



**Invasion of the
Spirit Snatchers**

JOHNNY TOWNSEND



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

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Johnny Townsend

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On the Back of Oxen

Bennett was special, but not special enough to have a vision. At twenty-seven, he was a little young to be called to work in the temple. Retired folks usually received those callings, so much nicer than being called to clean the ward toilet. But he'd told his bishop in no uncertain terms that working as the ward membership clerk, which was only a step above toilet-cleaning on the best of days, was making him lose his testimony. All those people moving in and out of the ward boundaries who insisted they didn't want to be tracked any longer by the Church. It shook his faith.

A month after that discussion, Bennett was called to work the Recommend Desk at the Gilbert Arizona temple. He simply had to sit behind a magnificent mahogany desk in the large square foyer. The room was decorated sparsely but elegantly in brown tones, with a beautiful mosaic on the floor in front of him he could look at his entire shift. No one ever showed up without their credit card recommend, so it was always just a formality to make sure no anti-Mormons were trying to sneak in with recording equipment. By now, the entire endowment ceremony was on YouTube anyway, so it was pretty much a moot point.

Bennett worked just one shift a week, usually the Tuesday 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. slot. It wasn't a busy time. The last endowment session began at 7:00, so few people came in after that, though baptisms went on till 8:00. There was no cafeteria

to direct people to, no clothing rental available. The temple was a magical place in many ways, but it was also a bit mundane. You came and did your service, either as a worker or a patron, and you went home.

And that was the crux of the problem. Bennett didn't have a key, so he couldn't be the last person to leave. Yet he wanted to stay until all the patrons had gone and there were only a few workers left. Maybe then he could find a sacred corner of the building and finally see Jesus. He'd read so many stories of the apostles and prophets, who'd made it all the way to the head of the Church without ever seeing Christ personally, and then finally, one special day in the temple, they'd met face to face. If Bennett were to have any chance at all, it had to be at the end of his shift. It wasn't quite the same thing, but one didn't see ghosts in a busy shopping mall. One saw them in a deserted old house.

"Good night, Brother Alexander," said Bennett softly, waving at an older gentleman who was on his way out now. Brother Alexander saw his wave and whispered good night in return. Everything was said softly in the temple, at all times. Heavenly Father must simply love golf, Bennett thought.

Brother Alexander worked at the veil. He was so hard of hearing no one ever had any trouble getting through. The man always just assumed he'd heard the patrons incorrectly and ushered them past the check-point without ever correcting them.

Looking at so many elderly people all the time, Bennett worried simultaneously about two things. One, that he'd grow old without ever finding the love of his life. And two, that he'd find the love of his life, and *she'd* grow old and unattractive. It was comforting to know that his wife, or wives, would be

eternally young once they reached the Celestial Kingdom, but he was almost thirty already. That only left him a good ten years before he was middle-aged himself. He'd guarded his chastity for so many years, but now he was afraid once he did marry and could freely have sex, his wife would be too old to satisfy him.

Yet even trials like that he could face, even for another thirty or forty years, if only he really *knew*. He simply had to have a vision. Perhaps he didn't truly deserve one, not really being very special in any way, but he wanted one just the same.

Bennett waved good-bye to a few of the other workers, wishing they'd hurry up before he'd be kicked out himself. He had decided this morning on his way to the office downtown that tonight during his temple shift, he was going to have a vision. And by golly, he was going to do it.

The problem was where.

The bathrooms were usually pretty quiet and isolated, but Bennett had determined that was not exactly the place he wanted to meet the Redeemer. One of the ordinance rooms where the endowments took place would be too much like a class with its rows and rows of chairs. While Jesus was the Great Teacher, Bennett wanted to meet him on more equal terms. The Celestial Room was an obvious choice, but that sanctuary was closed down at the earliest possible moment, its access restricted even before his shift ended.

It was so frustrating trying to find the peace he longed for, when peace was off limits.

So what was left? A sealing room? That wouldn't be a bad idea, Bennett thought, but it might spark some awkward

questions from the Savior. For instance, why was a righteous Mormon man still single at his age? Did he not know the importance of marriage? Was he being too picky, thinking himself better than all the daughters of Zion freely available to him in the stake?

