. “And why don’t you marry my daughter? You both have dark hair.” Sofia smiled at me, and then the two girls smiled at each other.

Please. I had a girlfriend back in America who I didn’t even want to marry. But Elder Mosby looked excited, enjoying the flirting. He must not be gay after all. Maybe this flirting would at

*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

least satisfy him enough that he wouldn't have to worry about me for a while.

"Aren't they a little young?" I asked. I hated to say anything at all, but Mosby was just sitting there grinning.

"Oh, but you boys can't be more than nineteen or twenty yourselves, and you know girls mature faster than boys." The one woman nodded toward Paola's breasts. "You can't keep a pretty girl locked up in the house forever. You just have to try to marry her off to someone respectable."

"Well, we have to finish our missions first," said Elder Mosby, still grinning, "but we'd certainly like your names and address so we can come back later." It looked like he winked, but I couldn't be sure.

Paola's mother's eyes lit up, and she hurriedly found some paper but very slowly and awkwardly wrote down the information. "Ours are good girls," she said. "You'll like them."

"Of course, we're only supposed to marry Mormons," said Mosby, shrugging.

The two women looked at each other carefully. "Maybe," said Paola's mother. "Maybe."

We finished our water and stood up, Elder Mosby shaking everyone's hands warmly and making a show of putting the address in his pocket before we left. Back in the street, he turned to me triumphantly. "See? And you didn't want to go. Now we have a referral to give the sister missionaries."

"Uh-huh." We walked on in silence as I wondered how he could possibly see that experience as effective missionary work. The Church had once used missionaries coaching baseball to pressure teens into joining, but there was no "propose to baptize" campaign that I knew of. Yet then so much of our pressuring people seemed slightly unethical. I wondered if the ends justified the means. Because we were bringing people the greatest gift,

*THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN*

was it okay to trick them a little? If what we had was so great, why did we need any kind of pressure at all? Why did we have to make being a member of the Church appear to be something even slightly different from what it was? Was this why so much resentment built up in converts that the majority stopped attending church before they'd even been members a year?

We were certainly misled as missionaries, told these would be the "best two years" of our lives, that we'd constantly be having spiritual experiences. Why couldn't Church leaders tell us the truth and let us emotionally prepare ourselves? If the mission was miserable but still worth doing, why not be honest about it? If they could only get young men to go by lying, what did that say about the morality of the leaders? Or about the calibre of missionaries that were serving?

I looked at Elder Mosby. Last week, he'd told me that as a child, after one of his friends teased him about Mormons having horns, he'd glued two rose thorns to his scalp near the hair line and then gone over to his friend's house. He pulled his hair back and showed him the horns, and the little boy had begun screaming hysterically. It seemed a funny story last week, but now it made me wonder about what kind of feelings and ideas were driving Mosby. Maybe he felt he'd proved his manhood now with those girls, and things could get back to normal, whatever that was.

We kept walking and eventually ended up at a little piazza where half a dozen streets converged. One man was selling used shoes, a couple of people were selling fruit, and several cars whizzed by.

Two teenage boys, probably the same age as the girls, walked up, smiling. "Americans," said one boy. "Waat taim eez eet?" He turned my wrist to look at my watch. "Ah, eet eez eelehveen and half." He smiled again.



*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

I wasn't much in the mood and didn't expect these teenagers to be terribly interested in the Church, but they were friendly, and they were talking to us, so I asked if they'd like to hear our lessons. "Sure," said the first boy in Italian. He pulled out a piece of paper and motioned to show he had no pen. Elder Mosby reluctantly offered his. He was looking around nervously, shifting his weight from foot to foot. What was his problem? The teens seemed to just be pretending interest so they could talk to Americans, but there was no harm in that. Public relations was also part of our job, wasn't it? The boy handed me the paper with his name and address, and I accepted it, smiling.

"Well, we'll certainly try to stop by—" I began, but suddenly, Elder Mosby had the boy by the collar.

Mosby grabbed his pen out of the boy's shirt pocket, screamed curses at him which I didn't understand, accused him of stealing his pen, and then spit in his face. Finally he marched off, leaving me behind.

I stood in shock, watching the boy wipe the frothy spit off his face. The boys looked at me, my mouth still hanging open, and walked away. One boy put his arm on the other's shoulder. Maybe they were gay and Mosby had sensed it, but they didn't seem gay to me, and males here in Italy often touched each other like this. They were reasonably cute, but even I hadn't much noticed that, given the stress of the morning. If Mosby was gay, though, and really fighting with it right now, maybe he had noticed.

