



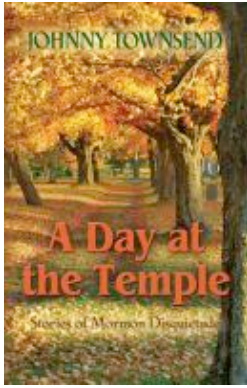
HOLLYWOOD

A CHAUNCEY MCFADDEN MYSTERY

DEATH BY DOWNSIZING

DAN ANDERSON

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR



In this collection of Mormon short stories, the LDS Church issues a survey about sexual orientation but neglects to allow "gay" as an answer. An anatomically male, inwardly female transgender feels guilty for holding the priesthood as a woman. A bishop's wife organizes a sex boycott among the leaders' wives until the Church agrees to ordain women. A man redecorates his house with Mormon art as a surprise for his husband.

A Day at the Temple

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Praise for Johnny Townsend

In *Zombies for Jesus*, “Townsend isn’t writing satire, but deeply emotional and revealing portraits of people who are, with a few exceptions, quite lovable.”

Kel Munger, *Sacramento News and Review*

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

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

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

Stephen Carter, editor of *Sunstone* magazine

“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*

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

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

“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

In *Sex among the Saints*, “Townsend writes with a deadpan wit and a supple, realistic prose that’s full of psychological

empathy...he takes his protagonists' moral struggles seriously and invests them with real emotional resonance.”

Kirkus Reviews

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

“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

“Johnny Townsend’s short stories cannot be pigeon-holed. His 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. He dares to think and write about people and incidents that frighten away more timid artists. His perspective is sometimes startling, sometimes hilarious, sometimes poignant, but always compassionate.”

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

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

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

Kel Munger, *Sacramento News and Review*

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

Donna Banta, author of *False Prophet*

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

Kirkus Reviews

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

Johnny Townsend has written at least ten books of Mormon stories. So far, I’ve read only two (*Mormon Fairy Tales* and *The Circumcision of God*), but I’m planning to read the rest—and you should too, if you’d like a fun and interesting new perspective on Mormons in life and imagination!”

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

Marginal Mormons [named to Kirkus Reviews’ Best of 2012] 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.”

Kirkus Reviews

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

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

“*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

"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*

"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

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

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

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.”

Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

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

A Day at
the Temple

Johnny Townsend

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My Dad's Wife Hits a Tree

I was sitting on the sofa with Greg, watching Chris Hayes, when the phone rang. I got up and walked to my office but didn't pick up the phone. We couldn't afford Caller ID, so I always screened my calls. Most of the time, the caller hung up rather than leave a message. It was usually a telemarketer. I was on a Do Not Call list, but charities I'd donated pathetic amounts to now had the authority to contact me.

The ringing stopped and my voice message began. Then there was a beep. If the caller hung up, I'd return to Chris Hayes.

"Tommy?" said a female voice. "It's Linda. Did you hear—"

I picked up the phone. "Hi, Linda, what's up?"

My sister and I talked maybe twice a year. She still lived in New Orleans, but I had moved to Seattle after Hurricane Katrina nine years earlier. Not even a full year apart in age, we had never been particularly close. She'd been wild as a teen, I'd been overly obedient. Then she moved out of the house, and I pretty much never saw her again. I felt no animosity toward her. And I liked her second husband more than her first. I simply didn't feel close to either of them.

"Joann was in a car accident."

Joann was my father's wife, his fourth. My parents had been married for twenty-five years, until my mother died of breast cancer. Then my father had married the Relief Society

president at church, a horrific marriage which lasted two grueling years. After that, my father married a Catholic woman. That lasted maybe five years. And finally, my dad returned to his roots, leaving New Orleans for the backwoods of Mississippi just outside of McComb, where he married a lovely Baptist woman. They'd been together now fourteen years? It was hard to keep track.

“What happened?”

“She ran off the road, hit a tree, and went down an embankment, rolling over three times.”

“Oh my god.”

“She broke her clavicle and fractured several vertebrae in her lower back, but she didn't damage her spinal cord.”