No, the sealing room wouldn't do. A reprimand from Jesus wasn't what he was after.

Bennett strolled the halls, carefully, ducking into open doors when the occasional lingering worker passed by. Too many of the doors were locked at this point, though. He had to do something quickly. He tried another door. Locked as well.

“Forget something, Brother Benson?”

Bennett swirled around to see Sister Dell looking at him curiously. She helped the elderly sisters put on their caps and aprons at the appropriate points in the ceremony. What she was doing here this late Bennett didn't know.

Did women want to meet the Savior, too?

“Uh, no, I'm fine. Have a good evening.” Bennett walked on, remembering just how often people were able to intrude on each other's most personal moments in the temple. Holiness here was a communal experience, whether one wanted it that way or not.

He remembered overhearing two elderly women a couple of weeks ago in the hallway. One of them, still in her temple clothes, turned to the other, who'd just taken off her apron. “You know, when my granddaughter Angie was having so much trouble with her second pregnancy, I came to the temple every single day and put her name on the prayer roll.”

“And what happened?” asked the apronless woman.

“Well, naturally, she got better,” replied the first woman. “In fact, she didn’t have another single problem the rest of her pregnancy.”

“Heavenly Father is so amazing.” She shook her head.

“All it takes is a little faith. I come to the temple once a week now to show my gratitude.”

“What a wonderful grandmother you are. Your granddaughter must love you very much.”

The women were out of range after this, but it wasn’t an unusual conversation to overhear. The discussion of everyday miracles was another of the perks of this calling. He’d once heard a man talking about regaining the use of his left hand after a stroke. He heard a woman talk about lowering her blood pressure by meditating in the Celestial Room. He heard an elderly man tell his wife his cancer had gone into remission. Bennett thanked Heavenly Father every night for the privilege of working in this sacred place.

It was just that as wonderful as the environment was, and all the blessings he was receiving every day, it still wasn’t *quite* enough. Joseph Smith had seen God at the age of fourteen. He’d gone on to do a lot of astoundingly great things. That was primarily because he was such a great person to begin with. But there was no denying that seeing God the Father, and Jesus Christ, and Moroni, and Peter, James, and John, and Ezekiel, and all the others simply bestowed an enormous amount of strength on a person.

If only Bennett could see one of these perfect beings.

He peeked in the men's room, knowing it wouldn't be locked yet.

Nothing.

Just as well.

He remembered one time right after attending an endowment session on his own time, he'd gone to the Celestial Room and enjoyed the soothing, peaceful environment. The furnishings were luxurious, the room like the lobby of a five-star hotel. People criticized the Church for spending so much money on temples, but Bennett had seen the cathedrals of northern France during his mission. Maybe the poor had suffered by their construction, but there was no mistaking the incredible spirit one could feel even in an apostate building, if that building were beautiful. It was only natural that Mormons want to experience a little of that in their own places of worship.

But that one night...Bennett closed his eyes, trying to forget. An elderly woman on the sofa next to him had lost control of her bladder, ruining the brocaded fabric. She was absolutely mortified and began crying as if her life were over. The attendants talked to her gently and calmed her down as they quietly ushered her out, trying to be as comforting as possible.

But during his next shift at the Recommend Desk, Bennett heard one of the other workers tell him the woman's recommend had been revoked.

Rather than go up to the Celestial Room now, which was pointless, Bennett decided to head down to the baptismal font. He'd loved coming to the temple as a teenager and doing

baptisms for the dead, the only ordinance teens were allowed to participate in. A line of the youngsters would come from their ward or stake and get dunked fifteen times in a row, hardly having enough time to come up for air before going under the surface of the water again. He'd choked every time. And yet every time he headed back to the dressing room afterwards, dripping wet, he luxuriated in the knowledge that he'd touched eternity.

