

At Judgment Day, Mormon misfits face their eternal fate.

Weeping, Wailing, and Gnashing of Teeth

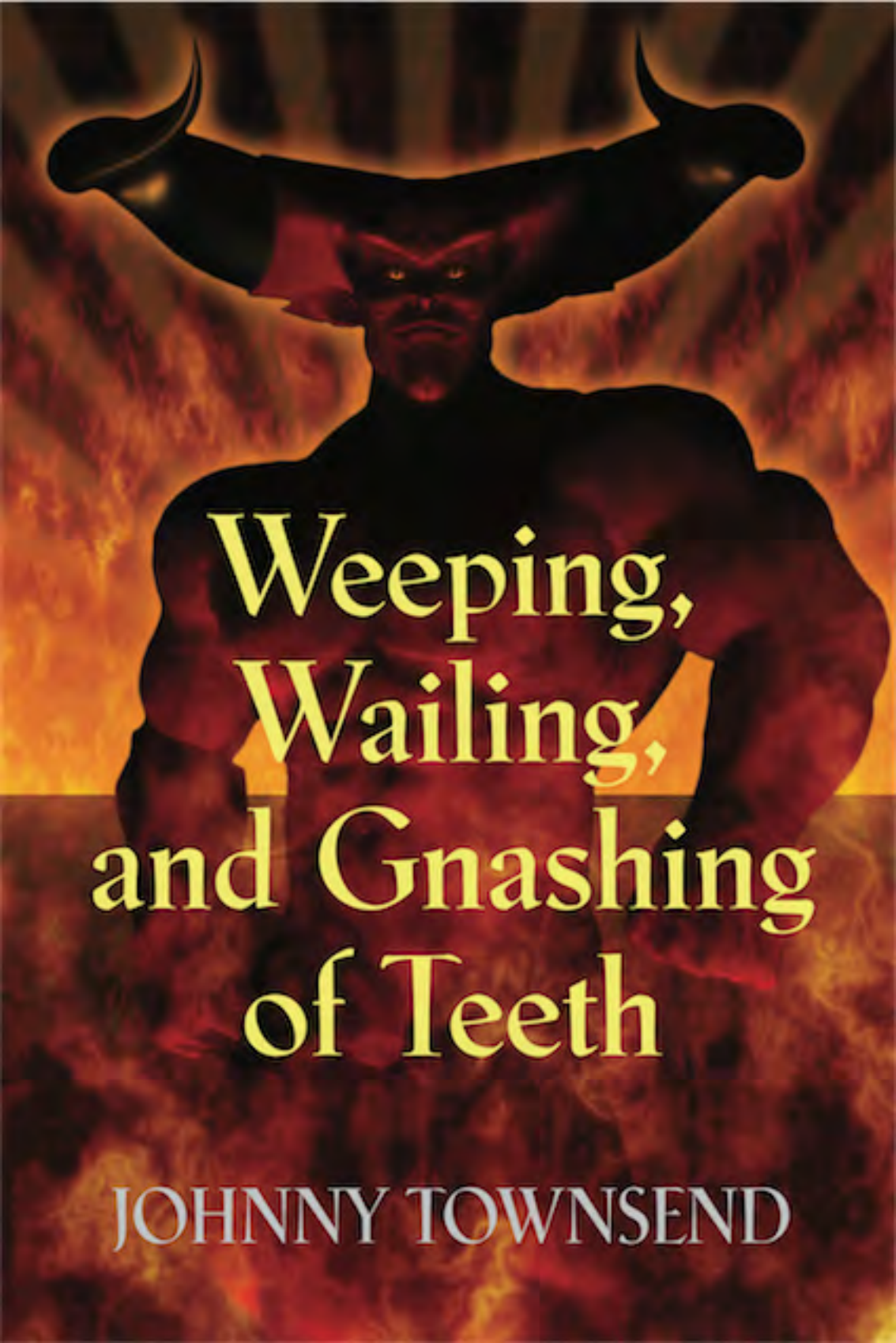
by Johnny Townsend

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A muscular, horned devil with glowing eyes, set against a background of fire and smoke. The devil is the central figure, with large, curved horns and a menacing expression. The background is a mix of orange, red, and yellow flames, creating a hellish atmosphere.

Weeping,
Wailing,
and Gnashing
of Teeth

JOHNNY TOWNSEND

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 Washing of Brains has “A lovely writing style, and each story was full of unique, engaging characters....immensely entertaining.”

Rainbow Awards

“Townsend’s collection [*The Washing of Brains*] once again displays his limpid, naturalistic prose, skillful narrative chops, and his subtle insights into psychology...Well-crafted dispatches on the clash between religion and self-fulfillment...”

Kirkus Reviews

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Two-Transfer Mission

“Wow, this is just like Endor,” said Elder Parker as the Assistants to the President let him off in front of his first missionary apartment. Garberville was going to be a great place for a three-month-long mission, only a few hours north of his home in San Francisco. The air was rather cool today, and there were wisps of fog drifting between the buildings and across the hills beyond the town.

“Excuse me?” asked Elder Rich, his new senior companion, waiting out on the sidewalk for him.

“You know,” said Elder Parker, “like in *Return of the Jedi*.” He motioned to the redwoods in the distance.

Elder Rich bent over to peer into the car at the Assistants. One of them shrugged, while the other just shook his head. Elder Parker tried to hide his smile. It was still working. While he’d always liked church well enough, he hadn’t wanted to serve two long years as a missionary, particularly in some Third World country, which was where both his brothers had been sent. Not quite two years ago, he’d learned of a new Church program to send “problem” elders on short missions near their home. They’d be carefully supervised, only have to endure three months, and then be released “honorably” and go on to live the rest of their lives as they wanted.

The trick was being enough of a problem to qualify for the program without being so much of a problem that his parents had him locked up. Elder Parker had decided his best chance lay in becoming a socially inept science fiction geek.

“Hi, Elder Rich,” he said. “I’m Elder Parker.” He offered his hand and shook Elder Rich’s with as strong a grip as he could manage, deliberately squeezing a little too tightly. “For an AI, you look pretty real.”

“Huh?”

“The AP’s said you were a real robot.” Elder Parker turned to look back at the car, which pulled away, leaving him alone with his companion, who looked after the car in disgust.