“How is she?”

“She's in ICU in Jackson.”

“When did it happen?”

“Last Wednesday.”

My mouth fell open. It was Monday night now.

My sister continued. “I just found out about it yesterday. Dad didn't tell me. He told Kip.” Kip was her son, who was 37. Linda had gotten married in our living room at sixteen, marrying a boy she'd met at the high school we attended. She hadn't participated in any church at all in the years since then. Kip had been born a few months after the wedding, and while my father had never spent much time with either my sister or me, he spent a great deal of time with Kip, taking him to the

construction sites where he worked. Kip eventually competed in tractor pulls with my dad. He was the son my father had always wanted.

“And Kip didn’t think to call you?” I asked.

“Well, he only found out Saturday,” she said. “And he called me Sunday.”

And you called me Monday, I thought. Sheesh. We’d never been an excessively communicative family, which was why I hadn’t felt bad moving halfway across the country. In all the years since I’d moved out of the family home, my father had only visited me once, when I lived in the Marigny, just outside of the French Quarter, way before I met Greg. That visit had lasted perhaps fifteen minutes. When I still lived in New Orleans, I would visit Dad once or twice a year on the farm and stay for a couple of days. That much contact had been awkward, but I wanted to believe that one day we’d finally truly care for each other.

When I’d first come out, my father had told me, “I don’t ever want to meet any of those weird friends of yours.” Then years later, after marrying Joann, he’d told me, “If you can just find someone you like in this world, that’s a good thing.” Still, he hadn’t even bothered to send a card after Greg and I were legally married last September on our seventeenth anniversary.

“How’s Dad holding up?” I asked.

Linda barked out a laugh. “He kept calling me Lynn,” she said. “I finally had to ask him, ‘Dad, don’t you know my name?’”

I'd noticed in my last couple of calls with him that he seemed to be having memory problems. No one else in the family had ever had Alzheimer's, but then, Dad's father had died at 79, and his mother at 76. Dad was now 77.

"He's driving up to Jackson every day?" I asked.

"Yeah. He can only stay in Joann's room twenty minutes twice a day, but he hangs out at the hospital all day so he can do that."

"He does love her."

"Yeah." She laughed again. "Though he told me when I talked to him last night that she yelled at him the other day."

"For what?"

"He was in her hospital room talking on the phone to Kip about the tractor pull next weekend. She said, 'I'm lying here dying, and you're talking about a tractor pull.'"

I smiled despite myself. "That does sound like him, too."

"Yeah."

"And Joann? What caused her to go off the road?"

"They don't know if she fell asleep at the wheel or what. It was 3:00 in the afternoon. She'd just gotten her hair done."

"Do you think she did it on purpose?" I asked.

"I wondered that too, Tommy." She paused, and I thought of the deep depression Joann had been in the last couple of years since her kidneys failed. Greg had offered her one of his, but she'd declined. We were never sure if she simply didn't

want a “gay kidney.” She’d refused the more common IV dialysis and opted for peritoneal dialysis instead. She had to do it almost constantly, though, and couldn’t have any decent quality of life.

I looked at my watch. It was 8:15. After 10:00 in Mississippi. I’d phone my Dad tomorrow night. “Well, thanks for calling, Linda.”

“I was afraid no one had told you.”

“You were right.”

We hung up, and I let Greg know what I’d just learned. He hugged me, and then I went back to my office to email my aunt Jennifer, who lived in Hattiesburg, a little over an hour from McComb. Jennifer was Mom’s sister, so not my Dad’s side of the family, though technically, since I was the only one excommunicated, all the rest of the family were still sealed to each other, even after my Dad’s non-Mormon marriages. My aunt Jennifer was only six years older than I was, and we’d always liked each other. She was the sole extended family member I kept in touch with. Years ago, she’d even told me she’d married her husband Dennis because he was so much like me. Since she couldn’t marry me, she explained, she’d married him. It was kind of a joke, but only kind of. It turned out that Dennis was indeed a lot like me, even in his preference for sexual partners. He’d been excommunicated, repented, and had refused to speak to me for the last ten years because I was such an evil influence in his life. That had all naturally had an impact on Jennifer’s relationship with me, but despite it all, we were still friends. Two of her daughters were living in South Africa right now, becoming even more prejudiced than they’d already been living in southern Mississippi. Somehow, we managed to avoid the inflammatory issues that would naturally

divide us. I had to admit, though, it often left our conversations tepid and superficial.