Bennett paused in the stairwell. This was where he'd overheard the temple president talking to one of the prominent members of the bishopric of his ward one evening. They were on a different level in the stairwell, and Bennett heard them before he saw them. "Brother Raleigh," the president said, "the best way to deal with wayward children like yours is to cut them out of the will. And I don't just mean your son who's had his name removed from Church records. This goes for your daughter as well. She's active, but she doesn't have a temple recommend any longer." Bennett had slowly descended and could now just see the two men around the corner. He paused, afraid of interrupting such a serious conversation.

"It's such a burden," Brother Raleigh confessed, looking defeated and much older than he'd looked even a few weeks earlier.

"It's money that's a burden," the temple president returned. "And a curse. It's only a blessing in one's life if one is righteous. In the hands of others, it only leads to heartache. Now that you're facing this terrible illness, you need to rewrite your will and leave your money to the Church."

Brother Raleigh looked unhappy, but the temple president noticed Bennett at that point and gave him a withering look, so

he had to continue on his way without hearing the rest of the conversation.

Bennett didn't mean to be a peeping Tom. It was just that so many extraordinary things took place in the temple every day. And since it was the temple, those things were often quite personal. It was like accidentally finding you had access to HR's personnel files at the office, when all you were really trying to do was find the photocopier.

But the richness of his experiences scared him. So Bennett had decided he needed to start concentrating right away on receiving his vision, realizing he might be released from his calling at any moment. Some people had a given calling for years and years. Other people were released within months. He might not have much longer to see Jesus. And every Tuesday since then, he'd fasted the entire day, hoping to make himself at least slightly more worthy of Christ's presence when he arrived to work his shift.

There were only moments left before Bennett had to leave the building tonight. He descended quietly toward the gallery where the baptisms were performed. The lights would be dimmed but not off. The font itself would be empty by now but this room was almost as spectacular as the Celestial Room. In some ways, spending time in the baptismal chamber was like finding an out-of-the-way eatery in a foreign city, away from the well-traveled avenues, but where the food was so fabulous tour guides would fight over claiming they'd discovered it. Only they never discovered it, which is why it remained such an incredible treasure.

Bennett stopped short when he entered the room. Someone was in the font. In fact, it looked as if there were two people.

In the dim light, Bennett could just make out Brother and Sister Bradford. They always did their shifts together. Married almost sixty years, they did everything together. Bennett had met them at the grocery once wearing matching shirts. That was a harder feat to pull off at church, of course. But they had team taught Gospel Doctrine for years. Brother Bradford had never risen very high in the Church because he'd refused any leadership calling that would force him to spend too much time away from his wife.

Brother Bradford had told him a few weeks ago that he'd meet the girl of his dreams one day and *know* she was right for him. Sister Bradford had said he might even meet her here at the temple. The Bradfords had met each other at the Mesa temple in the Celestial Room decades before. It was sweet of them to worry about his bachelor status, Bennett thought. So many other members made him feel like a failure. These folks made him feel happy, single or not.

Bennett wondered what they were doing in the font. It didn't look like they were cleaning it. In fact, it looked like...

Oh, my heck, thought Bennett. They were having sex. In the temple. On the backs of twelve oxen.

Bennett knew he should turn and walk quietly out of the room, but he was fascinated by the sight in front of him. He'd never been the kind to look at pornography. He didn't even allow himself to watch R-rated movies. The fact that he had access to the temple proved he'd passed his temple recommend interviews regularly.

But he did *think* about sex sometimes. He watched as Brother Bradford pulled backward and pushed forward, pumping his groin toward his wife. They were both fully

dressed from the top up, just in white, no temple accessories visible. Bennett couldn't see anything down below, and given their age, he decided that was probably a good thing.

Bennett had no idea how long they'd been at it before he showed up, but the sex seemed to go on forever, slowly, methodically, for another ten minutes. Neither of them seemed to feel any great passion, but when they finally finished, Brother Bradford leaned forward and softly kissed his wife on the lips. They zipped up or pulled up and fastened whatever they were wearing down below, and that might have been the end of that. But then Brother Bradford took his wife in his arms and made the motion of baptizing her, even though there was no water in the font. Bennett's brows furrowed in confusion. But it was what happened next that most surprised him. Sister Bradford then took her husband in her arms and baptized him as well.