Good grief. Did everything have to be about sex? Maybe Elder Mosby was mad because the boy was trying to be a smart aleck and steal his pen. Still, why not just smile knowingly and take the pen back? Of course, Mosby's problem might simply be temper and not sexuality. God, why couldn't You just put me with someone normal and let me do the work?

*THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN*

I was still staring at the two teenagers, and the one who hadn't been spit on looked over his shoulder at me. I should have apologized, but how did one apologize for something like that? Did the Church realize that this guy was out here representing for many people their only impression of the Church? Surely, other companions had said something. I certainly planned to tell the mission president in my next weekly letter. Of course, Mosby hadn't broken any of the major rules, the ones dealing with sex, and the Church tried to be lenient with people who only broke the "lower" ones. It was too damaging to send an elder home from his mission. He'd probably become inactive and leave the Church. Clearly, Elder Mosby needed to be out here on his mission every bit as much as I did, to work out whatever his problems were. He needed all the spiritual help he could get.

That didn't mean I shouldn't report him, though. He also clearly needed some kind of counseling. I probably did, too, but at least my problems weren't so public, still kept reasonably safely bottled up inside me. But then, I'd had elders reporting on me my whole mission for every little thing. I didn't want to feel like a spy now, too. And what if I reported Mosby, and when the President asked him why he acted this way, he said it was because he felt nervous being around someone gay?

We roamed some more and ended up at the funicolare. We took the tram almost straight up the hillside to Vomero and began walking around there. This middle class area was so much more pleasant. We didn't stop many men, and I tried to enjoy the beauty of the area and relax. I could live in a place like this. Only I could never truly imagine a life after my mission, with a career and a family. I'd only had one year of college and still had no major. And with no desire for women, the future seemed even drearier than the present.

But this area was relatively clean and on days when the smog wasn't too thick, we could easily see Naples, the bay, and

JOHNNY TOWNSEND

Vesuvius. It was all so beautiful from a distance. I could pretend the bay wasn't polluted, that trash wasn't six inches deep in the city below. And up here on the hill, Vesuvius didn't seem like much of a threat. Unless this hill were really just the slope of another volcano.

All that teeming multitude down below was going about life without any apparent concern for the continual danger they were in. The people here believed in San Gennaro's blood, kept as powder in a vial and paraded through town once a year, for almost 600 years now, turning into liquid blood on that one day, the miracle assuring people that the martyred Gennaro was still protecting the area. The Catholic Church wouldn't let the powder be analyzed, but whatever it was, it did change every year on that day. And Naples hadn't been destroyed in the most recent earthquake, and Vesuvius was still sleeping peacefully, since 1944.

That seemed more like coincidence than a miracle, however, a superstition that was going to lead many of these people to their deaths one day. Of course, God *could* stop a volcano if the people had faith, but the Mormon Church taught that faith was a belief in something true, not just a strong belief. As much as a child might believe in Santa Claus, it could never be called faith because Santa Claus wasn't true. So even if people believed they had faith, if they believed something that was false, it wasn't going to save them.

To have your whole city, your whole life, based on a vial of powder, or even based on the denial of tectonics, seemed so pathetic. Then again, there was no really safe place to live, I supposed. Hurricanes did destroy crops and fishing boats as well as homes, so it took away businesses, too, even if people survived the storm. And tornadoes or droughts or blizzards or floods or forest fires or something terrible happened almost everywhere. Maybe it was to help us remember that eternity was more

*THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN*

important than this life, to help us not mind suffering and dying so much.

I didn't feel like talking to anybody on the street any longer, and Elder Mosby hadn't stopped anyone in over half an hour. Yet it made my life feel meaningless not to at least try, so I finally stopped a man in his 50's, but he wasn't interested. Elder Mosby said nothing, and we walked on in silence.

Finally, finally, it was almost time for lunch, so we took a bus to the Ospedale Cardarelli and waited there for another bus to take us back down to our area. But Elder Mosby started shifting about again, looking very uneasy. "We can't wait for a bus," he said abruptly. "We've got to get back to the apartment *now*." He started walking.

"Why?" I asked, following.

"I've got to take a shit," he said, "and I can't wait."

We'd probably be home in five or six minutes by waiting for the bus, faster than we could get to Via Nicolardi by walking, but I couldn't tell what he was feeling, so I tried not to look surprised. We walked only a few yards further and were near the site where the prostitutes built their fire every night. There was a low stone fence along the road, and past it, the hill sloped downward, covered in trees here, and we could look down below at Napoli, and past Napoli to Vesuvius. It was a beautiful view, even if I did now always associate it with prostitutes.

Elder Mosby hopped the wall and pulled down his pants. Then he pulled on the sides of his garments to open the slit in the back, and he crouched down. He looked at me a little challengingly and I turned away.

