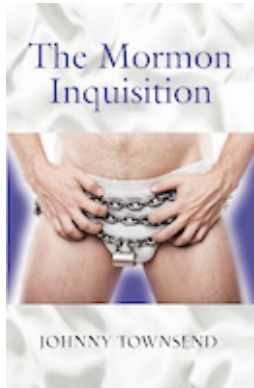


The Mormon Inquisition



JOHNNY TOWNSEND



Decades after the Fall, archeologists excavating ruins discover an abandoned vault deep in a mountainside. The vault has been seriously compromised, but a few documents have been found printed on actual paper, an astonishing recovery after worldwide climate disaster has all but wiped out forests. The researchers carefully peruse the documents, a series of stories about everyday Mormons, to learn about the glories of the past. But, the disturbing discoveries they make leave them on the verge of forbidding further exploration altogether...

Mormon Inquisition

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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

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

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

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

Kirkus Reviews

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

Niki D’Andrea, *Phoenix New Times*

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

Kirkus Reviews

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

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

A.J. Kirby, *The Short Review*

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

David Lenson, editor, *The Massachusetts Review*

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

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

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

Kirkus Reviews

“Johnny Townsend’s 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)

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

Let the Faggots Burn: The UpStairs Lounge Fire is “a gripping account of all the horrors that transpired that night, as well as a respectful remembrance of the victims.”

Terry Firma, Patheos

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

Kit Van Cleave, *OutSmart Magazine*

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

Kirkus Reviews

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

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

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

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

“Johnny Townsend’s ‘Partying with St. Roch’ [in the anthology *Latter-Gay Saints*] tells a beautiful, haunting tale.”

Kent Brintnall, Out in Print: Queer Book Reviews

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

Gay. Guy. Reading and Friends

The stories in *The Mormon Victorian Society* “register the new openness and confidence of gay life in the age of same-sex marriage....What hasn’t changed is Townsend’s wry, conversational prose, his subtle evocations of character and social dynamics, and his deadpan humor. His warm empathy still glows in this intimate yet clear-eyed engagement with Mormon theology and folkways. Funny, shrewd and finely wrought dissections of the awkward contradictions—and surprising harmonies—between conscience and desire.” Named to Kirkus Reviews’ Best of 2013.

Kirkus Reviews

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

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

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

Publishers Weekly

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

Publishers Weekly

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

Kirkus Reviews

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

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

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

Kirkus Reviews

Selling the City of Enoch is “sharply intelligent...pleasingly complex...The stories are full of...doubters, but there’s no vindictiveness in these pages; the characters continuously poke holes in Mormonism’s more extravagant absurdities, but they take very little pleasure in doing so....Many of Townsend’s stories...have a provocative edge to them, but this [book] displays a great deal of insight as well...a playful, biting and surprisingly warm collection.”

Kirkus Reviews

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

Lauren Childers, *Windy City Times*

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

Ryan Rhodes, author of *Free Electricity*

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

Rainbow Awards

Lying for the Lord is “one of the most gripping books that I’ve picked up for quite a while. I love the author’s writing style, alternately cynical, humorous, biting, scathing, poignant, and touching.... This is the third book of his that I’ve read, and all are equally engaging. These are stories that need to be told, and the author does it in just the right way.”

Heidi Alsop, Ex-Mormon Foundation Board Member

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

C. L. Hanson, *Main Street Plaza*

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

Kirkus Reviews

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

Kirkus Reviews

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

Kirkus Reviews

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

Kirkus Reviews

The Mormon Inquisition

Johnny Townsend

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Next to Murder

“Here, Liam,” said Terry. “Right here. No. Here.” They set their 150-pound load down against the glass doors, just barely catching it when it began to tip over. Terry steadied the shoulder once, then again. Liam looked at him and shook his head. Terry nodded in return. Next time, they’d have to bring some of that wide, clear tape one used to seal packages. They could then tape the body’s burial clothes to the door with long strips of the adhesive, keeping the body in place. “Here. Let me put this Book of Mormon in his hands.” Terry placed the book of scripture on the body’s lap and opened it to a random page. He set the left hand to hold the paper down on the first part of the book while setting the right hand to hold the paper down on the last part of the book.

“Let’s get the hell out of here, Terry!”

Terry and Liam stepped back briefly to assess what they’d done. They’d agreed not to take any photos, not to leave any letters, not to make any phone calls. Their actions would have to speak for themselves. They gave each other a peck on the lips and then rushed back to their pick-up, driving off quickly, the trailer carrying their towable backhoe rattling too loudly behind them. It was almost three in the morning.

