

OUT THERE



FIRST PLACE STORY BY DIAN SADERUP

MORMONS don't die: her great aunt Zoe had "passed away beyond the veil" and her grandmother had "gone to meet Grandpa Abe Abramson who was waiting on the other side" and last summer her eighteen year old cousin Renee' who was from the Greening side of the family had driven her Toyota through the wall of a concrete underpass into "paradise" which was a place out there beyond the cement fences of this mortal earth. But her friend Mona, who was agnostic, had had her mother frozen last year, to be brought back to life when a cure for cardiac cancer was found. Mormons don't die—it was her grandfather on her mother's side who'd said it—they just go on home.

"Would you like a kleenex?" the pudgy sixty-ish woman in the seat next to her on the Western jet asked.

"Do I sound like I have a cold?" Evelyn answered. It was the first she had spoken to the woman since getting on the plane.

"No . . . I thought you were crying. Excuse me."

Evelyn smiled suddenly and brushed the palm of her hand roughly over her face. "I am crying, aren't I." She took the kleenex. She rubbed under her eyes. She blew her nose. "You can count on that when you cry, a stopped nose."

The woman smiled wanly and nodded, "Yes, one can always count on a running nose. Are you from Utah, dear?" she added more brightly.

Evelyn looked out the plastic window at the Wasatch mountains bulwarking Utah Valley; Timpanogos was the same as it had been eight years ago when she was at the Y. She'd seen photographs of the Salt Lake and Utah valleys from when the pioneers first settled them. The mountains in the dim black and white photos were exactly the same as now, maybe a few grains of dirt less, but that was it.

"Salt Lake," she said.

"And you've been away on a trip?"

"A trip?" she turned. The woman clutched a black patent leather handbag on her lap. She probably clutched it like that every time she sat down somewhere. "I moved out to California six years ago."

"A visit then. How nice. I had a sister who moved out there, to California I mean. Just loved it, all the sunshine. She never could abide the cold. She died though, last year. We brought her home to be buried. She wasn't really Californian you know; it was just all that sun attracted her for a while. She didn't have any real family there anywhere, being divorced and all. We laid her in the American Fork cemetery. That's where all our folks are resting."

Evelyn didn't say anything. The FASTEN SEAT BELT sign lit up. She didn't buckle hers. She looked out at the Point of the Mountain, then covered her face quickly with her hands when she saw the clear broad Salt Lake Valley spread out below her, the everlasting Wasatch jutting into the afternoon air.

"Are you all right?" the woman asked anxiously. "I don't mean to be a pest, and I usually don't strike up with strangers, but—"

"Yes, yes, just ignore me. I'm fine," Evelyn mumbled into the tattered kleenex.

"Here, have another," the woman offered her a blue

floral tissue.

Evelyn took it. She knew her mascara was probably in black tear-streaks on her chin by now. The woman was looking at her. Evelyn said blankly, "My father died."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize. Please forgive my intruding. How sad."

Evelyn smiled, "No, I'm glad about it." Her father had been an invalid for nearly five years. "My mother'd suffered long enough." She stopped abruptly (this was a stranger), then turned her head to the window and chewed on the knuckle of her left index finger. Her mother's voice over the phone the night before had been low and soft, as ever: "It's about Dad, Evie. He's gone." Her father had not died; he'd only gone away on a trip of sorts, like the time he went to Fresno for a month when she was seven. Someday her mother would follow him, and after that Evelyn would her. It's like days, she thought, one always coming on the dusk of another, each day different, its own self, but like all the others, too, all connected by the endless reeling-across-the-sky of the sun. Then she laughed.

The woman cleared her throat uneasily, "Could I ask your name, dear?"

Evelyn laughed again and pressed the back of her hand against her mouth: "You can call me Josh," she said.

"Why, what an . . . an interesting name for a girl."

"He made the sun stand still, remember?"

The woman nodded vaguely.

Evelyn had no husband, no son, or daughter to fill up the wood and chrome rooms of her Santa Monica beach apartment. The plane landed, and the sensation made her stomach queasy. She closed her eyes and concentrated on pretending she was in a flat, still, dark place where her stomach was perfectly quiet and unsick. It worked. When she closed her eyes she could be anywhere. The DC9 taxied toward the terminal.

"I hope you don't mind," the older woman's sincere voice broke into Evelyn's flat, still, dark place, "but are you LDS, Josh?"