Afterward, they climbed out of the font and headed toward another exit. They hadn't seen him at all.

Bennett was tingling all over. He wondered if the feeling was the witness of the Holy Ghost. He'd felt something similar when he watched the film about the First Vision.

Of course, he'd also had this feeling when watching a particularly moving story on the Hallmark channel. So who knew?

Bennett looked about carefully and then walked hesitantly to the middle of the room. He climbed the steps leading to the font, looked around again, and stepped slowly inside. He turned around and looked at the columns and curtains and chandeliers and everything else in the room. So very beautiful.

And he felt as if he were standing waist deep in love.

Had he witnessed a proxy honeymoon? He'd never seen anything so lovely.

Surely, this was the night Bennett was going to meet the Savior. He wanted to close his eyes in prayer, but he was afraid he'd miss the vision if he did so. "Heavenly Father," he whispered, the words sounding loud in the silence, "I believe you're real. I...I *know* you are. But I know I could do something truly great with my life if you just showed yourself." He shook his head. "Not you personally, of course. I know only very special people get to see *you*. But I really want to see Jesus, know my Savior. If you could—"

"Hey!" someone shouted from the doorway. "What are you doing in there?"

Bennett turned to see Brother Flake. The guy with the keys. Speaking in a much louder tone than usual in the building. "I...I..."

"Get out of there right now. I've got to lock up." He shook his head in disgust as Bennett climbed out of the font and walked sheepishly toward him. "You newbies drive me crazy." He patted Bennett on the back as they headed back into the hallway. "Don't worry, though. You'll get over it."

Brother Flake ushered Bennett out of the building, though he stayed inside himself. Was *he* trying to see Jesus, Bennett wondered?

As he inserted his key into the door of his car, Bennett looked across the parking lot and watched as Brother Bradford two rows over held the car door of his own vehicle open for his

wife before climbing into the driver's seat himself a moment later. The taillights came on, and the car backed slowly out of its spot. It turned and rolled smoothly toward the gate.

Bennett looked up into the night sky, only a few stars visible over the lights of the parking lot and the town around them. He'd so wanted to see a vision tonight.

He sat in his car and turned on some classical music, the same as he did every night after his Tuesday shift. He started the engine and pulled out into the street, heading home. Work would start again so early in the morning.

But not before he faced eight hours alone in an empty apartment.

Handel's water music played around him, and Bennett closed his eyes tightly at a stoplight. All he could see was an old couple making love in an empty font.

But then Veronica's face came to him. She was a full year older than he was and had a five-year-old daughter by a man she'd never married. But she always talked for fifteen minutes every week after Sacramento meeting to the nearly deaf widow everyone else ignored.

The light turned green and a car honked behind him. Bennett stepped on the gas and drove on.

Plane Crash on Kolob

“You’re sixteen years old,” said Jeanette. “Don’t you ever want to date?” Jeanette herself even wanted to go out with non-members, but her father forbid it.

Kesley laughed. “Babysitting for my neighbors is fun,” she replied. “And what’s the point of dating anyway?” She glanced across the room at Josh. “I still have to go on a mission when I turn nineteen. No point getting involved now.”

“But you’re not even being paid,” Jeanette persisted. “It’s...it’s...unhealthy.”

Kesley smiled. “Oh, Jeanette,” she said, “I’m getting paid in ways so much better than money. I get to practice being a mother. I get to serve others. And I even get to teach the kids a little about the gospel.”

Jeanette made an effort not to roll her eyes. “Your neighbors don’t mind you brainwashing their children?”

“It’s not brainwashing. It’s teaching the truth. And since I’m babysitting for free, they don’t make many demands.”

“I can imagine.” Jeanette turned away from Kesley and joined her friends Shauna and Naomi in another part of the meetinghouse foyer. All the youth in their Walnut Creek ward were gathered together for a special fireside. They had been told about it for weeks, but no one knew what the topic was

going to be. Probably chastity or the dangers of watching inappropriate television. Then this morning in church, all the kids were given an envelope. When Jeanette opened hers, she found a plane ticket. The destination was Salt Lake City. She'd groaned. But there was no way to avoid coming back this evening. With the bishop as her father, she was always expected to be a "good girl."