The men were too hyped to sleep when they returned to their home in Sugar House. They left the tarps and shovels in

the back of the truck, the trailer still hitched to the post. If the police ever suspected them and investigated, Terry had told Liam right from the start that they wouldn't try to hide what they were doing. If there were consequences, that was all part of civil disobedience. There would be enough DNA and fibers everywhere to convict them. But even the trial would give publicity to the problem they were emphasizing.

Liam showered first, followed by Terry. They put their clothes in the washer and lay on the bed together in their fresh garments. Terry took Liam's hand and held it as they lay in the darkened room in silence, waiting for morning. He felt like Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo. They were creating a great work of performance art, art that would shake the world every bit as much as the Mona Lisa or the Sistine Chapel.

"Terry. Terry! Wake up! The news is on. Let's see if they say anything."

Terry staggered to his feet and stretched with his eyes closed. After a few sluggish moments, he trudged out to the living room and sat on the sofa next to his husband. The news anchor was halfway through the story about the exhumed body discovered on the front steps of the Mormon chapel. "...appears to be that of Devin Kimball, the young man who committed suicide in Murray three days ago. Authorities have only confirmed that Kimball's grave was tampered with, but they will not confirm if his body was removed from the cemetery. Kimball, as we reported on Wednesday, apparently killed himself in response to being called into a disciplinary council by the LDS Church. Neither Church leaders nor..."

Liam grabbed Terry's hand. "We did it," he said. "You were right."

“I don’t know,” Terry replied. “They still don’t seem to have made the full connection.”

“Everyone knows the kid killed himself because he was gay.”

“They’ll just think whoever did this is a creep.”

“We *are* creeps. So what? They’ll remember that young man every time they open the front doors of the chapel. He won’t just be brushed out of their thoughts forever.”

They watched the rest of the report. Then the anchor moved on to discuss upcoming traffic delays for the day. What they’d done might be reported again later in the evening news, but by tomorrow, it would be ancient history. Of course, Terry had known from the beginning that it was going to take more than one body. Today was Saturday. He and Liam had deliberately chosen the weekend for their first protest. They couldn’t jeopardize their careers, after all. Terry was a loan officer at Zions Bank, and Liam was in charge of produce at Albertsons.

“Let’s go back to sleep,” said Terry. “We’ll have a picnic later and then get ready for tonight.”

“I love you,” said Liam. He leaned forward, Terry pulling him close so they could kiss. Liam had the worst breath of anyone Terry had ever known. His husband smelled like a rotting corpse himself most of the time. But what could Terry do? He loved the man, so they kissed at every opportunity. Liam also had a problem with heavy dandruff. He actually saved the dead skin cells that sloughed off every day to use in the compost for all the gardening they did, a back yard full of native plants. And the man had what was apparently an incurable case of athlete’s foot. The itching may have been what

concerned Liam most, but it was the smell that could turn Terry's stomach.

Still, Terry could never get enough of the man. The two had met at a mission reunion four years earlier, bonding over a discussion of black orchids. Terry had been a zone leader in Belize two years after Liam had been an assistant to the president there. They sometimes put on their old nametags when they were feeling adventurous and pretended to be companions helping each other out during "Dual Study." Other times, Terry would be a demanding zone leader to a greenie missionary, and other times just Liam would be the missionary, while Terry played the investigator. They did a lot of investigating.

Liam drove them to Fairmont Park around noon. It was already too warm a summer for some residents to venture outdoors at this time of day, so they were able to find a table fairly quickly. Terry set down his cooler with the chicken salad sandwiches and the plastic containers of chilled applesauce while Liam set his cooler filled with drinks down on the table beside it. "I have a special treat for today," Liam said.

"Funeral potatoes?" Terry asked.

"Don't mock the dead."

"Sorry."

Liam reached into his cooler and brought out two chilled cans of Nestea. He handed one to Terry, who took it with his mouth gaping open. Liam pulled the tab on his own can and tipped the liquid into his mouth. "Ahhh!" he said.

Terry sat staring at his unopened can. “Are we really going to become complete degenerates now?”

“Terry, if we’ve become graverobbers, I don’t think breaking the Word of Wisdom is going to be the issue keeping us out of the Celestial Kingdom.”

Terry nodded, wondering about all the unintended consequences of calling out the Church on its homophobia. He opened his can and took a sip of tea. A little tart, but still pleasing. But of course, sin always tasted good.

“Someone posted an article on Facebook about how all the suicides in Utah are a result of the high altitude,” Terry said, taking a bite of his sandwich.

“Isn’t Denver the ‘mile-high city?’” asked Liam. “How do the suicide rates compare?”