“Let’s get your things in the apartment,” said Elder Rich. “Then we’ll get right to work.” He looked Elder Parker up and down, exhaled deeply, and led the way.

The apartment was small, but it did have a bedroom separate from the living room. Elder Parker had been half expecting a studio with bunk beds. He figured the mission president would be torn between scaring him off right at the start or, alternatively, wasting limited resources on a nobody. While it turned out that he and his companion each had their own separate cots, the bedroom window looked out on a dumpster. A card table had been placed in the corner of the room for his desk, with an unpadded folding chair for him to sit on. One of the two bulbs in the overhead light was burned out, making the dim apartment feel more like a cave because of the damp air. There were two smashed mosquitoes on the wall next to the light switch, and someone had written “Kill me now” in pencil that someone else had apparently tried to erase. Elder Parker swallowed. He only had to hang on for

three months, he reminded himself. He'd even been able to skip the normal weeks in the Missionary Training Center in Provo learning his discussions and all those persuasive techniques the other missionaries had to learn. Even with a long-held belief in the Church, Elder Parker had no desire to be a salesman.

“Okay, buddy,” said Elder Rich. “Let’s have a little devotional before we begin our first afternoon working together. We’ll start with a hymn.”

Elder Parker raised his hand. “Ooh, ooh, ooh.”

“Yes?”

“I have a special song I’d like to sing.”

“Sure, whatever. Go ahead.”

Elder Parker hated to do it, but it was essential that he make a strong first impression. He cleared his throat and belted out the lyrics to the song from the opening credits of the Steve McQueen movie *The Blob*. Elder Rich stared at him with his mouth open. When Elder Parker finished, he pointed to his companion and then bowed his head, waiting for the prayer. Elder Rich stumbled through a few words, and then they left the building.

The town was pretty small, so tracting was not really much of an option, Elder Rich told him, and that was fine with Elder Parker. They spent the afternoon visiting two of the four member families who lived in the area. Then, after a quick meal back at the apartment, they headed to the library to teach an English class in one of the meeting rooms. Only two teenage Latina girls and one Asian man about thirty showed

up. The man spoke so little English Elder Parker couldn't tell if he was Japanese, Chinese, or from some other Asian nation.

The lesson started off well, but not ten minutes into it, one of the Latina girls answered the question "What color is the flower?" with "Flour is white." Elder Rich turned to Elder Parker, rolled his eyes, and muttered, "Space cadet." As if he knew more than a handful of words in any language himself other than English.

But the sarcasm was too tempting to pass up. Elder Parker opened his eyes wide and smiled. "That was a great novel by Robert A. Heinlein. Maybe we can check it out of the library and read it together for Dual Study." He was afraid he might have overdone it, but that night he heard Elder Rich on the phone to the zone leaders complaining about him. That was a good sign, but he didn't want an emergency transfer somewhere else. This was a charming little town, there wouldn't be much work to do, and he'd already decided he wanted to spend his entire mission here. He'd lighten up tomorrow.

After they turned the lights out, Elder Parker reflected on his years of deception, which had finally brought him the reward he was seeking. But now he found he was feeling guilty and wondering if he should repent. He'd given talks in Sacramento meeting comparing The Book of Mormon to Orson Scott Card's *Homecoming* series. He'd quoted Dr. Who in his interviews with the bishop. He'd stayed up late Saturday nights watching *Red Dwarf* while his friends went on dates. He'd shouted, "Danger, Will Robinson!" at church dances whenever a girl looked like she might be interested in him. It pained him to pass on some of these girls, but there was no

point going out with anyone until he was free to get involved to the degree he wanted.

The funny thing was that his grades had actually improved the longer he kept up the charade. He had to read dozens of classic SF novels, and his reading comprehension rose accordingly. He knew his material well enough to write several A-quality essays for English class, and he even learned to appreciate the sciences enough to start doing better in Physics and Chemistry. He went along with it all since he was hoping to take classes at UC Berkeley as soon as he could, but his only real goal out of all of this was simply to get that two-transfer mission.

These partial missions were called “two-transfer” because the elders and sisters in almost every mission were generally moved to new districts with new companions every six weeks. Not everyone would be transferred on each transfer day, of course, but there would always be some changes to a large district or zone. Elder Parker tried to look disappointed when his stake president suggested the short mission in place of a regular one, but he started a special fast of thanksgiving the day he received his call. He knew he’d have to keep up the act for a while even after he returned, so as not to arouse suspicion, but he was in the home stretch now.

He couldn’t bring himself to repent.

Elder Parker woke up with a smile on his lips his second day in Garberville. “What’s on the agenda today, comp?” he asked over breakfast.

“We help out at the soup kitchen.”

Elder Parker blinked. “There are homeless people in a town this small?” He was used to the hordes in San Francisco. His mother always carried a special change purse filled with quarters she handed out when she went downtown.

Elder Rich laughed. “There are homeless people in almost every town,” he said. “But it isn’t only the homeless who need food. There are lots of poor people in every town, too. And there are thousands of people in the rural areas around here, and lots of them come in for help.”

“Ni pukh ana rindu.”

Elder Rich stared at him.

Elder Parker smiled. “It’s Klingon for—”

“Never mind.”

Of course, Elder Parker had never bothered to learn any real Klingon, if “real” could even be used to describe the language, but spouting gibberish like this had always made his stake president roll his eyes, so he knew it was effective. After the morning devotional, the two missionaries headed to a Presbyterian church at the edge of town and joined the other volunteers. There were two groups. One prepared bags of non-perishables to hand out, and the other served hot food to be eaten at some long folding tables they’d set up. Elder Rich said he was going to serve food and pointed Elder Parker in the direction of the other line.

It was almost as if Elder Rich didn’t want to be seen with him. Elder Parker smiled.

Since he was in a Mormon-free zone now, Elder Parker relaxed and tried to act normally. He wasn’t sure he could do

it, given his immersion in oddity for so long. He realized he might need real therapy when he returned home in a few months. But he decided to make an attempt now.

“Good morning, ma’am,” he said, handing a paper bag filled with goods to a woman his mother’s age. Her blond hair faded to gray about two inches from the roots. The woman took the bag and nodded.