Evelyn opened her eyes and looked at the woman: "I guess so."

The woman reached for Evelyn's hand and squeezed it. "Isn't it wonderful that we know these things aren't forever, loved ones' passing and such?"

She waited for Evelyn to respond. She didn't.

"Maybe a better way to say it would be that families are the things that are forever. My nephew's got a bumper sticker on his Pinto says that. Death's just like an eye blinking, or . . ." she fumbled for an appropriate image.

"I know what you're trying to say. I'm fine."

"Of course you are," the lady said, patting Evelyn's hand. "You'll have someone here to meet you, won't you?"

"Yes, everything's taken care of," Evelyn lied. With a sudden guilty afterthought she added, "It's been nice to sit with you."

"It's been my pleasure. Now take care," the woman said and pulled her heavy body from the seat. The paper covering the headrest of the seat caught on a pin in the woman's iron colored hair and tore away completely as she stood. It fluttered like a veil about her broad round shoulder: *The Aged Bride*, Evelyn thought, or maybe

Endless Nuptial would be a better title. The woman clawed at the napkin, muttering.

"No, wait," Evelyn jumped up and stopped the fleshy hand. "May I take a picture of you? Like that—with the paper in your hair?"

The woman chortled. "Of all things, a picture of me playing the silly ninny! Oh for heaven's sake." She reached for the napkin at her shoulder.

"No, honestly, I'd like to very much. I'm a photographer. It's my job. I know it sounds crazy, but I really would like to take the photo."

"Well, if it means all that to you, I suppose—" she stopped mid-sentence.

Evelyn had her camera out in seconds, focused, and clicked off two shots. "Thank you," she said, fumbling to put the camera back in its case.

The woman unpinned the paper, gathered her coat and purse and a present tied with a pink yarn bow, and walked away down the aisle. Evelyn smiled to herself: the woman's jowls were perfect, like a basset hound's. It was always like that: an image would freeze in front of her, almost like a motion picture stopping on a single, isolated frame, every detail exact. She took her camera with her everywhere.

She moved with the crowd down the aisle, row after row (she'd sat in the second to last). She was glad she'd told her mother she'd take a cab home. She didn't feel like seeing anyone. Her mother hadn't driven a car in nearly two years, ever since running over the Peterson's dog. Evelyn told her she was being ridiculous, anybody could hit a dog, it should have been tied up in the back yard. But her mother insisted she hadn't been paying attention, Cleo had been in plain sight, and next time it could be somebody's child. She was too old to drive the Buick. The bus suited her. Her mother had offered to call Uncle Vernon or Aunt May to pick Evelyn up, but Evelyn said a cab was okay and she didn't care about the five dollars or whatever it cost, she had all the money she needed. Everything I need, that was how she put it. "I have everything I need, Mom." She guessed she did: a photographer's job with a big advertising agency, different work practically every week or two; a cliff apartment in a house on stilts (so what if every wet winter the mud dragged it an inch downhill and she even thought she could feel the slant of the floor?); a bunch of friends; a great Siamese cat named Claudia which she called Catface; a convertible Fiat, silver-blue with only one dent; designer underwear with her initials monogrammed on them that Kirk had given her for her birthday and a laugh. She had even lost seven pounds in the last two months since starting to jog. Jogging prevented clogged arteries in your heart, depression, and early death, one of the guys at the office had told her, half seriously. He jogged thirty-five miles a week.

Since getting super thin Evelyn liked to stretch out naked in front of the mirror. She'd taken some shots of herself with the auto-pilot on her camera. A couple days ago she'd shown them to Kirk whom she'd known from the Mar Vista Ward for four years and whom she had dinner with once or twice a week. He spent weekends at her beach place every so often. Kirk was an excommunicated, rebaptised homosexual who was

living straight, which meant alone. "Good God, I'm pathetic," he'd laughed when he looked at the photos. "You've got legs as long as Wilt Chamberlain's, right here in my hands, and I'm inert. These are gorgeous, hon." She laughed with him.