Terry took another sip of the tea. And then another. “I’m not sure, but one has to wonder why the suicides seem to be so much higher among gay people in Utah. Are they taller than straight people?”

“You’re taller than I am, Terry,” said Liam, smiling as he chomped on his own sandwich. “I hope you’re still taking your Prozac. But I don’t expect the altitude here in Salt Lake changes from month to month, and yet the suicides keep going up every time the Church makes another hateful statement.”

Terry finished his tea and looked at his empty container. “You have any more, sweetie?”

Liam smiled and pulled out another can.

They retired that evening right after watching an episode of *Vicious* on PBS, but even after some exhausting sex, it was hard for Terry to fall asleep. Liam started dozing within minutes, breathing through his mouth, the smell of death wafting toward Terry's face. He didn't think it would ever be possible to actually like the scent, but the odor was becoming less offensive every day. He wondered if after the resurrection, Liam would still smell the same. Would Terry have to get used to his husband all over again?

What other changes would there be once they arose from the dead with perfect bodies? Perhaps Terry's anus would be more accepting. Maybe Liam's penis would grow larger. Or, better yet, smaller. But the entire idea of the resurrection left Terry more and more baffled all the time. A really *perfect* body would have two penises, one in the regular spot but another on the forehead, so he could suck his partner's second dick at the same time he was getting fucked with the first. Of course, what he'd do with his own extra dick during all this he didn't know.

Perhaps a perfect body would have movable and interchangeable parts. A big dick today. A smaller one tomorrow. Two the day after. Maybe three on Sundays. There would still be Sabbath sex, wouldn't there?

It was hard to look at paintings LDS artists had created of God the Father and think that was the image of human perfection.

Terry eventually fell asleep, and then at 1:30, the alarm clock rang. They made sure their shovels and tarps were still safe in the back of the pick-up, and they headed for the next cemetery. Their commitment to gardening was the main reason for buying the truck three years earlier, but it sure came in handy when one wanted to dig up suicide victims as well.

They'd considered just renting the small backhoe, but that sounded like a sure way to be tracked down quickly, so they'd purchased it in Idaho over a month ago, waiting nervously for the day they'd finally be able to put it to use, dying inside as new reports of other gay youth killing themselves aired regularly on the news. They worked more quickly tonight, pausing occasionally only to make sure they hadn't been spotted.

Liam pried open the lid of the casket, and Terry breathed a sigh of relief. Sealed caskets cost more, but the sixteen-year-old kid they were after tonight had shot himself in the head, so the casket had been closed for both the wake and funeral. Closed but not sealed. They pulled the body up out of the grave and dragged it over to the truck.

Terry felt like Victor Frankenstein. Graverobbing to create life, for the thousands of other gay youth who might not take their own lives if the Church could be pressured to stop teaching gay kids to hate themselves.

"Oh, man," said Liam. "I don't think they embalmed this one. Just refrigerated him."

The smell was noticeable, but Terry wondered how Liam could distinguish the smell of death from his own breath. He seemed oblivious most of the time about his continual odor, only worried when he first woke up in the morning, as if his breath were actually normal at any other time of the day.

"Let's stash him in the truck and then load the backhoe back on the trailer."

They froze for a moment when they saw headlights pass by, but then they continued. Breaking through cemetery gates

would have seemed unimaginable only six months ago, but the number of gay runaways, gay and lesbian kids kicked out of their homes onto the streets, young gay men and women being excommunicated, young transgender folk shunned at work and school, even older LGBT Utahns facing backlash, was increasing all the time. While society at large grew more understanding, Mormon leaders just cracked down harder and harder. Young people weren't exposed to the world enough to understand there were options. They only understood they were loathed by others as much as by themselves. What good was it to move to San Francisco or Chicago or New York if you were still an abomination to God?

“Did you guys ever break any laws in Belize?” Terry asked, standing in the back of the truck and pulling, while Liam pushed.

“You mean like breaking into sports fields to play soccer?”

Terry nodded. “Or like baptizing kids without getting their parents' permission,” he said. “Or shoplifting food.” The mission president had been so stingy with Terry's stipend. And it was all Terry's own money. He'd saved the entire amount himself before he received his call.

“We never felt guilty,” Liam said as they covered the boy with the tarp. “Stealing for the Lord was what Nephi did, wasn't it?”

“I've been trying to put my finger on why I don't feel bad now about what we're doing.” They worked quickly to secure the miniature backhoe in place.

“What's the penalty if we caught?”

Terry had never bothered to look it up. “What’s the penalty if we do nothing?” he returned. He could have either dead flesh on his hands, he reflected, or blood from the victims he didn’t even attempt to save.