I watched an episode of *The Big Bang Theory* with Greg, and then at 9:30, I kissed him and headed for bed.

“Late night for you,” he said.

“Yep,” I agreed. “And then work comes all too soon.”

I preferred to be in bed by 9:00, though Greg stayed up as late as 1:00 most nights. He worked part-time in the Freedom Socialist Party office. He didn’t bring home much money, but I was proud he was trying to make a difference in the world. My office job downtown depressed me enough that I longed every evening for the oblivion of sleep. I would usually waken as Greg climbed into bed, alert just long enough to hear him whisper, “I love you, Tommy,” as he slid under the covers. He said it every night.

I woke up at 12:30 to go pee, finding Greg asleep with the remote in his hand. I left him on the sofa and returned to bed. I got up again at 3:00 to pee. Greg was in bed by this time. When I climbed back in, he said, “Golly gee whiz!” and rolled over. He frequently talked in his sleep. During our first years, he often shouted or yelled, something like, “No, Mom, no!” or “Dad, please!” He was Mormon, too, from Salt Lake. These days, he was more likely to say something along the lines of, “I remember...I remember...” and then say, “Hmphh,” as if he’d just forgotten what he wanted to say. A few weeks ago, he’d said, “What a purty flower!” Another time he’d said, “And the winner is...!” I sometimes got up in the night to write down his comments so I could make fun of him the following day.

I woke up again at 5:00, my normal time for rising. I ate a bologna sandwich and took my HIV meds. I had to eat in order to take the pills, and I had to do it far enough in advance of the bus ride to work that I wouldn't get sick and throw up. I took prochlorperazine for nausea, but it was only moderately successful.

I checked my emails a few minutes later, as I did every morning. My aunt Jennifer had replied, a bit of a surprise since she only checked her account once a week, so I eagerly read what she had to say. "We already heard about Joann," she began. "Mark heard about it in town." Mark was Jennifer's and Mom's brother, who still lived in McComb, not far from Dad.

"Mark said we should wait and see if any of you were going to tell us about it."

At this point, I stopped reading, my mouth falling open. Jennifer and I emailed at least once a month. We were far closer than I was to any other family member. She honestly thought that I wouldn't tell her?

I reread the sentence. "Mark said we should wait and see if any of you were going to tell us about it." Well, it's true that I didn't tell my uncle Mark. He and I had never been close. One of our routine family relationships. Mark was ten years older than Jennifer. He was the executor of my grandmother's estate after she died a few months after Hurricane Katrina. My grandmother had written a will, so there was no debate or discussion about who got what. It was all clearly laid out. But two years passed, and Mark still hadn't settled the estate. I really needed the money, making a new start in Seattle with Greg after losing so much in New Orleans, so I began to ask Mark when he thought he might get around to settling things. He never even bothered to respond. After four letters in one

year, I asked my dad, who lived just a couple of miles from Mark, to intercede.

Mark called us vultures, even though by this time three years had passed since my grandmother's death. It wasn't until the threat of a lawsuit yet another year later that things were finally settled. I eventually received the land my grandmother left me, but by this time, the economy had gone into a deep recession and no one was interested in buying the land, which had lost 60% of its value.

Both Mark and Jennifer stopped sending Christmas cards to my father, he stopped sending cards to them, and I stopped sending cards to Mark, but I always kept in touch with Jennifer.

Even though she always voted Republican. Even though she donated money to Proposition 8. Even though her son wrote about his evil cousin Tommy on his blog.