She looked about the foyer now. All the kids were holding plane tickets. Josh and Kesley were talking by the chapel doors. He was on track to be Valedictorian when he graduated from high school in a couple of months. Cary, David, and Tony were deacons, earning new merit badges every month in Scouting, but still being reprimanded for chewing gum during Sacrament meeting. And then of course there were her best friends, Shauna and Naomi. They were both MIA Maids while she was a Laurel, but they were far more interesting to hang out with than her fellow classmate Kesley, that was for sure. Shauna liked skateboarding and Naomi liked playing the guitar. Jeanette fantasized about the three of them forming a band sometime. Only Shauna couldn't sing, and Jeanette could only play treble clef on the piano. She'd quit her lessons back when she was eight.

"If I'm old enough to know right from wrong and be baptized," she'd told her parents at the time, "then I'm old enough to know I don't want to play the piano."

She smiled at the memory. Her teachers at school had always said she was unusually precocious, and even now, they complained she was bright enough to be earning straight A's, but schoolwork bored her. She wanted to become a professional tennis player.

“Okay, everyone,” said Sister Gerard, the Laurel instructor, clapping her hands. She looked disappointed that more kids hadn’t shown up. Not that there were that many more in the ward who were active. But what kid wanted to spend their Sunday evening at church when they only had a few more hours of freedom left before going back to school on Monday? Jeanette thought Sister Gerard should be grateful the attendance was as high as it was.

“It’s time to go into the gym,” Sister Gerard continued, ushering everyone through the doors leading to the Cultural Hall.

Jeanette followed the others and found the basketball court set up with a few rows of chairs and a magazine rack with copies of *The Ensign*, *The New Era*, and *LDS Living*. There were copies of the *Deseret News* newspaper as well. What in the world was everyone up to? Jeanette heard a voice come over a loudspeaker. Actually, it sounded like a recording of a voice pretending to come over a loudspeaker. “Will the Clawsons meet their party at the information desk?” the monotone female voice said. It sounded like one of the Primary teachers. Sister Cortez maybe? As the kids moved over to the chairs, the voice continued. “There has been a gate change for passengers on flight 262 to Nauvoo. Please go to Gate Six to board your plane.”

Sister Gerard had left them all in the gym by themselves. No adults were present. Jeanette looked at her ticket. She was on flight 1212. She pointed to the chairs, and she, Shauna, and Naomi sat down. The deacons tore a couple of pages out of the newspaper and made paper airplanes. Kesley and Josh opened their scriptures and pointed out verses to each other.

Jeanette rolled her eyes. She couldn’t help it this time.

“Where’s the Starbucks?” Jeanette called out, hoping one of the adults lurking in the hallway would hear.

Shauna and Naomi giggled. “You’re so bad, Jeanette!” said Shauna. Jeanette smiled in return.

Soft, light music was playing on the recording in between announcements. Jeanette and her friends chatted for a few moments until the next important announcement was made. “Flight 1212 is now boarding at Gate Four. Flight 1212 is now boarding at Gate Four.” Sister Buchanan, the Seminary instructor, appeared over by the stairway leading up to the stage and waved everyone over. As the kids filed past her, she tore off the stubs on their tickets and guided them up the steps.

The curtains were closed, so Jeanette hadn’t been able to see the stage from the gym floor. But now she saw that there were four rows of chairs, three on one side of an aisle and two on the other. This was to be their plane. Jeanette grabbed Shauna and Naomi and quickly sat in the front row on the left. “We’re first class!” she shouted. “I want some champagne!”

The other kids sat down as well, and Sister Gerard showed up again, now acting as a flight attendant. Jeanette had no idea where all this was leading, but it was certainly more interesting than most of the firesides she was forced to attend. She’d be finished her junior year in high school soon, and then only had one more year before college. Her father was insisting she attend Brigham Young University, but that was the last place Jeanette wanted to go. She didn’t really want to go to college at all, but if she had to, someplace like Berkeley would be better.