Liam gave him a kiss after they climbed back into the front seat and turned on the ignition.

Rotting flesh was better than blood.

They drove to Eric Smoot’s ward meetinghouse and quickly deposited the body against the front door. They remembered to bring the tape this time, so positioning the body went more smoothly. This time, Terry placed an open copy of the *Ensign* in the body’s lap.

“Let’s get out of here,” said Liam. They hurried to the truck and back to Sugar House.

How did bank robbers do it? thought Terry. Bank after bank after bank, the risk of being caught ever greater. Well, perhaps addiction to money made those guys reckless. But being addicted to justice wasn’t much safer. He and Liam just had to keep going until they made their point. Until their point made a difference.

The sad thing was that they’d never run out of ammunition. Not anytime soon, anyway. Terry wondered if it was wrong to use the destroyed bodies of young people as weapons. Was it more wrong than Mormons loving their gay family members to death?

Terry was able to fall asleep more quickly this morning, resting his head on Liam’s chest, fingering his husband’s garment symbols until he fell unconscious. They had set the

alarm for 7:00 so they could watch the morning news on KUTV. “There’s nothing about the kid,” said Liam. “What gives?”

“Maybe no one’s shown up at church yet,” Terry replied.

They went to their own ward for services later, and no one seemed aware of what had happened. Bishop Haas pulled Terry aside after Elders Quorum, making his heart skip a beat, but all he said was, “Really, Terry, you need to start attending more Singles dances and find a nice girl to marry. Why do you want to keep living with a roommate like Liam?”

“We served in the same mission. This way we get to keep up the language.”

Bishop Haas then cornered Liam. His response was the same as Terry’s.

There was no talk among the ward members about dead bodies during the entire three-hour block.

But finally, on the 5:00 news, it was the lead story. Terry watched, waiting for the reporter to show her interview with one of the apostles.

It never came.

“They’re still not saying anything about the suicides being gay,” said Terry. “They just keep talking about anti-Mormons and crap like that. Or acting like it’s a sick prank.”

“The members of the wards know, though,” said Liam. “They know. The newscasters know, too. They’re just pretending so they can downplay it.”

“Goddammit.” Terry held his hand over his mouth as Liam looked at him in surprise. Then Liam headed for the kitchen.

“Want a beer?” he asked, pulling two from the back of the fridge.

“Alcohol now?” asked Terry. “And so the downward path to the gutter continues.”

“I just think we need something to help us relax. I’m not advocating a fifth of Bourbon. Or two thirds. Or whatever it is.”

Terry nodded and opened his Red Rock.

There was talk at work on Monday and Tuesday about the exhumations, but by Wednesday, the city was back to normal. Fortunately, there were no new gay suicides during the week, or at least none reported as such, so on Friday night, Terry pulled up a map of the cemetery where Gerald DeSalvo had been buried three weeks earlier. He was eighteen and had just received his mission call to Nova Scotia when he hung himself in the back yard of his parents’ house. His nine-year-old brother discovered him, a kid old enough to be accountable for cursing his father on camera later when the man said “I would rather my son be dead than lose his chastity” to a reporter. The father denied the boy was gay, but the girlfriend confirmed that Gerald had confessed his feelings toward other young men to her. Fortunately, he’d been embalmed, but the procedure was of limited help tonight. A body in the ground that long was still pretty awful to drag to the back of the truck. This time, Terry and Liam broke into the DeSalvos’ ward building and set the corpse up against the bishop’s office door. Terry placed a copy of the Bishop’s Manual in the body’s decaying hands.

They didn't watch the news the following day. They had a picnic in their own back yard around noon, drinking beer with their microwaved hot dogs. Neither of them had much to say. At one point, a terrible odor filled the air. Terry gave Liam a look, but he seemed oblivious. It was a case of SBDAD—Silent But Deadly And Dangerous. Liam's gas smelled worse than the average fart, and he never seemed to notice.

Late in the afternoon, they took a nap in their garments. Terry awoke first and looked down at his husband's still body, his face pressed against the mattress. He leaned over to kiss him on the cheek and took in the smell of death from his breath. He started to get hard. He reached over and gently tried to lower Liam's bottom garments.

"Mmm," he murmured. "Whaaa?"

"Don't move," Terry whispered. "Pretend you're dead, and I'm showing you that our love will endure beyond death." He grabbed some lube from the bedside table.

Liam turned over and sat up. "What?" He wasn't smiling.

They were still spiraling out of control, past the gutter, toward Outer Darkness.

"Let's watch some TV," said Terry. "And make plans for the next body."