I was worried, though, about the "public relations" aspect again. No one could see him from up where I was, but about half a million people could see him from the buildings along the bus route down to our area, and then from Napoli below. Still, if he

*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

really had to go, I suppose there was no choice. A few minutes later, Elder Mosby grabbed some leaves from a nearby bush and soon rejoined me.

“If you ever tell anyone about that,” he said in a low voice, “I’ll kill you.” His face was impassive and his eyes stone cold.

I believed him. It didn’t sound like an empty threat. But I tried to keep my voice calm as I replied, “You know, it may be that most people won’t find your going to the bathroom a topic they care to dwell on.”

I wasn’t sure what his reaction would be to that, but he turned away and looked down the hillside, staring into the woods for several moments. Finally, he looked back again at me coldly and then turned to look up the road for the bus.

What was going on in this man’s mind? As a missionary, I was supposed to be spending my time figuring out more effective ways to spread the gospel, but my every second was filled with finding some way to understand the missionaries about me just so I could survive.

Soon we’d be back home for a two-hour lunch break, but then we’d be out working for six more hours before time to go back to the apartment. Maybe I could talk to the zone leaders about a “work visit,” changing companions for the evening. I’d be with someone who criticized my every technique, but it had to be better than this. And the zone leaders needed to see Mosby in action. Of course, he might behave perfectly and save it all just for me, but if he did behave well tonight, that would still be a good thing, unless he felt betrayed by my asking for a work visit and suspected I was talking about him behind his back.

At least three more weeks with him before transfers, I realized again, and maybe neither of us would be transferred even then. If we did get separated, someone, or eleven someones, would have to be with him for the eleven remaining months of

*THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN*

his mission. And I had seventeen more months of my own mission. How many more companions like this would I have? None of them had been real winners yet. I wondered if we really needed to have companions in the first place. Would all this prepare me for marriage, if I managed to get married at all, or would it ruin me for it?

I looked up the street, hoping to see the bus. Not yet. I saw a man about thirty, with a moustache, leaving an apartment building and walking toward us until he turned a corner. He looked so calm, so confident. I wished I could have someone like that for a companion. To just have a real friend for once. In fact, I wished—

I felt an erection beginning, and I tried to focus again on the present. God had put me with Mosby for a reason. I had to find a way to connect with him if we were to be at all effective in spreading the gospel. Maybe I could tell him a story that made me look vulnerable and see how he reacted. I looked over the wall at the view and then back up the street for the bus. Then I looked out at Vesuvius again. It really was a lovely sight.

“What are you thinking about?” asked Elder Mosby suspiciously. I realized I shouldn’t have been looking over the wall in the direction he’d just come from.

“I was thinking about Santa Claus,” I said, hoping to divert him. A memory from a few years ago had jumped suddenly into my mind.

“Huh?”

I thought maybe I could get him to think about normal things again, so I kept on. “I believed in Santa for a long time.”

“So?”

“My parents hired a man one year to come in our house so we could catch him in the act of putting down gifts, so I believed for years.”

*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

Elder Mosby had a superior smile on his face, but it was better than the suspicion he had earlier. “How old were you?” he asked.

Here was my chance at being vulnerable. Did I dare be honest? I might never live this down if he made an issue of it. “Thirteen.”

Elder Mosby’s eyes widened and he burst into laughter. “Oh, my god,” he finally managed. “You really were a dork, weren’t you?”

I wondered if being trusting was a sign of innocence and was something necessary for faith, or if it only meant I was being naïve and taken in easily. How did one reconcile the need to be trusting with the necessity of not being gullible? “When I was twelve,” I continued, “I even asked my Mom, ‘Is there really a Santa?’ and she said yes. I didn’t think my mother would lie to me when I was asking for the truth.”

I’d even said publicly at school that I still believed, in front of my entire eighth grade class. When I found out the truth a year later, I vowed I’d never lie to my children, I’d never set them up to feel betrayed, and I’d never teach them that what they thought was faith was really nothing. What message would that send to them about believing in the Church?

How could children ever really trust their parents after that? Wasn’t lying just setting up the family on a foundation that was doomed to crumble? How could the Church, which constantly insisted that the family was the most important institution in the world, allow parents to lie to their children for years? I was going to be a good father, if I ever had the chance to be a father.

“You believe everything anyone tells you?” asked Elder Mosby.

THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN

“I don’t believe that my parents would lie to me now,” I said. “I believe the prophet wouldn’t lie, that the apostles wouldn’t lie. I guess they’re the only people I really need to trust.”