“How are you this morning?” he asked another woman who reached for a bag. She had to be in her late fifties or early sixties, with rather stringy hair far too long for her age.

“Hungry,” she said. “I wish you guys gave out enough food to last until next week when you open up again.”

Elder Parker didn’t know what to say to that and simply smiled.

“Any plans for the weekend?” he asked a man in his mid-thirties. The guy had three days’ growth of beard, and his green flannel shirt was stained on the right sleeve.

“Look for work,” he muttered. “Like always.”

Elder Parker noticed that the other volunteers worked mostly in silence. They were pleasant but distant. He felt the people coming to them for help needed more nourishment than just calories, though. They needed to feel they were important enough to interact with. If playing the geek the past two years had taught him anything, it was how lonely it felt to be an outcast.

“That’s a lovely earring,” he said to one young woman.

“Great T-shirt,” he told a young man.

“How are things at home?” he asked a woman in her thirties who seemed to have a bruise on her left cheek underneath some make-up.

“Fine,” she muttered, lowering her face before walking off.

Two men came up to him smelling like alcohol. Another man smelled overwhelmingly of pot. Three others overpowered him with body odor. One of the people in his line was a twelve-year-old girl, with an expression that suggested she’d already seen a great deal more in her life than she should have. Elder Parker quietly slipped two dollars from his wallet into the bag before handing it to her.

He and Elder Rich returned to their apartment for lunch around 1:00. “That was pretty intense,” said Elder Parker. Though tired, he felt oddly energized.

“Yeah, we’re required to do four hours of community service each week,” his companion replied. “Real service would be baptizing them into the gospel, of course. Then they’d make something of themselves.”

Elder Parker thought of the story “By His Bootstraps” that he’d read several months ago, about a man who goes into the past to give himself what he’d need to become successful in life.

He didn’t think it worked that way in the real world.

“I enjoyed this morning,” said Elder Parker carefully, though he wasn’t sure “enjoyed” was the appropriate word. “Can we do more of that?”

“We’re driving to the next town over to do a little tracting now.”

Darn it. The stuff he’d been dreading. “Don’t defecate where you eat?” asked Elder Parker, quoting from a *Big Bang* episode.

Elder Rich gave him a look.

The following weeks were filled with visits to the few member families in their area, some unsuccessful tracting in nearby towns, soup kitchens, and English classes where they tried to throw in Church-related words as often as possible. At Elder Parker’s urging, they spent one day cleaning a non-member neighbor’s yard and another day picking up trash along the road. Elder Rich made it clear that particular activity would not be repeated. But after an afternoon later that week trying to pass out pamphlets, he told Elder Parker, “You’re just too weird to do much real missionary work. I guess we’ll *have* to get in even more service hours.” The next day, Elder Parker suggested they start tutoring math at the library a couple of afternoons a week, and shelving books two mornings each week. One morning when Elder Rich didn’t feel like leaving the apartment, Elder Parker insisted on doing some grocery shopping for an elderly black woman down the street who always waved to them when they passed by. Elder Rich suggested his companion take care of it alone. When he dropped off her food, the woman grabbed Elder Parker’s hand and said incredulously, “You *see* me.”

He immediately thought of the H.G. Wells book, *The Invisible Man*. He thought about the various movie versions of the story, the television series. He thought of the book by Ralph Ellison.

He started noticing all the various people he saw in town. *Everyone* seemed important. He couldn't begin to fathom how God could keep track of billions and billions of people. Maybe Heavenly Father was a supercomputer.

Sheesh, he thought. He didn't need to be a geek to himself.

"Elder Rich," said Elder Parker the next day as they were leaving their apartment after lunch, "our new neighbors need help." He pointed to two young men carrying a sofa into their apartment.

"I'm not helping a bunch of queers move in," Elder Rich replied.

Elder Parker didn't stay to discuss the matter. He walked over and introduced himself and asked what he could do. He spent the next ninety minutes carrying boxes and furniture and helping the guys set things up in their new place. Elder Rich had long since disappeared back into their own apartment. When Elder Parker finally joined him in the living room, Elder Rich said, "Make you feel all big and strong to help the little gay guys?"

"Made me feel like a decent human being," Elder Parker replied. Though it shouldn't have. It should be *normal* to help other people, he thought. As normal as singing Tom Lehrer's chemical elements song.

Maybe he wasn't faking, he thought. Maybe he really was a geek. The Church was supposed to help people find themselves. Perhaps it had helped him realize who he really was.

Being weird was okay, he realized.

“Decent? Helping gays?”

Elder Parker remembered the book *Stitch* he’d read, a collection of gay science fiction stories. He’d never hated gays the way some people did, but he’d certainly been indifferent to them, until he read that book.

It was funny, he thought. He’d never particularly liked hard work. He had no ambition to be a furniture mover or a construction worker. Somehow, though, when mowing lawns or washing cars or repairing fences as a missionary, all the activity felt...spiritual. Much more spiritual than the few hours a week they spent proselytizing. He’d always dreaded the sales aspect of missionary work, but he’d never considered what a great idea it was to set aside a certain time in your life when all you did was help people. When he was senior companion...

“I need to call the mission president,” Elder Parker said suddenly.

“You going to rat me out for not staying with you while you were in the queers’ apartment?”

Elder Parker pulled out his cell phone, walked into the bedroom, and closed the door behind him. President Griffith answered a few moments later. “What can I do for you, Elder? You’re not ready to go home already, are you? We can always let you make a call to your mother if you’re feeling homesick. We don’t want you to leave dishonorably.”

He resisted the urge to say, “Elder Parker phone home,” and instead tried to use his most sincere voice, the one he used

at the food bank. “No, President, I don’t want to leave. It’s just the opposite.”

“What do you mean?”

“Can I have my mission extended to the full two years?”

President Griffith laughed. “You’ll get points on Judgment Day for that,” he said, chuckling. “But your companion is sending me reports on you every couple of days, and I don’t think staying longer would be wise. We want you to reap the benefits without doing too much damage. It’s great that you have the desire, but you’ll be released in a few weeks as the Lord already decided.”

“But President—”

“If you want to do the Lord’s work, I suggest you get off the phone and get busy right now.”