They had beer with dinner later and then watched another episode of *Vicious*. They planned how to dig up Chester McConkie's body at yet another cemetery out near Bountiful. Chester had suffered a nervous breakdown after being sexually assaulted by his mission companion in Iceland, being sent home to recuperate. But it turned out the breakdown occurred because

he'd enjoyed what had happened, even the violent aspect. When he finally confessed this part of the event to his stake president, the man set up a court of love to be held the following week. Chester had overdosed on his mother's heart pills the day before the hearing. His note explained that he deserved to be killed, and if his companion hadn't finished the job, he'd have to take care of it himself.

This time, Terry and Liam placed the body on top of the sacrament table. Chester had died a little over a month ago.

The *Trib*, the *DN*, all the local news stations, and now even some cable channels were covering what was going on. The fact that these were all gay suicides was impossible to deny any longer.

"It's working," said Liam. "You're a genius, Terry."

Terry leaned over and kissed Liam, thrusting his tongue deep into his husband's foul-smelling mouth. If only Terry could taste Liam's resurrected breath. If only they each had two glorified penises. Or three.

Tuesday night after work, Terry toasted Liam with a glass of tea. "Let's do a session at the temple tonight," he said.

Liam groaned. "We'll get out so late. I have bananas coming in the morning."

Terry nodded. "But we won't be able to keep our recommends for long. We're going to be found out. No amount of pretending to be straight roommates is going to hold up after that."

Liam rubbed his chin. "I suppose we're lucky no one ever found out we were legally married last year."

“Let’s do an endowment session.”

They grabbed their suitcases and headed downtown. The Salt Lake temple had to be one of the Church’s most beautiful edifices. Really one of the loveliest buildings in the entire country.

Too bad there was no way to get a body past the front desk.

Terry and Liam sat next to each other during the interminable program, helping each other with tying this strap and that. They never took part in the prayer circle, since it was always boy girl boy girl, but tonight, Terry considered it, wondering if he could insist on holding Liam’s hand. The feeling passed, and soon they were through the veil and sitting on a luxurious powder blue sofa in the Celestial Room.

“Move along, boys,” said an elderly woman, trying to usher them out to the hall and back toward the dressing area. “Make room for the others.”

“Liam...”

“I know, Terry.”

“There are consequences for our actions.”

Liam nodded.

Terry removed the pocketknife he’d hidden in his white pants. Even now, he wasn’t sure what he was going to do. Kill Liam and then himself? Perhaps he’d just kill himself. Or maybe one of the veil workers. Or even one of the younger patrons who’d gone through tonight. He would be condemned no matter what he did.

What would make the biggest impact?

He stood up, offering his free hand to Liam, the knife in his other. Liam stood as well. Terry pulled Liam close and planted his most fervent kiss ever on the man's lips. There was the sound of a roomful of gasps, a whooshing noise so loud Terry suspected something similar might accompany the creation of a new planet, like the ones he and Liam would make one day. The sound was followed by shouts of "Hey!" "Stop that!" "What do you think you're doing?" from three elderly temple workers, one of them walking slowly toward them with a cane.

Closing his knife, Terry slipped it back into his pocket and kept kissing. He'd never felt more alive in his entire life. And Liam's breath had never tasted any sweeter.

Faking It

“Yes!” she whispered fiercely. “Yes! Yes!” Jenneth had to make sure the kids down the hall didn’t hear her.

“You like it?” Clancy asked. “You like it?” His grunting proved he was close.

“Yes! Yes! Aahhhhhhh!” Jenneth made sure to climax at the same time as her husband, easy to arrange given she was making it all up. He sighed heavily, pulled out, and then rolled over. Within twenty seconds, Jenneth could hear him snoring gently, a slight wheeze that sounded just like the bathroom window every time the wind blew through the small crack in the upper right corner.

Had it been ten years since Mort had thrown his submarine against it when he didn’t want to get out of the tub? He’d been ordained a priest less than a month ago and was now in his third year of Seminary. Diane had recently become a Beehive. Jenneth turned on her side, away from Clancy, and thought about her cousin Shirley’s children. Shirley told her she’d just sent in her resignation, and now her husband was divorcing her and hiring an attorney to try to take the children. She and her husband had gotten along perfectly well until she no longer believed in the Church. “You’re not the same person anymore,” he told her. Jenneth hadn’t known what to do when her cousin

confided in her. What could one say? And why in the world had Shirley come to *her*, out of everyone in the entire family?

From her pillow, Jenneth could see the painting of Joseph Smith leering at her in the dark. The man who'd done more to save humanity than any other person besides Jesus Christ.

She closed her eyes and tried to get to sleep. There was church to face in the morning.