I read the rest of the email. Jennifer was packing to prepare for a visit to South Africa. She'd just held cheerleader tryouts at the school where she worked. She was mad at her bishop for something. "Hope you're doing well," she concluded.

I stared at my computer screen, aghast. I remembered Todd Bridges, the actor from *Diff'rent Strokes*, being interviewed on a talk show once. He said something like, "Every family is dysfunctional in some way," and he was jumped all over by the others on the set, who vehemently denied the claim. But I always wondered if maybe he was right. My parents never argued where I could hear them, and they never physically abused me. My father said belittling things sometimes, but mostly, we were just all very distant, as if we weren't even related but somehow accidentally found ourselves living in the

same house. Almost like being randomly assigned a roommate in a dorm.

My mother was the first to join the Church, when I was nine. She hadn't even told my father she was investigating. A few weeks later, though, my father, sister, and I were baptized. Jennifer wanted to join next, but Grandpa wouldn't let her. She joined later when she turned eighteen. Then Mark and his wife joined. At that point, my grandmother wanted to join, but my grandfather forbid it. After he died, Grandma was baptized, too, a couple of months after my excommunication, which I hadn't told anyone about yet. So that entire side of the family was now Mormon, and everyone had been to the temple. We were a forever family.

Except that we couldn't even be bothered to tell others when a major disaster had befallen someone else in the family.

I started typing a reply. "Jennifer," I said, "I'm surprised that when you and Mark found out about Joann, your first instinct wasn't to call my Dad and offer sympathy, or ask if there was anything you could do for him." I took a breath and reread the sentence. "I'm surprised your first instinct wasn't to send him a sympathy card, or send flowers to Joann." My heart was beating faster. "I'm surprised your first instinct wasn't even to call Linda or me to talk about it. Your first instinct was to test us."

It sounded harsh, but I was truly offended. How could my aunt who'd I'd stuck with all these years be saying such things? "It hardly seems indicative of true family love. Or of decent Christian behavior."

I looked at my watch. It was 5:35. I'd have to get dressed in a few minutes and prepare for a long, miserable day at work.

The bus came at 6:02. I still had to brush my teeth and floss. I only flossed once a day, and I made myself do it in the morning just to guarantee that the chore was done at all.

I stared at the computer screen. I had no relationship with my sister. Two calls a year. I had no relationship with my father. Maybe three calls a year, and a letter, all initiated by me. I'd have to call him as soon as I got home tonight. Neither of them had email, which made things more difficult. Jennifer was it, even with her husband who despised me.

Was this email going to make things better, or worse?

I hit the backspace button until everything I'd just written was deleted. Then I started again. "Jennifer, you know how poor the communication is in our family. It turns out you knew of Joann's wreck before I did. I'd appreciate it in the future if you could assume I don't know whatever important information you've just found out, and would call or email me, to keep me in the loop. Our family certainly has its problems. Let's be on the same side."

I wasn't sure that wasn't still an offensive reply, but it was the best I could do under the circumstances. I added a few more sentences about her bishop and her trip to South Africa, and then I hit Send.

I logged out of the computer, turned it off, and put on my slacks and Polo shirt. Then I affixed my name tag for the office and pulled on my winter jacket. I put the sandwich Greg had prepared for me last night in my lunch bag, and I crept quietly into the bedroom. I leaned down gently and kissed Greg on the temple. "I love you, Greg," I said softly.

Johnny Townsend

He murmured in his sleep, and I walked across the street in the dark to the bus stop.

The Boycott

Ann put down her copy of *Lysistrata* and looked at the portrait of the First Presidency hanging on the living room wall. Her eyes narrowed as she scanned the other paintings in the room. Jesus Christ and Heavenly Father talking to Joseph Smith. Peter, James, and John ordaining Joseph. Brigham Young in his wagon entering the Salt Lake valley.

Ann frowned.

She'd heard through the grapevine that the radical group Ordain Women was going to try to gain admittance to the Priesthood session of General Conference in two weeks. Ann wasn't sure even Philip would be able to attend. It was a big conference center, but there were always thousands of men trying to get in from all around the world.