Elder Parker sat on the edge of his cot wondering what to do next. He only had seven more weeks. And he knew once he went home, he’d be concentrating on his studies and on finally being able to date the way he wanted. He joined his companion in the living room.

“Well?” Elder Rich demanded.

“Let’s go talk to the Methodist preacher down the road.”

“What? Why?”

“His building needs painting.”

“Oh, my heck, Elder. I sure hope I’m transferred next week. I don’t know what’s worse, all this work you want us to

do, or you making a mountain of mashed potatoes while humming the music from *Close Encounters*.”

“Come on, Elder,” said Elder Parker, walking over and slapping his companion on the shoulder with a smile. “Let’s go grok while we have the chance.”

Elder Rich sighed and stood up, and they both folded their arms. After Elder Parker offered a short prayer, he led his companion briskly out the door.

A Peanut Butter and Cranberry Sauce Sandwich

“Ho parlato con il vescovo,” said Amelia, joining her husband in the meetinghouse foyer. She noticed that the industrial carpet was fraying at one seam, and there were children’s handprints on the front glass doors. The team assigned to clean the building the day before had missed a spot near the lobby sofa. Amelia had spied three Cheerios on the floor next to it the moment she arrived three and a half hours earlier. They were still there.

She was almost hungry enough to pick them up herself.

“And what did the bishop have to say?” her husband Adam asked, still in Italian. They had both served missions to Italy years before, she to Milan and he to Rome. They almost always spoke in Italian to each other in public, kind of a code language, though they had to be careful around Latinos, given the ability of Spanish speakers to break some of their code.

Brother Rivera was a case in point. Just last week, he’d overheard Amelia’s comment after Sacrament meeting and said, “Yeah, I thought that talk was boring, too.” Amelia couldn’t stop herself from critiquing the teaching ability of others, even that of the youth speakers, but she made a note to keep negative comments to herself in the future. She didn’t want to bring anyone else down with her.

She felt down a lot lately.

“He wants to call me to the Nursery again.” Amelia sighed. “And I was so enjoying working with the ten-year-olds in Primary.”

“Enjoying?” Adam laughed, and Amelia joined in with a shrug.

“Well, comparatively,” she said. She’d complained to Adam more than once over the years about her frustration with Bishop Holmes, who kept switching her back and forth between the Nursery and Primary. She wanted to teach teenagers for a change, not only doctrine but how to give talks. She wanted to teach the Relief Society, or, better yet, the adult Sunday School. “I asked him when he was going to call me as the Gospel Doctrine instructor.”

“What did he say?”

Amelia’s smile faded. “He said I had to stay with the young children until I learned my lesson.”

“Porca la miseria.”

Amelia tried to bring her smile back. “I called him a stronzo,” she admitted. “When he asked what it meant, I told him it was a term of endearment.”

Adam laughed. “Lying will get your temple recommend revoked. You should have at least called him a stronzino. Then maybe it would have been okay.”

“Let’s go home, Adam,” said Amelia, looking weary now. “I told him I’d have to think about the calling.” She remembered the bishop chastising her the moment she stood

up to leave. She was supposed to pray about these things, not think. Ideally, she was just to accept whatever the bishop said without question. That's what a truly faithful person would do.

Why was it so hard to develop her faith while tending two-year-olds? Or ten-year-olds, for that matter. She had that guilty thought again: perhaps it was a blessing that she'd never had children.

As they drove home, Amelia looked out the car window at some kids playing in someone's front yard. She knew the bishop didn't believe her when she said they couldn't conceive. He was certain that if Amelia demonstrated enough faith, she could get pregnant in spite of any physical limitations. She'd never told anyone that Adam's low sperm count was the culprit, since men always needed to feel "potent." It was better to let the congregation think she was infertile.

Amelia prepared a quick lunch of hot dogs while Adam took a nap on the sofa. She used to cook elaborate meals. Chicken cacciatore. Homemade Margherita pizza. Homemade vermicelli with homemade sugo. Both their refrigerator and their pantry were getting low on supplies but it was important to have a special meal on the Sabbath. The pickle relish was almost gone, but there was plenty of mustard, plus a couple of old ketchup packs from a long ago fast food foray. Looking at the spread, she wondered if this might be a good teaching moment. "You know," she said when her husband joined her at the table, "now that you're unemployed and I'm working, you might want to start taking over some of my duties."

Adam stopped with a hot dog halfway to his mouth. He looked at it and put it back down on his plate. "You're absolutely right," he said. "I didn't even think."

Amelia took a big bite of her own hot dog to prevent herself from responding. The Church taught men to be blissfully unaware that they were capable of washing dishes and vacuuming and folding laundry. She'd thought she and Adam were beyond following expectations.

They made love around 8:00 so Amelia could get to bed by 9:00. Their lovemaking had required her to find several teaching moments over the years as well, but these days, Adam was quite effective as a lover. She fell asleep satisfied but remembering the time one of the sisters at church had said that it was a sin to have sex if you weren't trying to conceive. The woman had looked pointedly at Amelia, who just smiled and said, "If you want to monitor our bedroom, I'm sure we could set up some chairs." The woman turned up her nose and walked away. But she never brought up the subject again.

Amelia awoke the next morning before dawn and drove to her first cleaning job. Having been a stay at home wife for the entire nine years of her marriage, she didn't have any other particularly useful skills. If only Adam hadn't been laid off at the air conditioner factory. Her pay was never going to equal what Adam had earned.

That night, Amelia directed the Family Home Evening. She usually taught it three out of four Mondays, and this was one task she didn't mind keeping. She'd studied every religion course she could get at BYU to fill her electives. She'd wanted to teach for the Church Educational System, but while not outright denied the opportunity, she'd been strongly discouraged and ended up with an English degree instead.

She'd hoped to teach her children a love for reading.

“Tonight’s lesson is on sustaining our Church leaders,” she began, knowing she needed the reinforcement even if Adam didn’t. She had to find a way to *want* to do the right thing.

“I object,” said Adam, raising his hand and laughing.

“Be serious, honeypot.” She knew Adam hated the term. It reminded him of a portable toilet company. Using the word was the fastest way to gain control of a lesson. She read a quote by a General Authority which said that if your Church leader asked you to do something wrong and you did it, you’d still be blessed by Heavenly Father for obeying.