The one benefit to the first Sunday of the month was that Jenneth didn't have to cook a big breakfast. She took an extra long shower, trying to wash away the guilt of faking her orgasm the evening before. But was lying really that big a sin when she was the only one who suffered any consequences? She reminded Mort to hurry. He was always the last one to get dressed. Even today, he didn't finish putting on his tie until they were in the car.

"I'm wearing clip-on ties on my mission," he said.

"You'll be wearing bow ties where they send you." Diane laughed.

Clancy guided the family to the third pew, their usual spot. They sat on the right end of the middle section, giving them a good view of the sacrament table. Mort joined a friend behind the white cloth covering the bread and water trays. Poor Mort with his dyslexia, always struggling over and over to read the prayer for the water, but of course it had to be said exactly or it didn't count.

Just like the phrases at the temple veil. One couldn't make it into heaven without the secret passwords. Even after all these

years, Jenneth couldn't get through without a couple of prompts.

She was going to have to call Shirley when she got home.

Clancy opened the hymnbook and shared it with a grin. He loved to sing but was afraid to join the ward choir because people might think he was gay. "Praise to the Man," he called out now, his head swaying back and forth with the music. Jenneth was impressed he was always in such a good mood on Sundays. Even listening to Mort stumbling over the sacrament prayer a few minutes later didn't take the smile off her husband's face. He turned to her and pressed her upper arm. Their son was growing up to be a good Mormon. Soon enough, he'd be off to some far flung nation, preaching the gospel to the heathen. Jenneth could read the look in Clancy's eyes so easily. She pretended to smile in return.

Ten minutes into the testimonies, Diane stood up and squeezed past Jenneth and Clancy. Oh, my lord, thought Jenneth, not again. Diane walked straight to the microphone and began speaking. "I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Heavenly Father for my wonderful family and my wonderful teachers. I'm so happy to be in the wonderful Young Women's program with so many wonderful girls. I know the Church is true. I know Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God. I know the Book of Mormon is the word of God. I know we have a wonderful prophet of God on the Earth today. And I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen."

Clancy was beaming at their daughter, and Jenneth put on a smile as well. But she couldn't help but think about suggesting that next time Diane close her testimony "in the wonderful name of Jesus Christ."

Jenneth knew she had a wonderful daughter. She should stop being a bitch and just be grateful for her luck. Shirley's kids weren't speaking to their mother anymore. The oldest daughter, the one caught smoking, called Shirley "Judas." Their middle child, the boy who made a point of loudly passing gas in their chapel every Sunday, directed farts at her now. Even the youngest girl, only seven, gave her mother the silent treatment every day.

Jenneth hoped Shirley's husband did get custody.

But it would be different for Jenneth. Her kids loved her. Nothing could change that. She watched an elderly woman bear her testimony, followed by a young mother and then the wife of an inactive member. Jenneth felt her heart sink as Mort walked over to the microphone next. "I'd like to take this opportunity to tell everyone how lucky I am to have parents who taught me the truth. I know the Church is true. I know Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God. I know the Book of Mormon is true. And I know we have a living prophet today. I say this in the name of our lord and savior, Jesus Christ. Amen."

Was it normal for a teenage boy to talk like that? Jenneth's next door neighbors were Catholics, and she never heard their two teenagers talking the way Mort did.

Jenneth remembered her mission service to Switzerland. At zone conferences, the mission president wouldn't conclude the meeting until every last missionary had borne their testimony. Even the ones who hated being on a mission eventually got up and spoke, just to get the meeting over with.

To Jenneth's horror, Clancy headed to the podium a moment later. "I don't know where I'd be without my beautiful wife," he said near the end of his five minute long testimony.

“She leads me, she guides me, she walks beside me. She makes our home a bit of heaven right here on Earth.” Jenneth felt her face burning and forced a smile, praying he would finally finish and come down. Clancy clasped her hand tightly when he returned to the pew. He jostled her with his elbow and nodded toward the microphone. When she didn’t respond, he nudged again. Diane was beaming up at her from the left. Mort was grinning from the sacrament table.

Jenneth’s armpits felt wet. Her deodorant might have been strong enough for a man, but that could only mean Jenneth’s glands were more powerful than those of most Relief Society secretaries.

She shook her head tightly and motioned for Clancy to listen to the five-year-old boy who’d just gone to the stand, repeating into the microphone what his mother whispered to him. Everyone smiled and chuckled and said “amen” loudly when he finished.

Jenneth served spaghetti for lunch, always a quick and easy way to break the fast. When they finished, the kids played The Book of Mormon Video Game while Clancy took a nap on the sofa. Jenneth pulled out an old journal and read for a couple of hours in her study. After dinner, they all sat down to watch the DVD, *The Best Three Hours of the Week*, and then Clancy sent the kids to bed.