Elder Mosby didn’t say anything, so I looked expectantly at him for a few moments. Then I thought about the time I was about eight and I’d lost a tooth and put it under my pillow. The tooth fairy had never been a big deal in our family, so I didn’t really believe, but I was going to stay awake that night and find out for sure. But when I left my room for only a minute to go to the bathroom, well before bedtime, and came back to check, there was a quarter under my pillow. I couldn’t believe it. And my mother was way down at the other end of the hall sewing. She *couldn’t* have done it. So I believed in the tooth fairy for another year.

I shook my head. What possible good could come from teaching children about the tooth fairy? Why did parents lie for such stupid reasons? On the surface, it created the scene of a sweet, good family, but the reality was that kids were being taught not to believe even in God. It was hard enough to believe without parents deliberately opening a chasm in the ability of their children to believe. It was like crying wolf. Even if parents told the truth after that, how could anyone know?

God was different, though. People wouldn’t lie about God. I believed, and I had faith, and my faith was somehow going to get me married and raising a family of my own. I could believe what the Church said. I was going to be a good father.

“Why do you keep looking at me like that?” asked Elder Mosby.

Oh, my god. He was going to drive me crazy. I was going to go crazy.

“If you keep looking at me like that, I’m going to break your glasses.”



*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

Heavenly Father, I prayed. Can you hear me? Can you help me through this?

“The bus!” I said, pointing down the street. “Look! The bus is coming!” If we could just get home and have a little break from the tension, maybe I’d be okay. Maybe he’d be okay, too. I looked at my companion, hoping he was sufficiently distracted from his threats for a while.

But Elder Mosby smiled suddenly and clenched his fist. I stared at him. Oh, my god. He was going to push me in front of the bus. I couldn’t believe it. The man was cracking up. Looking at Elder Mosby’s balled fist and tensed jaw, I knew I had to do something fast, do something now.

If I got killed out here, I wanted it to be for my principles so I could be a martyr and go to the Celestial Kingdom, not because my companion had a split personality. What was I going to do? Elder Mosby raised his arm, and as I braced myself, he playfully punched me in the shoulder and winked. “I can’t wait to tell the others about our referrals,” he said.

“Uh-huh.” I wondered if I was the crazy one. Surely, I was misreading a lot of cues. But I didn’t think I was that out of touch yet. I looked down the road and avoided looking at my companion. What in the world was going on inside of his brain? I’d heard a little about manic-depressive disorders. Maybe Mosby had that. Or perhaps he perked up because he would no longer have to be alone with me. Constantly trying to second guess was exhausting me. I’d always expected a mission to make me emotionally healthier. Church leaders often spoke poorly of psychiatry and psychology, claiming they were too secular and they rationalized sin, that all anyone needed in order to have a sound mind was to live the gospel.

But how could someone live the gospel in the first place if they didn’t have a very sound mind? And in a world like this,

*THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN*

with people like this, how were we supposed to ever develop a sound mind to begin with? Just what were we supposed to *do*? I'd been going to church weekly, plus praying and reading the scriptures daily, for years. It just wasn't enough.

"I'm hungry!" said Elder Mosby. "I can't wait to see what the other elders cooked for lunch." Smiling, he climbed aboard the bus as it pulled in front of us. I was so tired of this whole mess. I just wanted to turn while Mosby wasn't looking and run, but I didn't know where to go. And a mission was where God wanted me. But I was going to have to relieve some tension somehow. Maybe I'd have to take up wrestling with the other elders after all.

Instantly, though, I saw one of the elders bent over, with his behind stretching out against his garments, with a big, floppy protrusion in front, and that familiar pressure below my belt started again. This was just not going to work.

Elder Mosby was already on the bus, though, so there was no more time to waste thinking. Forcing a smile, I followed up the steps behind him and we headed on home.

## Bus Surfing

“Come on, it’s 3:30,” I said to Elder Deiana, picking up my notebook and Bible. “You ready, Anziano?”

“Si’,” he replied, but headed for the bathroom to brush his teeth. I smiled and opened my notebook, studying the crude map I had drawn a couple of weeks earlier. Elder Deiana and I had tracted out almost half the streets in our new tracting zone in northeastern Rome, no small feat considering that nearly every apartment building was seven or eight stories high. Several doormen, however, had “helped” us speed along in our zone by refusing to let us tract out their buildings. Some wouldn’t even allow us to use the citofono, or intercom, outside.

Deiana was pretty good with portieri, though. We were able to sneak past a few each night, and if we got caught, he could usually laugh or talk his way out of a potentially sticky situation. “Oh, I’m sorry,” he’d say. “We didn’t see you sitting right there in your desk by the door.” The portieri were never pleased, but my companion’s obvious lie and the twinkle in his eyes would usually get us off the hook without being shouted at too loudly.