“Wasn’t that the Nuremburg defense?” asked Adam.

“The Prophet isn’t Hitler,” she returned.

“Wasn’t that also what the loan officers at Wells Fargo said?” Adam persisted.

“Heavenly Father isn’t the CEO of the Church,” Amelia replied. “Now, let’s talk about a time we *didn’t* obey our local leaders, and what the consequences were. I’ll go first.” Amelia reminded Adam about the time Bishop Holmes had asked her to take in Sister Duvall’s two teenage children for a couple of weeks when their mother had surgery. Amelia could have done it, but she felt the children were old enough not only to take care of themselves but also to care for their mother. She’d said no to the bishop, and the oldest girl had set fire to the kitchen when trying to cook a meal. Sister Duvall still refused to speak to Amelia, and the incident had occurred almost three years ago.

“There can be permanent consequences for not following our leaders,” she concluded. She’d hoped her pep talk would make her feel more excited about returning to the Nursery, but she found herself still murmuring in her heart. Perhaps Adam would tell a more helpful story. “What about you?” she asked. “There must be at least one time you disobeyed.” Though frankly that was hard to imagine. Adam had served as ward clerk, second counselor in the Elders Quorum, first counselor in the Elders Quorum, as stake missionary, and as Primary teacher before his current calling. When had he had time to say no to anything?

“I don’t want to talk about it,” he said.

“I thought so,” said Amelia, despite her surprise. “And if you don’t want to discuss it, that must mean things went poorly as a result.”

Adam said nothing.

Amelia put her hand on Adam’s arm. “Come on, honey. This is a judgment-free zone. Let’s get it out in the open.” He was still the head of the household, whatever his job status, whatever his sperm count. He could show her the way to accept any calling the bishop offered her.

After a little more coaxing, Adam finally said, “Bishop Holmes told me to divorce you.”

Amelia’s jaw dropped. He couldn’t be serious, she thought, but what a mean joke to tell when she was trying to present a faith-promoting lesson.

“Two weeks ago,” Adam went on. “He said I should look for a wife who’s willing to give me children.”

Amelia's mouth still gaped open.

"I explained my sperm count, but he thought I was just covering for you."

Amelia could tell from the pained expression on his face that Adam was telling the truth. The lesson quickly fell apart after that, and Amelia had a hard time getting to sleep when she climbed into bed at 9:00. She got up around 9:30 to wipe down the kitchen counters. She wiped down the pantry as well, irritated to find a spiderweb forming on an upper shelf. She wanted to drink a glass of warm milk, but there were only a few ounces left in the carton, and she wanted to save that for Adam. She tried a glass of warm water, which was unsatisfying, and went back to bed, where she tossed and turned some more. She kept thinking of Sarah in the Old Testament and how poorly that situation had turned out. She thought about Emma Smith adopting. She thought of Audrey Hepburn's miscarriages.

She thought of Sharon Tate's baby.

In the morning, Amelia made Nutella toast for Adam, finishing the jar. They'd both discovered the chocolate hazelnut spread while in Italy. They'd also discovered how much they missed peanut butter, impossible to find there. Amelia made sure to always stock up when it was on sale. She'd bought three 64-ounce jars of Jif for \$4.98 each a couple of weeks ago. They'd just opened their last jar of that, too.

If only Adam could find another job.

What if he found another job *and* another wife?

She had to remind herself that such a move wouldn't help Adam in the child department, so there was no peer pressure benefit to that.

Amelia had so wanted a boy named Gaetano and a daughter named Antonella. Maybe a second daughter named Valeria, though Adam said that sounded too much like malaria.

Wednesday afternoon when Amelia returned from work, she discovered that Adam had cleaned the bathroom and vacuumed the living room. That night after dinner, which Amelia still prepared, Adam left to go home teaching but came back thirty minutes later. "What happened?" asked Amelia.

"Brother Rivera moved without telling me. I spoke to him on Sunday at church when we agreed I'd come see him tonight."

"I'm sure it was an oversight."

"It's hard to forget you've moved to a new house."

Amelia frowned. "You don't think..." She couldn't finish the thought.

"What?"

"He lost his daughter in the custody battle. Maybe he resents the fact that we 'deliberately' chose not to have children. Maybe he thinks it means we can never understand what he's going through."

Adam walked over and put his arms around her. "Not everything is about being childless." He kissed her ear.

“They why are you the cub scout packmaster and not the Elders Quorum president?”

“Not everything is about church,” he said.

But it was. She and her husband shared a second language because of the Church. They had seen the world because of the Church. They appreciated both Nutella and peanut butter because of it. She made the best pizza of anyone she knew.

Amelia had no marketable skills because of the Church.

She made more money scrubbing bathtubs than she’d ever make at Domino’s. And she was certainly not sous chef material just because she could make her own gnocchi. She listened to audible textbooks while mopping, but it would take her years to earn an advanced degree. Amelia still wanted to teach, only she wanted to teach adults and not children, so that meant a PhD. She was still toying with the idea of pursuing a Masters part-time, but she came home pretty tired every day.

Just before 9:00, Amelia’s cell phone buzzed. Hoping it was another cleaning job from the service she worked for, she picked up on the second ring.

“Sister McGrath?” asked a woman.

“Yes. Who am I speaking with?” Amelia asked in return. So much for studying English.

“You’ve already forgotten all about me, haven’t you?” said the voice. “This is Sister Duvall.”

Amelia didn’t know what to say.

“I hope I’m not calling too late.”

“Oh, no, it’s fine. What...what can I do for you?”

“Well, now, that’s exactly it. You know I had surgery again yesterday. This time on both my hands.”

Amelia couldn’t really say she’d paid much attention to any news about the woman which she may have heard in passing at church.

“So here’s the tricky part,” Sister Duvall went on. “I have to go potty, and I can’t risk contaminating my hands. Could you come over and wipe me?”

Amelia’s mouth fell open.

“It’ll give you a chance to redeem yourself,” said Sister Duvall. “I’m all about helping people find forgiveness.”

“Uh, okay,” Amelia stammered. “I’ll be right over.” She pressed End and then turned off her phone.

“Who was that, dear?”

“Telemarketer,” she replied. Sister Duvall’s husband could step up to the plate. Or maybe the one kid still living at home. Amelia was sure both had done something the woman needed to forgive them for. Knowing Sister Duvall, probably several somethings.