“You all right, honey?” he asked.

“Just a little tired,” she replied. “I should probably take an iron pill.”

He leaned over and kissed her. “I can always give you a blessing if you need me to.”

Jenneth smiled and shook her head. “You go on to bed, Clance. I’m going to stay up a little while and listen to the classical radio station. They usually do Baroque on Sunday evenings.”

He kneeled down beside the sofa so they could have their nightly prayer together. Then he kissed her again and headed for the bedroom. Jenneth turned on the radio and thought about Eva. Sister Nielsen. Her last companion in Bern. She was about to get her maiden name back. She only had the one child, though, and she seemed likely to get custody.

Pachelbel’s Canon in D came on. Jenneth hugged herself and closed her eyes.

In the morning, Jenneth prepared oatmeal with a blackberry and whipped cream topping. She always whipped the cream by hand. Well, with the mixer, anyway. She wanted her family to know she loved them. “Have a good day at work, Clance,” she said, handing him a cheese, onion, and ham sandwich. He gave her a peck and went out to the garage. “And you kids are going to miss the bus if you don’t hurry.”

“Aw, Mom, you say that every day.”

“It’s because it’s true every day.”

True. Every day.

Mort and Diane ran off without so much as a hug. Jenneth finished washing the dishes and then picked up her cell phone. She looked up Shirley’s number, her finger pausing over the name. She should call her. She should. She should call her.

Jenneth set the phone down and started doing the day’s laundry. While the last load was drying, she went to her

computer and looked up one of the essays on LDS.org Eva had told her about. She sighed as she read, and then she emptied the dryer so she could do some ironing.

The kids had finished their homework and the meatloaf was just about ready when Clancy came home. “I have a history test on Friday,” said Mort as they ate at the table. “Can you help me study on Thursday, Dad? I’ve got to get an A.”

“You have to?” asked Clancy. “Or you want to?”

“Doreen won’t go out with him unless he’s an A student,” Diane clarified.

Mort turned almost as red as the ketchup on his meatloaf. “Well, at least I *can* date, you 404.”

“Not with your GPA.”

“Kids, kids,” said Clancy, smiling. He turned to give Jenneth a knowing look. She forced a bright smile in return.

After the cell phones and landline were turned off, Clancy started the Family Home Evening lesson for the night. He called on Diane to offer the opening prayer, and then he dug right into the lesson, about Lehi’s vision of the Tree of Life, and how Heavenly Father then generously permitted Nephi to experience the same dream.

The way Joseph Smith stole the dream from his own father, Jenneth thought.

“So we must hold to the iron rod no matter what,” Clancy concluded. “Whoever might be mocking us from that great and spacious building. No matter how cunning their lies. No matter how tempted we might be. We *must* hold on if we want to eat of

the fruit of the tree.” He pointed quickly to Mort as if drawing a gun in an Old West gunfight. “And *what* does that fruit taste like?” he demanded.

“It’s the sweetest fruit of any in the whole world,” Mort replied.

Clancy turned to Jenneth and smiled. He looked as if he were about to call on Mort for the closing prayer but then asked Jenneth instead. “We thank thee, Heavenly Father, for the priesthood guidance in our home,” she said softly, her head bowed. “Please help us to be grateful for all thy gifts, and help us to follow thee always. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

“Amen.”

The next day while the kids were in school and Clancy was at work, Jenneth went back online. Shirley had told her about something called the CES Letter. Jenneth started crying halfway through it.

She should call Shirley. She should call Eva.

“You okay, honey?” Clancy asked that night as they were getting ready for bed. “You need to see a doctor?”

“Oh, I’m okay, I guess,” she replied, sitting on the edge of the bed in her nightgown. “It’s just that one of the sisters in Relief Society called me today.”

“Yeah?” asked Clancy, tying his pajama bottoms about his waist. “She trying to get you to do her Visiting Teaching for her? You know that’s not kosher.” Jenneth had been known to do 125% of her Visiting Teaching.

“She said she didn’t believe the standard narrative of the Church any longer.”

Clancy stared at her. “Standard narrative?” He frowned. “What the hell is that?”

Jenneth recoiled slightly. It was unusual for Clancy to curse, and she’d said so little. “I think she meant that some of the Church history we’ve been taught may not be entirely accurate.”

Clancy reached out and slapped the headboard, making a loud smacking sound. Jenneth was certain the kids could hear it down the hall. She hoped they didn’t think he’d hit her. Maybe they’d just think someone tripped. “You report that woman to the bishop tomorrow morning,” he said. Jenneth watched as he clenched and unclenched his fists. She was confused. What did he care what some woman he didn’t even know thought or didn’t think?