Ann had talked to Philip about her feelings many, many times. Philip's response was always, "You don't *need* the priesthood. You have *me*."

It had been very difficult to raise her right hand to sustain Philip when he was called as bishop fourteen months ago. But she'd been a dutiful wife and done so. She had believed that once in a position of substance, her husband would have more influence on the larger church and be able to help enlighten people to ideas of equality.

Unfortunately, since he didn't hold those ideas himself, he was hardly the right subject to proselytize them. Still, Ann was determined to at least get Philip to say something in Sacrament meeting just once about the Church needing to reevaluate its

position on women and the priesthood. And he needed to say something *before* General Conference. She was going to have to do something that left him no choice. He was already stressed to the max with both work and his clerical duties. It shouldn't take much to push him over the edge. She stared at the First Presidency and thought.

An hour later, Philip walked through the door. "Hi, honey, I'm home."

Ann walked up to meet him and kissed him gently on the lips. "How was your day, dear?"

"Tough. My boss is killing me." He took off his coat and hung it up.

"I'm so sorry."

"But I'll be boss one day soon myself."

"You're certainly cut out for it," said Ann. "I'm sorry you have to put up with him."

"Her."

"Oh, that's right."

"Well, it's nothing a plate of macaroni and cheese won't cure." Philip's eyes twinkled.

"Macaroni and cheese?" asked Ann innocently.

"It's Tuesday night, isn't it?"

"Oh, that." Ann smiled coyly. "Well, I decided that until you say in Sacrament meeting that you think women ought to be ordained to the priesthood, I'm not cooking anymore."

“What?”

“No more dinners. No more breakfasts. No more preparing your lunch to take to work.”

Philip laughed nervously. “That’s not even funny, Ann.”

“It sure isn’t.”

Philip’s brows furrowed. “Ann, I’ve had a hard day at work. I’m the breadwinner around here. I pay all the bills. It’s your job to be a wife and do the cooking and housework. If I do my share, you have to do your share.”

“I’d be happy to,” said Ann. “Once you make the announcement.”

“I’m not being excommunicated just to fulfill some stupid whim. The Church will never ordain women to the priesthood. It wasn’t done in the New Testament, and it wasn’t done in the Book of Mormon. It simply isn’t God’s will.”

“If I recall,” said Ann brightly, “there was no Relief Society for women in the New Testament or Book of Mormon, either. No Primary, for that matter. No Institute.” She batted her eyes innocently.

Philip stormed up the stairs and slammed the bedroom door. The kids, Ben and Susan, ten and eight, had just come down the stairs as their father pushed past them. They looked at Ann questioningly.

“How about chicken nuggets for dinner?” she said with a smile.

She obviously had to feed the kids, but it would be the simplest meals possible, no matter their nutritional value. They'd remember the boycott with fondness, regardless of Philip's actions.

Philip came downstairs just as the family was finishing up. He made no attempt to open the fridge or the pantry. He simply grabbed his coat and said, "I'm going out to eat." He opened the front door. "At that restaurant on Olive you like so much." Then he was out the door.

Ann laughed.

She was in bed when she heard the car pull back up in the driveway. Philip would have had to spend most of his evening at the church meeting with the members. Members with problems. Members who would add to his stress. He came up the stairs, opened the bedroom door, and loudly clicked the light on, adjusting the dimmer so that the light shone at its brightest. He didn't say a word but noisily undressed, stomping about and slamming drawers.

Ann pretended to sleep through it all.

Philip plopped into bed roughly, trying to shake the mattress as much as possible. Ann continued to pretend to sleep. Philip kicked her in the leg, also pretending, that it was an accident.

The next morning, Ann poured cereal for the kids and sent them off to school. She was eating a bagel with cream cheese when Philip showed up in the kitchen. He poured himself some orange juice and left without saying a word. Ann was sure he'd get tired of providing his own food long before she had her fill of his spitefulness. She'd grown used to it over the years and

built up a defense, since this was hardly his first display. Once, about two years ago, Ann had announced at the dinner table that she'd applied for a part-time job at the library. Philip's immediate response was to say calmly, "If you interview for that position, I'll sell the second car."