That night, Amelia dreamed about a spider that was trained to assassinate. It was a Hit Spider.

On Friday, Amelia paid the light bill and gas bill. That left \$20 until her next weekly paycheck. She stopped by the Grocery Salvage store on her way home and bought some dented cans and some others without labels. Plus, cranberry

sauce was on sale for 25 cents a can because the labels were on upside down. Adam had to save up his unemployment checks to put toward the mortgage.

If only the ward employment specialist could help Adam find something. But the specialist was a retired factory worker, a volunteer like everyone else at church. No one was an expert at anything.

Leaving a toilet sparkling didn't rank high on resumé searches.

She could have been an expert teacher, though. Even after leaving BYU, she spent hours each week reading Church history and Church doctrine and faith-promoting stories. She'd plowed through the Journal of Discourses. She read all of Michael Quinn's books. She read everything the current apostles had written. Even the stuff by Elder Bednar, who drove her crazy.

"I could have done it," she said aloud, walking back to the car. A small boy holding his mother's hand turned and looked at Amelia with a frown.

Sunday morning, Amelia cooked the last of the eggs, which they ate with dry toast. After services, Amelia met with Bishop Holmes to give him her answer. "Well, Sister McGrath, have you come to accept the Lord's calling?" he asked, rubbing his hands together with a smile.

"I'll teach Gospel Doctrine," she said.

"Um...but...um..."

"It's Gospel Doctrine or nothing," said Amelia. She stood up to leave.

“I’ll think about it, Sister McGrath.”

“And pray about it?” she asked at the door.

“Yes, yes, of course.”

“See you next Sunday, Bishop.”

Amelia met Adam in the foyer and took his hand. “Ho parlato con il vescovo,” she said, telling him what happened.

Adam gave her a big, deep kiss in front of the bulletin board pinpointing where the missionaries from the ward were serving around the world. Sister Barnes covered her young son’s eyes and hurried him out of the building.

Back home, Amelia pulled the peanut butter out of the pantry and opened a can of cranberry sauce. “Allow me,” said Adam. He made them both sandwiches, and they sat down together to eat their Sabbath meal.

About the Author

Johnny Townsend earned an MFA in fiction writing from Louisiana State University. He also has a BA and MA in English, as well as a BS in Biology. A native of New Orleans, Townsend relocated to Seattle after Hurricane Katrina. After attending a Baptist high school for four years as a teenager, he served as a Mormon missionary in Italy and then held positions in his local New Orleans ward as Second Counselor in the Elders Quorum, Ward Single Adult Representative, Stake Single Adult Chair, Sunday School Teacher, Stake Missionary, and Ward Membership Clerk. In the secular world, Townsend has worked as a book store clerk, a college English instructor, a bank teller, a loan processor, a mail carrier, a library associate, and a professional escort. He has worked selling bus passes, installing insulation, delivering pizza, rehabilitating developmentally disabled adults, surveying gas stations, preparing surgical carts for medical teams, and performing experiments on rat brains in a physiology lab.

Townsend has published stories and essays in *Newsday*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Salt Lake Tribune*, *The Army Times*, *The Humanist*, *The Progressive*, *Medical Reform*, *Christopher Street*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Glimmer Train*, *Sunstone*, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, in the anthologies *Queer Fish*, *Off the Rocks*, and *In Our Lovely Deseret: Mormon Fictions*. He

helped edit *Latter-Gay Saints*, a collection of stories about gay Mormons, and he is the author of 30 books.

Most of those books are collections of Mormon short stories, and several have been named to Kirkus Reviews' Best of 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015. In addition to his Mormon stories, Townsend has written a collection of Jewish stories, *The Golem of Rabbi Loew*, based on his years as a Jew. He has also written one non-fiction book, *Let the Faggots Burn: The Upstairs Lounge Fire*, having interviewed survivors as well as friends and relatives of the 32 people who were killed when an arsonist set fire to a gay bar in the French Quarter of New Orleans on Gay Pride Day in 1973. He is an Associate Producer of the feature-length documentary *Upstairs Inferno*, directed by Robert Camina.

Townsend sang in the New Orleans Gay Men's Chorus for a time and performed in the priests' chorus in the opera *Aida*. He has a collection of Victorian ceramic tiles, wooden dinosaur carvings from Bali, and the entire set of Calvin and Hobbes comic strip compilations in Italian. In addition to speaking English and Italian, he's also studied French, Spanish, Russian, Hebrew, Old English, and American Sign Language. Townsend is an avid movie fan, whose three favorite Hitchcock films are *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Strangers on a Train*, and *Rear Window*. He gives regularly to environmental conservation groups, medical charities, groups that support single-payer healthcare, human rights organizations, and to various documentaries and other projects he finds on crowdfunding sites.

The University of Utah in Salt Lake City has a Special Collection of Townsend material, including all his books, the magazines and newspapers that have published his work, his

Weeping, Wailing, and Gnashing of Teeth

journals, his correspondence, photographs, and even a portrait painted by a prominent gay artist. ONE Archives in Los Angeles, the national gay and lesbian archive, has his UpStairs Lounge materials and his 20 original gay quilts.

Johnny Townsend is married to Gary Tolman, another former Mormon who served in the same mission in Italy. They still speak Italian to each other regularly.

Books by Johnny Townsend

Thanks for reading! If you enjoyed the book, could you please take a few minutes to write a review online? Reviews are helpful both to me as an author and to other readers, so we'd all sincerely appreciate your writing one! And if you did enjoy the book, here are some others I've written you might want to look up:

Mormon Underwear

God's Gargoyles

The Circumcision of God

Sex among the Saints

Dinosaur Perversions

Zombies for Jesus

The Abominable Gayman

The Gay Mormon Quilter's Club

The Golem of Rabbi Loew

Mormon Fairy Tales

Flying over Babel

Marginal Mormons

Mormon Bullies

The Mormon Victorian Society

Dragons of the Book of Mormon

Selling the City of Enoch

A Day at the Temple

Behind the Zion Curtain

Gayrabian Nights

Lying for the Lord

Despots of Deseret

Missionaries Make the Best Companions

Invasion of the Spirit Snatchers

The Tyranny of Silence

Sex on the Sabbath

The Washing of Brains

The Mormon Inquisition

Interview with a Mission President

Weeping, Wailing, and Gnashing of Teeth

Weeping, Wailing, and Gnashing of Teeth

Let the Faggots Burn: The UpStairs Lounge Fire

Latter-Gay Saints: An Anthology of Gay Mormon Fiction (co-editor)

Available from BookLocker.com or from your favorite neighborhood or online bookstore.