Elder Deiana glided into the room then, showing me his clean teeth in a wide grin. He picked up a Book of Mormon and a few pamphlets from off of his desk. “Ready?” he inquired innocently.

After Deiana offered a brief prayer, we headed out of the apartment and down the street toward the bus stop. It was annoying to have to run half a block right after lunch to catch a bus, so we walked quickly down Via Franco Sacchetti and hoped we would be close to the bus stop if the bus suddenly turned the corner. Just yesterday, we’d had to race for the bus, but Deiana had had to pause to avoid being hit by a car. I didn’t realize he wasn’t right behind me until the bus took off and I saw him

*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

waving at me. I'd stepped off the bus at the next stop and walked back to my companion. We'd had to wait another fifteen minutes for the next bus.

Resting at the bus stop now, I glanced at Elder Deiana. He was a few inches shorter than I was, about 5' 6", with short, straight black hair and olive skin, wearing a stylish Italian suit compared to my cheap American one. He was looking at a pretty, dark-haired girl who was reading a book. Deiana was always pointing out girls reading books. "Antonella read that one, too," he'd say, or "Antonella told me that one was garbage." I'd heard enough praise of Antonella to expect her to be swept up in a chariot of fire. "I like a girl who takes care of her body," explained Deiana, "but she's also got to use her mind."

A girl's mind was about all I cared about when meeting the girl, and I liked that Deiana at least put that somewhere on his list of priorities. I wondered if he'd find me attractive if I was a girl, but I had no desire to be a girl, and I didn't want Deiana to be one, either. I liked him as he was.

I had never told anyone about liking guys, and I'd hoped two years as a missionary would purge those sinful feelings out of me, make me worth liking as a person. The feelings were still there, though, and I didn't know what I was going to do about them, but I was sure that God had had a purpose in mind when he'd given me a companion I could really love. Maybe being with Deiana would satisfy that need I had to have at least one man love me during my life.

I looked over at Deiana again. He had a contented grin as he continued to look at the young woman reading her novel. Deiana always smiled when he saw a girl reading a book. He seemed to be sentimental about a lot of things. So was I. I think that's why I dreaded the next day so much. Transfers. Deiana and I had already been together for two months in the Rome Four district,

*THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN*

and I had never stayed with a companion for longer than that. It was almost certain that one of us would be leaving in two days.

It seemed as if those two months had flown by, but I could hardly remember a time without Deiana. We had done so much together. Friendships usually came and went with transfers, but Deiana and I shared something special. We weren't just compatible companions. We were friends and really cared about each other, especially when we could sense that the other was discouraged or feeling depressed about something. Like that time I had cooked eggs and potatoes for Deiana one morning, the day after he'd received his "Dear John" from Antonella. Or the time he had washed the dishes for me one afternoon when it was my turn. I had been discouraged with our lack of success in the work, and I felt like a failure. But I decided that if Deiana thought enough of me to help me out, I must have something going for me. I hadn't made many friends back in America, and I certainly hadn't made many out here. It was refreshing to have someone sincerely care about me now. Especially another man.

I had felt reasonably close to a couple of other companions previously. Nothing too special, but I would have liked to keep in touch after we'd been transferred apart. It was against mission rules to write letters within mission boundaries, though, so when transfers had come, that was that. Maybe we'd see each other again at a zone conference or something, and maybe not. Would I break that rule for Deiana, though, and keep in touch after transfers? Would he be willing to break it as well?

"Anziano Anderson," my companion interrupted my thoughts. "Here comes the bus." We crowded in behind the other passengers. Since we didn't have to worry about tickets, having bought a monthly pass for eight thousand lire, we squeezed by some of the other passengers and made our way to a reasonably vacant spot near the front of the bus, where we grasped a metal bar above our heads as the bus took off.

*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

Sometimes, we talked to the other passengers, trying to get their addresses so we could go teach them, but usually my companion and I just talked to each other. It had been during our on-bus conversations that I had learned a lot about Deiana's past. Almost every time we passed the army outpost on Via Nomentana, I heard another story of the year Deiana spent as an Italian paratrooper. Even though his service had been obligatory and difficult in many ways (hassles with leaders and rules, mostly—Deiana sometimes had a big mouth), he seemed to enjoy a lot of the things he'd had to do that year. He told me of the times he and his buddies had clogged the bathroom drains in the barracks and had slid naked on their stomachs in the three-inch deep water on the floor, and about how they would terrorize the new "allievi" in the middle of the night by making them leap off of upper bunks in the dark onto mattresses they couldn't see. He reminisced about using the big guns on the base and the war games they played. Once, due to a miscalculation, a huge shell from the opposing team had landed almost at his feet. Fortunately, the ground was wet from rain and the shell had sunk about ten feet before exploding.