Another time, she'd mentioned that she was tired of doing genealogy at the Family History Library every Friday morning. "All the work will be done in the Millennium anyway," she'd said.

"No Family History," Philip had countered, "and no more gift cards from Barnes and Noble for you to waste all your time reading books." She'd given in that time, too. She had almost a thousand books. Philip always complained that they were taking up too much space. And it wasn't as if she couldn't borrow from the library. But owning a book felt sometimes like the only freedom she had.

Ann spent the day reading another Greek play.

Around 5:15, the front door opened. "Honey, I'm home." Philip sounded cheerful. Ann's heart skipped a beat. Had he decided to give in so soon?

"Hi, sweetie," said Ann, going up to him and giving him a kiss. "How was your day?"

"Oh, it was just fine," he said with a grin. "During lunch, I went to the bank and took your name off the account. It's not joint any more. No more money for you until you decide to act like a wife." He smiled and sauntered into the kitchen. "What's for dinner?"

“I had dinner already,” said Ann sweetly. “A fried egg sandwich on toast. Boy, it really hit the spot. I know how much you like them, too.”

Philip eyed her warily.

“I fed the kids early, too. They’re upstairs doing their homework. Little angels.” Ann had some money hidden in the house if she needed it. And Philip’s new tactic simply meant that he’d have to do the shopping and cooking for the kids himself once they ran out of what was already in the house. She could live with that.

“I want dinner,” said Philip flatly.

“Be my guest.” Ann started out of the kitchen. “Oh, I suppose I should mention, you only have one more clean shirt. And since I’m no longer doing your laundry, so you might want to address that after you eat something.” There actually had been several clean shirts still in his closet, but Ann had deliberately wrinkled six of them and tossed them in the hamper this morning.

“Well, I’m not taking out the garbage anymore.”

“I’ll get over it.”

“And I’m taking back the keys of the car I let you use.”

“You mean, my car?” Ann played along.

“No, *my* car. Everything here is mine. I paid for everything.”

“All right, dear. Since I’m not buying groceries or running errands for you all day anymore, I suppose that’s fair.” She

started to walk away but then turned back. “I think there are some saltines in the pantry.”

“There are no ordained women in the Bible or Book of Mormon!”

Ann put her finger on her chin as if contemplating. “There are no sister missionaries, either, are there? Or Visiting Teachers? Or Home Teachers? Hmm, that’s odd.”

Ann walked up the stairs and closed the bedroom door. This had better work, she thought, or they were headed for a divorce. Why did men have to be such buttheads? She wondered for a moment if she were doing the right thing. She didn’t particularly mind being a stay-at-home mom. She honestly did think it best for one parent to be available for the children. She just didn’t think it always had to be the mother. There was no reason a man couldn’t stay at home and let his wife lead an exciting career. For that matter, there was no reason they couldn’t both have part-time jobs and both take part in raising the kids. There was no reason she *had* to be totally, one hundred percent dependent on her husband for everything.

Ann picked up the phone and called Betty, the wife of Philip’s first counselor in the bishopric. She quickly explained what she’d been doing and why, and Betty asked, “Is it working?”

“It’s too soon to tell,” Ann replied, “but it’ll work better if you do it, too. *Someone* in the bishopric will crack.”

“Are you going to call Samantha as well?” The second counselor’s wife.

“As soon as I hang up with you.”

“All right,” said Betty, “I’ll give it a try. But only till Sunday.”

Ann wasn’t sure she’d have success that soon, but any help was useful. She dialed Samantha next and told her what both she and Betty were up to. “Grady is such a prick sometimes,” Samantha said. “Thinks his dick makes him a god. I’m with you.”

“If we can keep this up for a couple of weeks,” said Ann, “I’ll call the stake president’s wife.”

“Well, she’s in our ward, too. There’s no reason she can’t be in on this.”