“All...all right, Clance, I’ll do that.”

Clancy paced up and down beside the bed. “Imagine!” he said. “Imagine! The damage that woman could do to her children.” He swiveled and pointed at Jenneth. “Does she have children?”

“Y-yes,” she replied.

“Her husband would be entirely within his rights to divorce her and take the kids.” He started pacing again. “If their own mother doesn’t care about their eternal salvation, he has no choice but to step up.” He swiveled and pointed at her again. “You’d better not to talk to her anymore. If she calls, don’t answer. Or hang up. Or say you’re busy. We don’t need that

kind of evil influence in our lives. *We're* going to be a forever family.”

“Okay, Clancy.” Jenneth slid under the covers. Still sitting against her pillows, she pulled the sheet up to her chin. “She and I were never very close anyway. I don’t even know why she called me.”

Clancy breathed out heavily, spreading his arms and shaking them as if relaxing his muscles. “Boy,” he said, “one sign of the Last Days is when the biggest dangers come from your fellow Mormons.” He turned out the lamp and slid under the covers. He reached over and took Jenneth’s hand, placing it on his crotch. “I’m really tense after hearing all that. Can you help me get to sleep?”

Jenneth turned out her lamp as well and then untied Clancy’s pajama bottoms. At least with oral, she didn’t have to fake anything. Her satisfaction was never an issue.

On Wednesday while the kids were in school and Clancy was at work, Jenneth listened to a couple of podcasts. In one, a man who’d stopped believing in the Church had come home from work one day to find his wife and children gone.

Jenneth had always believed that the most fundamental doctrine in the Church was the importance of the family. She felt mystified now that this didn’t actually seem to be the case. The importance of trueness outranked everything. It was looking more to Jenneth as if Mormons could accept or ignore just about any flaw in their principles or history as long as its trueness was never questioned. Trueness was its primary feature, she realized, perhaps its only true attribute.

Jenneth wouldn't even particularly care, as long as it was a great place to raise her family, but everyone *forced* her to care by emphasizing it in every single meeting, in every talk, in every article, in every book.

She really should call Eva. She should call Shirley.

After dinner, everyone retired to the living room to play. The kids normally would be at church on Wednesday evenings, but one Wednesday a month, Clancy decided they'd have their own Young Men/Young Women activity. It was both his right and his duty to receive personal revelation for his family. Only fun, no lessons allowed on these nights. Sometimes, the activity consisted of putting together a puzzle of the Salt Lake temple. Other times, it might be going to the shooting range, or even going to visit an Assisted Living facility. Tonight, they played "Who Wants To Be A Celestialaire?"

Clancy really was a good father.

"Did you call the bishop today?" he asked Jenneth as they finished the game.

She was a little surprised he would bring the subject of apostasy up with the kids around but then wondered if he actually wanted them to hear this conversation. He would do it to "inoculate" them, she knew, but perhaps she could use it to plant a seed. She shook her head bravely, but when Clancy tensed, she thought of Shirley. "I called her and bore my testimony," Jenneth said, swallowing. "And she came to her senses. But I still won't talk to her anymore, like you told me."

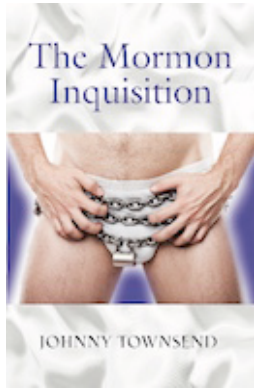
Clancy's head tilted slightly as he looked at her, and the kids looked first at him, then at her, and then at him again. Then Jenneth put a smile on her face and stood up. "Anyone ready for

dessert? I made some homemade ice cream today.” She paused. “I used real vanilla beans.”

The kids beamed, and Clancy seemed to relax. As he spooned the flecked ice cream into his mouth, he gave Jenneth a smile she knew very well. He didn’t want oral tonight. He wanted the real deal after the lights were out.

But that was okay. She knew what to do.

She stood up and carried Clancy’s bowl to the kitchen to grab him a second scoop.



Decades after the Fall, archeologists excavating ruins discover an abandoned vault deep in a mountainside. The vault has been seriously compromised, but a few documents have been found printed on actual paper, an astonishing recovery after worldwide climate disaster has all but wiped out forests. The researchers carefully peruse the documents, a series of stories about everyday Mormons, to learn about the glories of the past. But, the disturbing discoveries they make leave them on the verge of forbidding further exploration altogether...

Mormon Inquisition

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