One day last week after relating one of these stories to me, he'd paused, fingered his dog tag which he still liked to wear almost every day, and had then handed the tag to me nonchalantly, but had quickly turned to talk to a nearby man about the Church before I could say anything. Now I wore it every day. Another time when I'd asked about parachuting, he'd told me, "I was scared to death to jump out of that first plane, but since I had to go, I decided I might as well take a picture of myself falling," and he'd given me a copy of that picture later.

It was also on the way to our tracting zone near Piazza Bologna where I learned about some of Deiana's hobbies. He liked mountain climbing in the Alps, north of his home in Milano, and he enjoyed camping. I was surprised to find that I

THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN

was interested to hear him talk about his hobbies because I had little desire to participate in them, though I had to admit that his example with weightlifting had gotten me to work out with him twice a week so far. And his soccer lessons each Preparation Day had made the game at least reasonably fun for me, though I had never been much into sports before.

More than that, though, I think we discovered that we were both simply nice, that because we never tried to take advantage of each other or insist on having our own way, that it was a pleasure to be together. Once, Elder Lucas, our zone leader, had ordered a “work visit” with Deiana, intending to take my place as companion for an evening. But while Lucas was brushing his teeth after lunch, Deiana had pointed silently to the door and led me outside so he could work with me instead. “You’re my companion,” he’d said, giving me a light kiss on the forehead. “I want to work with *you*.”

“Our stop’s next,” Deiana said, pushing a square red button near a window. We edged over to the two doors near the center of the bus. When the bus stopped, we jumped down and crossed over to Viale XXI Aprile. We usually had to wait for the light, but our timing was just right this time. We passed the blue and white police van, always parked in the same place, and about seven young policemen.

We had been right there by that police van when Deiana told me about the time he was in Milano on his way to school one morning and saw a carabinieri get shot to death by the Red Brigade. The carabinieri had been just a young man serving his obligatory military term, but had had the misfortune of standing next to a higher officer, who had been seriously wounded in the incident. I think it was also as we passed the van, but on our way home one night, when Deiana reminisced about the fights he and his friends in the military used to get in with the local punks in Livorno, where they were stationed, and about the time he was

*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

beaten in Milano after refusing to give up his wallet to a couple of thugs. He lost his wallet, anyway, but he said he always loved a good fight.

A few minutes later, we were on Via Pisa, so I opened my notebook and checked to see where the next building we needed to tract out would be. We had to walk about two thirds of the way down the street before we could start tracting. We walked over to the next building on our list, went into the elevator, and pushed 7. At least we didn't have to pay ten lire each trip up, like down in Napoli. Most of the elevators in Rome were free.

"You're awfully quiet tonight, Elder," Deiana told me as we got out of the elevator on the top floor. "Anything wrong?"

"Oh, just thinking a little. It wears me out," I replied, smiling.

"I can understand that." He smiled back and pushed the doorbell of the first door.

A moment later, the door opened. A middle-aged woman answered. "Chi e'?"

"Good evening. We're two representatives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and we have a short message we'd like to share with you and your family." Elder Deiana paused. "Is your husband in?"

"No." She closed the door.

"Oh, well. Good evening," he replied.

"Not your type, Elder." I pushed the next doorbell. "What is your type, anyway?" I wondered if his type had changed any since Antonella.

"Can I give a long answer?" He laughed.

"Sure."

"Well, she'd have to be pretty, have auburn hair—"



*THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN*

“Auburn?”

“Uh-huh, and be fun.”

I pushed the doorbell again. I wasn't sure if I heard anything, so I knocked. “What do you mean by ‘fun’?”

“Oh, you know. Crazy. We can joke and laugh and have fun.”

“Oh.” We started down the stairs.

“But,” he added, “she has to be serious at the right times.”

“Like when?” I pushed the first doorbell on the sixth floor.

“In the park or in the car.”

The door opened. “Chi e’?” said a guy about our age.

“Hi! We're from the Church of Jesus Christ. Is your father home?” I asked.

Before I even finished my question, the father was at the door, but he wasn't interested in our message. At least he was nice about it, though. He closed the door and Deiana pushed the next doorbell. “So what kind of car did you have?” I asked him.

“A Fiat 500,” he said, looking indignant when I snickered. The “cinquecento” was probably the smallest car made by Fiat, so tiny it made a Volkswagon bug look big. “Better than a moped!” he added defensively.

“I'm sure! So, just how serious do you like to get in the park or in your 500?”