Follow Johnny on Twitter @QueerMormon

Wondering what some of those other books are about? Read on!

The Washing of Brains

A world-weary man becomes a widower for the third time. A non-Mormon couple allow their teenage daughter to be baptized but are then shocked when she rejects them and moves in with a more righteous family. A man awakens to celebrate a milestone birthday only to discover that horrifying world events demand his attention instead. A budding feminist tries to make a political statement by giving birth to her “illegitimate” son in church just before Mother’s Day. Missionaries in Rome try to prevent a terrorist bombing. The Prophet devises a plan to reverse global warming. A Salt Lake bishop is overwhelmed by his congregants’ secrets. A gay Mormon man devastated by the breakup of his marriage to a closeted Hasidic Jew considers returning to the fold. An unhappy bartender reminisces about the affair he had with his mission president in Paris. A returned missionary takes a job in an adult video store. A young woman befriends the dungeon master who lives above her. A BYU student working as an escort finds love.

Invasion of the Spirit Snatchers

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

Gayrabian Nights

Gayrabian Nights is a twist on the well-known classic, *1001 Arabian Nights*, in which Scheherazade, under the threat of death if she ceases to captivate King Shahryar's attention, enchants him through a series of mysterious, adventurous, and romantic tales.

In this variation, a male escort, invited to the hotel room of a closeted, homophobic Mormon senator, learns that the man is poised to vote on a piece of anti-gay legislation the following morning. To prevent him from sleeping, so that the exhausted

senator will miss casting his vote on the Senate floor, the escort entertains him with stories of homophobia, celibacy, mixed orientation marriages, reparative therapy, coming out, first love, gay marriage, and long-term successful gay relationships. The escort crafts the stories to give the senator a crash course in gay culture and sensibilities, hoping to bring the man closer to accepting his own sexual orientation.

Let the Faggots Burn: The UpStairs Lounge Fire

On Gay Pride Day in 1973, someone set the entrance to a French Quarter gay bar on fire. In the terrible inferno that followed, thirty-two people lost their lives, including a third of the local congregation of the Metropolitan Community Church, their pastor burning to death halfway out a second-story window as he tried to claw his way to freedom. A mother who'd gone to the bar with her two gay sons died alongside them. A man who'd helped his friend escape first was found dead near the fire escape. Two children waited outside a movie theater across town for a father and step-father who would never pick them up. During this era of rampant homophobia, several families refused to claim the bodies, and

many churches refused to bury the dead. Author Johnny Townsend pored through old records and tracked down survivors of the fire as well as relatives and friends of those killed to compile this fascinating account of a forgotten moment in gay history.

The Abominable Gayman

What is a gay Mormon missionary doing in Italy? He is trying to save his own soul as well as the souls of others. In these tales chronicling the two-year mission of Robert Anderson, we see a young man tormented by his inability to be the man the Church says he should be. In addition to his personal hell, Anderson faces a major earthquake, organized crime, a serious bus accident, and much more. He copes with horrendous mission leaders and his own suicidal tendencies. But one day, he meets another missionary who loves him, and his world changes forever.

Marginal Mormons

What happens when a High Priest becomes addicted to crack cocaine? Should an unemployed bank teller take in a homeless protestor from the Occupy movement? Do gay people have positive near-death experiences or unhappy ones? Is there a way to splice the empathy gene into the genome of every human? Can a schizophrenic woman on anti-delusional drugs still keep her belief in an intangible God? Will a childless biochemist be able to find fulfillment by taking part in a mission to Mars? Should a meek stay-at-home Mom become involved in an international protest against fracking? Not every Latter-day Saint has a mainstream story to tell, but these soul-searching people are still more than the marginal Mormons headquarters would like us to believe.

Despots of Deseret

In this collection of Mormon short stories, a man learns to forgive his mother for an unspeakable atrocity. An uncle awaits word on his niece caught up in the 2004 tsunami. A bereaved man receives an unexpected gift from his deceased husband on

Valentine's Day. A stake president threatens to revoke a couple's temple marriage. An elderly woman breaks her hip and struggles desperately to reach the phone. A young woman faces a shocking tragedy while serving as a missionary in Paraguay. A Mormon teenager wants to be named Best Christian Example at his Baptist high school. Conflict over finances arises in an interracial marriage. An anti-Mormon mob threatens a church outing. A virginal gay man takes out a contract on his own life to protect his virtue.

Sex among the Saints

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

reality of sexuality, but the rest of us will enjoy getting a glimpse into the Mormon bedroom.

Missionaries Make the Best Companions

What is behind the freshly scrubbed façades of the Mormon missionaries we see about town? In these stories, an ex-Mormon tries to seduce a faithful elder by showing him increasingly suggestive movies. A sister missionary fulfills her community service requirement by babysitting for a prostitute. Two elders break their mission rules by venturing into the forbidden French Quarter. A black Mormon deals with racism in the Church. A senior missionary couple try to reactivate lapsed members while their own family falls apart back home. A young man hopes that serving a second full-time mission will lead him up the Church hierarchy. Two bored missionaries decide to make a little extra money moonlighting in a male stripper club. Two frustrated elders find an acceptable way to masturbate—by donating to a Fertility Clinic. A lonely man searches for the favorite companion he hasn't seen in thirty years.

Dragons of the Book of Mormon

A supporter of Prop 8 is forced to attend his boss's gay wedding. A devout Latter-day Saint struggling to pay his bills wonders if he should keep paying tithing, even after being excommunicated. A reporter seeks the identity of Salt Lake's new superhero—a masked man wearing temple clothes who mysteriously shows up at crime scenes. A woman is murdered in the temple on her wedding day. A devoted husband loses his wife on their wedding anniversary. One of the Three Nephites is missing in Pasadena. Mormons survive the zombie apocalypse because of their two-year supply of food storage.