Sister Gerard stood in front of the group, in the aisle at the front of the plane, and gave everyone the emergency directions. The voice of Brother Hamilton, the first counselor in the

bishopric, was played on the recording. “Stand by for takeoff,” he said. Then there was the sound of plane engines revving up, and of a plane rushing down the runway.

“This is so fun!” Naomi whispered.

Jeanette turned to look behind her. The deacons were in the row behind them, an empty chair between each of them. They were flying the paper airplanes back and forth to each other. Josh and Kesley were in the back seat on the right, pretending to peer out the plane’s window, while all they were really looking at was the curtain.

“Miss? Oh, Miss?” said Jeanette, trying to catch the attention of Sister Gerard. “Where’s the lavatory?”

Sister Gerard kept a professional smile on her face, but Jeanette could see the irritation in her eyes. The woman would be reporting to Jeanette’s father about her behavior later, and Jeanette would probably be grounded. Again. But even when she was forbidden to use her phone or computer, there were always books to read. She was finishing one now about Martina Navratilova. And she could always practice her swing in the bedroom with her racket.

Sister Gerard grabbed a cart, one of those the teachers usually put a TV on when they wanted to show a film in class. She pushed it slowly down the aisle, handing out small packets of peanuts.

“Uh, Miss?” said Jeanette. “I think it’s against airline policy to hand out peanuts. Someone may be allergic. Peanut dust gets in the air.”

Shauna smothered a laugh, and Sister Gerard pretended not to hear what Jeanette had said. A few minutes later, she went back up the aisle with her cart, handing out cans of 7-Up. Jeanette thought about making another smart remark, but she didn't want to be an ass.

Suddenly, there was a loud explosion and bright red lights flashed about the stage. All the kids froze in their seats, peanuts or soda halfway to their lips, as they tried to figure out what had just happened. The lights went out for a moment, the deacons yelled, and then the lights came back on but dimmer than before. Another voice came on the recording. It was her father.

"Flight 1212 has just crashed," he said solemnly. "There were no survivors."

Shauna grasped Jeanette's hand tightly, and Jeanette frowned. Didn't the girl realize this was all pretend? There was nothing to get upset about. She wasn't actually dead. Sheesh.

"You will now all go to the Spirit World. Please follow your guide."

Sister Buchanan reappeared, now wearing a white dress. She motioned for all the kids to stand up. "Please follow me," she said softly. "No talking, please." They exited through the rear of the plane, Kesley and Josh leading, the deacons next, and Jeanette and her friends trailing behind. Shauna was still grasping onto her tightly.

"What do you think—" Naomi began, but Sister Buchanan turned around with her finger to her lips, and Naomi stopped speaking.

They walked off the stage and down the hallway to the Relief Society room, all taking seats on the front row. There was soft music playing. Before the ban on speaking became too hard to maintain, Brother Hamilton entered the room, also wearing white. “Your lives have been reviewed,” he said, “and you’ve been assigned to the degree of glory that you’ve earned.” He paused to let the import of what he’d just said sink in. Jeanette could pretty well figure out where this was going. She turned to Shauna and rolled her eyes. But Shauna looked as if she’d just witnessed a mugging.

“I’ll call out three groups. Please stand in your group and follow your angel to your kingdom,” Brother Hamilton continued. “Josh and Kesley, please form group one.” He smiled at them beatifically, which Jeanette thought made him look like a pervert, and the two young royals stood off to the side of the room. “Cary, David, and Tony, please form group two.” The boys clapped each other on the back and moved off to the other side of the room. Then Bishop Hamilton looked at the three remaining girls with a forlorn look on his face. Jeanette wanted to slap him for making such a show of their judgment. “Naomi, Shauna, and Jeanette,” he said, “you girls will form group three.”

Sister Gerard showed up in white to lead group one away and Sister Moss showed up in white to lead group two away. She was the Beehive instructor, and not a single one of her students had come to the fireside tonight. Jeanette wanted to stick out her tongue in vindication. But Shauna was still squeezing her fingers so hard she thought she might lose circulation.