We heard some rustling in the apartment in front of us, so we knew someone was looking at us through the peep hole. Deiana decided to give his approach to the door, but he got no response. We went down to the next floor. I pushed the first doorbell.

“Well, if I know her well enough, we'd probably French kiss.”

JOHNNY TOWNSEND

“Yeah?” I paused. “I hate to sound ignorant, but I’ve never kissed a girl before. Just exactly how do you go about French kissing?”

Deiana looked incredulous for a moment, but he knew me pretty well after two months, though I was sure he didn’t know *why* I had never kissed a girl, and I would have preferred to die rather than ever tell him. “Well, when you kiss,” he said, “you just put your tongue in her mouth and tickle the roof of her mouth. Girls love it.”

“And what does she do?”

“Chi e’?” said an old, female voice from the back of the apartment.

“Good evening!” I said loudly. “We’re two—“

“Chi e’?” the old woman shouted, a little closer to the door. It was useless to answer yet. “Chi e’?” she shouted again. Now she was almost close enough. “Chi e’?” she repeated yet another time, right at the door. I explained who we were and our purpose, but she was sure we were thieves and told us to go away. I pushed the next doorbell.

“Oh, girls do the same thing,” Deiana continued. “Guys love it, too.”

“I’ll have to try it one day.”

“You don’t know what you’re missing.”

In the next building, we discussed relatives. Deiana almost died when he heard the country names of my Southern relatives, my Uncle Buford and Aunt Betty Jo, and my cousins Mary Lou, Thelma Rose, and Bertha Sue. A woman opened her door as Deiana was laughing, but fortunately, she was good-natured and liked to see two boys who seemed pretty decent. Since her husband was home, she let us in and we taught them our first lesson, about Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the

*THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN*

restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ. They weren't terribly interested, but we left a Book of Mormon and a couple of pamphlets along with our card, which had the address of the local congregation and the missionaries' phone number. Who knows? At least we planted a seed.

Of all the different things we did as missionaries, tracting was one of my favorites because my companion and I were able to contact a lot of people and still have time to get to know each other better. We could discuss the work and new ideas, experiment with different door approaches, and get to meet with people in their homes where they felt most comfortable. It had taken me a while before I learned to enjoy it, of course, but it had almost always been better than referral taking was for me.

Not that tracting was always fun. After all, there was the time that woman had chased us out of her building with a pair of scissors, and over near Piazza Sempione last month when that man had pulled a gun on us, and there were a couple of doors shut in our faces each night along with being kicked out by portieri. But even those experiences were okay when shared with a friend.

I had always been afraid of having to be with a companion for twenty-four hours a day, every day. Surely there would be habits and characteristics that wouldn't blend well. That was true, I'd found out, but after a year and a half, I had learned to tolerate an awful lot of habits. I'd had a couple of rough companionships, but Deiana was not only okay, he was absolutely the best companion I'd had out of twelve so far. We had a lot of good times, but still there were days when having a good friend by my side constantly was the only way I survived emotionally or spiritually.

We had always been told, "Love the country, love the people, love your companion. Then you'll be an effective missionary." I'd always tried to put that into effect, and I'd found

*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

that it was true. All of that came together in my present companion, which made me appreciate him more than my other companions. But no one had prepared me to be separated from the people I had learned to love.

Love was a weird feeling for me, one I hadn't felt often, and it scared me a little. Once, when I was a child, my Sunday School teacher had asked us all to go home and tell our fathers that we loved them, saying that our fathers needed to hear that once in a while. That night right before I went to bed, when my father was in the kitchen getting something to drink, I'd said, "I love you, Daddy." He hadn't even looked at me. I supposed he'd felt awkward, but at the time I thought it meant he didn't love me at all.

I grew leery of the word "love" just after the one incident, and when my aunt told me she loved me a few years later, all I was able to manage in reply was, "I sure appreciate you, too." And whenever I felt particularly close to any other friend or relative, which hadn't been all that often, the only thing I'd been able to say was, "I like you." The word "love" just wouldn't come out of me. I felt it for Deiana, but I wasn't sure I'd actually be able to risk saying it again. I had tried a couple of times during the past few weeks, but the words simply would not come.

Now Deiana and I were probably going to be split up. I only had six more months before I went back to America. Why, I might not ever see Deiana again after two more days. Ever! I slipped my left arm around Deiana's right arm as we turned onto Via Livorno. It was common custom among Italian friends, even guys, to hold hands or walk arm in arm. I had quickly picked that up during my time with Deiana, although I knew I'd be clobbered if I ever tried that with an American companion.