Mormon Underwear

Mormon Underwear tells the stories of gay Mormons that mainstream members don't want to hear. Whether it is a young LDS man stripping to his Mormon underwear in public or a virginal 70-year-old finally giving in to temptation, a straight son who discovers his father kissing another man or a group who plots to put gays into positions of power within

the Church, these are the stories too shameful or shocking to be told among traditional Saints.

The Golem of Rabbi Loew

Jacob and Esau Cohen are the closest of brothers. In fact, they're lovers. A doctor tries to combine canine genes with those of Jews, to improve their chances of surviving a hostile world. A Talmudic scholar dates an escort. A scientist tries to develop the "God spot" in the brains of his patients in order to create a messiah. The Golem of Prague is really Rabbi Loew's secret lover. While some of the Jews in Townsend's book are Orthodox, this collection of Jewish stories most certainly is not.

God's Gargoyles

These tales of gay Mormons reveal abominable yet delightful secrets. A man obsessed with gargoyles battles his own subhuman attitudes on Halloween. A gay couple steal from the rich to provide for their favorite charities. A celibate 38-year-old dates a

promiscuous porn reviewer. A schizophrenic man accustomed to hearing voices suddenly starts to receive real revelations.

Mormon Fairy Tales

In these pages, we discover how the Three Nephites from the Book of Mormon cope with their frustrated sexuality, when their wives aren't immortal as they are. A deceased sinner plots to break out of Spirit Prison. An obsessive-compulsive missionary covers himself with sacred protective garments. A polygamist in 1855 Utah is ordered to take a fourth wife, when all he really wants is to be with another man. A mentally unstable woman abandoned by the Church is driven to homelessness. A same-sex couple has a wedding atop an ancient Mayan temple. Aliens visiting the U.N. reveal that God really does live on the planet Kolob.

The Mormon Victorian Society

A Victorian enthusiast has a startling sexual revelation to make at his monthly Society meeting. A father tries desperately to save his family from the imminent danger of global warming. Two men find love in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. A gay man attending his first Affirmation conference becomes embroiled in ex-Mormon politics. A home teaching assignment goes terribly wrong when a man whose father was murdered in a gay bar is confronted with a young gay cowboy. A Relief Society president is trapped on a plane next to a gay man flaunting his sexuality. A ministering angel to a young god tires of his position. Gay Mormons react when the Prophet has a new revelation about homosexuality.

Lying for the Lord

A missionary in Italy makes a break for freedom on Christmas. A youth outing for priests at a shooting range doesn't go as planned. Mormons create a theocracy in America and rename the country Zion. A conflicted father wonders how to deal with a

transgender son who wants to be his daughter. A bishop devises a novel method to make sure his congregants pass Tithing Settlement. Parents hire men to pose as the Three Nephites to teach their children the Book of Mormon is true. Ex-Mormons unwelcome at home for Christmas band together for their own holiday celebration.

Sex on the Sabbath

A Salt Lake bishop is murdered in his office. A missionary tries to rescue an Eastern European woman enslaved in trafficking. A Mormon advice columnist gets into trouble with the Church. Parents arrange to kidnap their missionary son and force him into deprogramming. A disabled woman questions her Patriarchal Blessing's admonition to remain celibate her entire life. A husband chafes when his wife won't let him watch R-rated movies. A straight high school senior asks his gay friend to the prom.

The Tyranny of Silence

An Artificial Intelligence tries to lead Mormons astray. A bereaved widow listens to the radio hoping to hear love songs from her departed husband. An ex-Mormon earns a living selling Mormon underwear online to non-members. A young man fakes a two-year mission to please his family. The Church reels after a leak that children of gay couples can no longer participate in its saving rituals and ordinances. A depressed Santa reaches out to help his community.

Selling the City of Enoch

A mission president's wife is murdered in Rome. A descendant of Enoch tries out Capitalism. A bishop disguises himself as a homeless man to teach his congregants a lesson. A lonely young woman rents a mother and father for Christmas. A young husband is horrified to learn he has married a pre-op transgender in the temple. A group of ex-Mormons meet regularly to watch LDS movies in order to keep in touch with their culture.

Flying over Babel

How do you ask a girl on a date when everyone in town knows your father was convicted for the serial murders of a dozen prostitutes? What's the best way to get your boyfriend to propose—fake a pregnancy or threaten to go on a mission for the Church? Will the torture of electroshock therapy turn a gay BYU student straight? How do two victims of child abuse move forward to create their own family? What happens when the beauty and peace of the Millennium just aren't enough to make you happy? In this collection of Mormon short stories, there is an acknowledgement of the real evil that exists around us, and an awareness of the difficult compromises we sometimes make in order to live in an imperfect world.

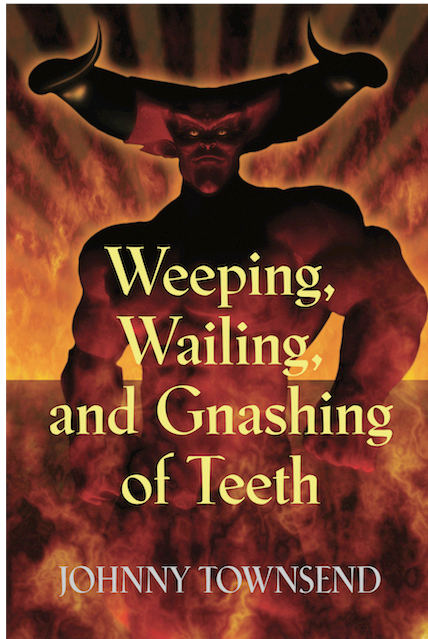
The Mormon Inquisition

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.

Interview with a Mission President

Jason Kincaid is nearing the end of his three-year term as president of the Washington Seattle mission of the LDS Church. His service has been difficult, and for the first time in his life, he has doubts. During the last zone conference over which he presides, he does something he's never done before. In each of his interviews with the missionaries serving under him, he asks them to openly discuss their own doubts. He hopes that by building up their faith, he will rebuild his own. What happens instead will rock the entire Church to its core.



At Judgment Day, Mormon misfits face their eternal fate.

Weeping, Wailing, and Gnashing of Teeth

by Johnny Townsend

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