Sister Anderson came in dressed in white and motioned for group three to follow her. She was the ward organist, the

best the ward could manage though the woman still hit two wrong notes for every ten correct ones. Jeanette and her friends followed down the hallway. She saw group two enter the High Council room and could only assume group one was headed for the chapel. She followed Sister Anderson to the Nursery. Jeanette gritted her teeth. She might be a C student, but she was smart enough to understand symbolism.

Sister Anderson closed the Nursery door behind them and motioned for the girls to sit in the tiny seats in the room. Brother Anderson was already waiting for them, also dressed in white. Jeanette couldn't wait for this horrible ordeal to be over. Close to an hour must have passed since they started the fireside. It couldn't last much longer. If her father grounded her again, she would insist that include skipping church. "Making me miss services is the greatest punishment you can give me," she'd say. "Since it's the most important event of the week." She'd have to eliminate any trace of sarcasm from her voice to succeed and would need to start practicing as soon as she got home.

Brother Anderson raised his hand and cleared his throat. "Young women," he began, "you're here today in the Telestial Kingdom because you have not been stalwart members of the Church. You had the gospel your entire lives and chose to waste the precious gift you were given. You are to spend eternity here without your families, forever single. You'll live the rest of your existence with liars and fornicators and murderers. People who drank and smoked. Hitler and serial killers and prostitutes will be your neighbors."

The temptation was too much. While Shauna and Naomi looked as if they'd just been told their noses would fall off

from leprosy, Jeanette simply had to say something. “And will alcohol be served now?” she asked. “I want a beer.”

Shauna and Naomi gasped. Jeanette had been hoping for a laugh. But Brother Anderson smiled. And yet there was something incredibly creepy about the way he was looking at her. Sister Anderson walked over to him and handed him an envelope, which he opened ceremoniously.

“It looks like there’s been an error in assignment,” he said, looking at the letter in his hands.

Shauna squeezed Jeanette’s fingers again.

“Jeanette, will you follow your guide?” Brother Anderson pointed to his wife, and Jeanette followed her out of the room. When she looked behind at the doorway, she saw her friends looking at her as if she were on her way to the guillotine. She was a little confused now, but whatever was about to happen, it wouldn’t be good. She followed Sister Anderson down the hallway.

They reached the girls’ bathroom, and Sister Anderson opened the door to let Jeanette pass in ahead of her. The air was filled with some kind of pungent incense, almost nauseating. Standing at the sink was her father, dressed in white. Jeanette felt her face burning.

“Jeanette,” her father said, “you’ve been cast into Outer Darkness. You were a valiant spirit in the Pre-Existence and given to a wonderful family on Earth. But you squandered away your blessings and deliberately chose to walk an evil path. You will spend eternity in the dark with Satan and his followers.” He paused, and Jeanette felt as if she’d been whipped with a belt, even though her father hadn’t done that to

her in years. “If only you had repented while you were alive. You could still have had a future in the Celestial Kingdom.”

He turned on a CD player, and loud, heavy metal music filled the air. He and Sister Anderson headed for the door, and as they left, Jeanette’s father turned off the light switch. Jeanette stood in the blackness of the bathroom, her ears pounding from the blast of the awful music.

She was livid. She ran over in her mind her non-Mormon friends from school, wondering if any of them had parents who would let her live with them. She thought about thanking her father for introducing her to a fantastic new band. She wanted to get a second and third piercing in her ears. She wondered if she should go to BYU and make it through three years before deliberately breaking the Honor Code and being expelled without her transcripts, wasting years and years of her father’s tuition money.

Outer Darkness. Who did he think he was kidding?

Jeanette knew she could walk over to the light switch and turn it back on. She knew she could click off the CD player. She knew once she graduated high school, she could move out and never see her parents again. She knew she could go home tonight and tell her father just how preposterous the whole evening had been.

But instead, she sat down on the cold, tile floor and cried.



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

Invasion of the Spirit Snatchers

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