The first time Deiana had held my hand was during a district meeting with the other elders and sisters all around us. I'd been so surprised I didn't know what to do. I could feel my face

THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN

turning red, but I *liked* holding his hand, so I didn't pull away. Then one evening, I had casually been rubbing my neck to get a crick out of it, and Deiana had come over and given me a massage. To feel his strong hands against my skin was wonderful. *Wonderful*. I was so afraid I'd fall in love with him, and yet I never felt that any of the contact we had was sexual. It was the touching between two friends, and I thanked God he'd sent me to a country where I could actually touch another man, and it was *all right*.

It was time for a break, so Deiana and I walked over to a nearby bar and ordered two glasses of Ferrarelle orange soda, my favorite. We watched a teenaged kid playing a pinball machine for a few minutes, and we talked to the bartender for a moment. He said he'd had the missionary lessons a few years ago, but he didn't care to hear any more. "Keep on working, though. I believe what you're doing is good." He wouldn't let us pay for the sodas. Thanking the bartender, we left and headed back to Via Livorno.

Deiana suggested a pee break then, but there was no place nearby with a public bathroom other than the bar we'd just left, which Deiana didn't want to return to. So he led me into the next apartment building and up to the top floor. Then he found a door which led up to the roof of the building. It was dark up here, but light enough to see because of the street lights and apartment buildings all around. Deiana walked to the edge of the roof and unzipped his pants. "Come on," he said, smiling.

I had a hard time peeing in the presence of another man, and even using a public restroom by myself was difficult because I was always afraid someone else was about to come in. But this was Deiana, and I felt more comfortable with him than I ever had with anyone else, so I walked up to the edge of the roof and unzipped, too.

*JOHNNY TOWNSEND*

“Let’s go,” he said, and started urinating, right over the edge of the roof. I couldn’t believe it. But a thrill went through me as I contemplated being so naughty, and I soon followed his example. When we finished, he laughed, and we headed back for the door leading down to the stairwell again.

The rest of the evening went fairly well. We only got in one more door, and that for only fifteen minutes, but we did have some good talks with people in the hall. One man said he’d come to church on Sunday, but of the hundreds who had said that to me, I had yet to see someone actually come out to church. There was always the chance, though. We’d see.

Deiana and I also got to talk some more to each other in between doors and buildings. I thought I knew almost everything about him already, but I did learn a couple of new things. For example, he could say some English curse words quite well. That jerk on the moped who spit at us didn’t know what was going on, but I sure did. He had that pronunciation and accent just right. I wondered who’d taught him.

We left our zone and started back to the apartment at about 9:00. We only had to wait a few minutes on Nomentana before a 136 came along. There weren’t many people on the bus, so Deiana grinned at me and said in English, “Bus Surfing, U.S.A.”

“In bocc’al lupo, Anziano,” I said. It was an expression used to wish one luck, which translated literally to “in the mouth of the wolf.” Legend had it that Rome had been founded by Romulus and Remus, two orphans who had been raised by a wolf, so the expression was a wish that the recipient would be as fortunate as Romulus and Remus had been. The phrase had sounded ominous to me the first time I heard it, but I’d seen that a lot of things which seemed negative at first could turn out to be positive in the end.

*THE ABOMINABLE GAYMAN*

Elder Deiana and I started bus surfing then. We balanced ourselves in the back of the bus and tried to stand without holding onto or leaning on anything. I cheated on a couple of curves and almost fell at one stop, but Deiana had been practicing longer and was really rather good. My balance had been getting a little better lately, though, since I'd been practicing more with Deiana. A few odd stares did come our way, especially from one old, large woman in black who scowled at us several times, but we were so used to being stared at as missionaries that it didn't bother us at all. We either ignored the staring people or smiled back at them.

Within twenty minutes, we were back on Franco Sacchetti, so we pushed the button and hopped off the bus. At least at night we could get off at the same stop. Last week, when we had been coming home for lunch at 1:30, the bus had been so crowded that only Deiana could squeeze off at the right stop. Then I'd had to battle for a minute with a "pasta mamma" and some young teens and get off at the next stop a couple of blocks away.

As we were slowly walking back to the apartment, Deiana looped his right arm around my left, and he rested his head on my shoulder. We looked up at our building and saw that the lights were on in our apartment. The other elders were already home. We rode the elevator up to the third floor and started to walk down the hall toward our apartment.

Deiana didn't slow down as he spoke. "Ti voglio bene. Sai?"

I didn't hesitate, either, in my reply. "I love you, too, Elder."

A gay Mormon missionary in Italy struggles to become straight as he faces an earthquake, organized crime, a serious bus accident, and evil mission leaders. Then one day, he meets another missionary who loves him, and his world changes forever.

## **The Abominable Gayman**

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/4546.html?s=pdf>