“She’s a bit fanatical in her religious devotion,” said Ann, “but I did hear her in the bathroom at church a few weeks ago say something about how she could run the stake better than Fred.”

Samantha laughed. “Call me tomorrow and we’ll compare notes.”

Ann read until 9:30 and then turned off the light. Perhaps half an hour later, Philip came in after another evening at church, surely exhausted and stressed again. He turned the light on as bright as it would go and stomped about as he had the night before. Then he turned the light down low. Climbing into bed, he shook Ann’s shoulder. “I want to make love,” he declared.

This was the moment Ann had been waiting for. She’d heard about the Ukrainian women vowing not to have sex with Russian men after the takeover of Crimea. She’d read about the

women in Kenya, Liberia, and Colombia having their sex strikes to force men to their will. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. She thought again of *Lysistrata*.

"Oh, honey, I'm so anxious to make love to you, too." She watched him smile and said, "And we can do that just as soon as you take a stand publicly in church that women should be ordained to the priesthood."

Philip's face grew cold. "I can divorce you, you know."

"But they won't let you be bishop any longer."

"They won't let me be bishop if I say what you want me to say."

"But you'll still have me and the kids. An eternal family."

"Honey, you have to accept the facts. God didn't ordain women in the Bible and the Book of Mormon because he didn't want them to be ordained."

"I suppose that's possible, dear," Ann said slowly, "but I can't help but recognize there was no church university in those scriptures, either. No Family Home Evening. No Word of Wisdom. No Singles wards." She paused. "Do you think it's just barely conceivable that God doesn't need us to do everything the exact way it was done two thousand years ago?"

Philip deflated in front of her eyes, and Ann almost felt sorry for him. "I'm so tired," he mumbled.

"I'm thirty-two years old," Ann returned, "and I've heard every day of my life that I'm not equal to men. You've had two hard days and *you* think *you're* tired!"

Philip sighed heavily. “All right. All right. I’ll say something in Sacrament meeting this Sunday. Satisfied?”

“I will be on Sunday.”

“So can we forget about all this and get our lives back to normal?”

“Not until after Sacrament meeting on Sunday,” said Ann. And maybe not even then, she realized. She wasn’t sure that a one-time announcement was going to make any kind of significant change in the Church. Maybe she should keep this up, and spread it by word of mouth from one bishopric to another to another. People had cousins and sisters and friends in other wards and stakes across the country. Maybe she could get a real movement going. Perhaps no one should give in until there was real change, even if it took a year.

People said it would be at least fifty more years before the Church started treating women equally. But if even twenty percent of the women stopped having sex with their men, it would sure happen a lot sooner.

“All right. It’s just a few more days. I’ll go beat off in the bathroom.” Philip started to climb out of bed.

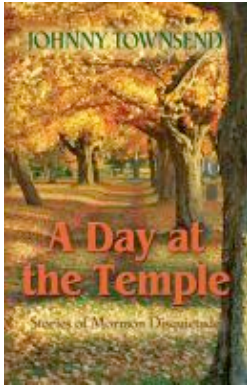
“While you’re in there,” said Ann to his back as he walked away, “be thinking about your brothers and college roommates and former mission companions you can call tomorrow. You can ask them to say something in Sacrament meeting, too. They can offer to give talks or something. Your calling them is part of the deal, too.”

She watched Philip hunch over at the words, but he didn’t turn around. “Okay, honey.”

She could hardly hear him.

Then he went in the bathroom and closed the door. Was this what power felt like, Ann mused. No wonder men didn't want to share it.

But sharing good things always made those things better. Ann would share. She pulled the blanket up closer to her chin, thought of new ways to torment her husband, and smiled.



In this collection of Mormon short stories, the LDS Church issues a survey about sexual orientation but neglects to allow "gay" as an answer. An anatomically male, inwardly female transgender feels guilty for holding the priesthood as a woman. A bishop's wife organizes a sex boycott among the leaders' wives until the Church agrees to ordain women. A man redecorates his house with Mormon art as a surprise for his husband.

A Day at the Temple

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