Evelyn stepped off the plane. The air was different here than out in LA. Maybe that was because the altitude made it lighter. She walked into the terminal. She dropped the crumpled kleenex in her hand into the garbage container and started down the hallway. She smiled. She shook her head. Her mother would probably turn papier-mache grey or look at her like she had horns for ears if Evelyn ever told her all about Kirk or the pictures she'd shown him or about his staying overnight (it wouldn't matter that he slept in a hammock on the deck). Three years ago when Evelyn had been up for a weekend, as they'd stood in the kitchen shelling peas together, her mother had said, "Evie, when you date the young men out there in California, don't you ever talk about the future? It just seems you've gone through such a long string of fellows and, well, to be honest honey, it concerns me. When I was a girl, you met a man, got married, and settled down. Of course there were exceptions, but—" she reached up and smoothed a stray lock of Evelyn's dark hair from off her forehead, "you're a pretty girl, Evie, there's no reason to stay alone if you don't want to."

Evelyn had shrugged her shoulders: "It's not so much a matter of being pretty or not. Things are just different, Mom. People don't get married so easy as they used to. Not even the Church guys. You've got to find someone whose conversation isn't boresville and who likes your kind of jokes and whose kisses get you. You know, connection."

"Men and women are two different kinds of people, Ev. Closeness comes with years."

"I guess," Evelyn said and threw a moldy pod quickly into the sink. She brushed at her hands nervously and flushed them under the faucet. "I hate mold. It makes me sick."

"You should be thankful for mold," her mother said mildly. "Before penicillin a sore throat could turn into heart trouble. My father's sister died of rheumatic fever at thirty-two. Left three children."

"Mom, didn't you feel something when you married Daddy like what I was saying?"

"Oh, I don't know, I suppose so," her mother replied, shelling another pod. "It seemed like the thing to do at the time."

Evelyn didn't say anything more but watched from the corner of her eye the picture her mother's soft hands were as they broke open pod after pod in perfect rhythm. Maybe her mother had shelled a hundred thousand peas in her life. Evelyn wanted to take a photo of it, but then she thought, strangely, only a moving picture would do. She had never taken a movie of anything, except the home movies she and her father had taken when she was a teenager with the camera Uncle Vernon's family once gave them for no reason at all, not Christmas or anything.

She stopped for a drink at a white porcelain fountain in the terminal.

"Evelyn!" a voice called from the crowd. She turned

and saw Harriet Aldis, her parents' neighbor two doors down, weaving toward her. "I'm so glad I've caught you, I thought sure I was too late," she said breathlessly.

"Sister Aldis," Evelyn said.

"Your mother told me you were going to take a taxi home and I know she always gives your grandma her shot and does her shopping for her Tuesday afternoons or I would have brought her along. I just couldn't have you flying in at a time like this with nobody here to meet you."

"That's very nice of you, Sister Aldis," Evelyn said, looking past the woman's right ear to the shifting colors and plaids that were people walking down the hallway.

They collected Evelyn's luggage, a make-up case and a suitcase. Sister Aldis insisted on carrying the suitcase. She'd left her car illegally parked in the loading zone. It had a ticket on it which she snatched from the windshield and stuffed in her pocket. Evelyn knew better than to ask to pay for the ticket, so she pretended not to have seen it, like Sister Aldis planned. When they got into the car they didn't say anything for a minute. Finally, Sister Aldis turned to her at a stoplight and asked earnestly, "How *are* you, Evelyn?"

Evelyn had her window rolled down and was waving her hand slowly alongside the car in the cool March air. She said, "It's lovely for a funeral. I hope Thursday is like this."

"Bob Welti says fair until Friday." She paused, then said in an encouraging let's-*really*-talk voice, "We've been worried for you, the ladies on the block, in the ward. We know how close you were to your father."

Evelyn had known Sister Aldis since she was three years old. The woman used to give her jam tarts just because Evelyn had been skating in front of her house. She had three sons, but no daughters. She was ten years younger than Evelyn's mother, who was nearly sixty-four. She'd helped sew the organdy gown Evelyn wore to her high school graduation at the Capitol Rotunda.

Evelyn didn't say anything. The air was like breath against her fingertips. She smiled an odd smile when she thought about a day of her visit last summer: she'd been helping her mother change the sheets on her father's hospital bed that was set up in the den. It had been in the den for four years. Her father had started a series of strokes a long time ago; five years was a long time. Finally, he talked all slurry, and he couldn't walk at all, or feed himself, or bathe, or dress. Her mother had to diaper him. (She was a licensed practical nurse.) The strokes took his mind too. But her mother wouldn't put him in a nursing home no matter how anybody argued with her. "He is my husband," was all she said. That day last summer his head had been especially bad, and he'd shouted nonsense words at them as they rolled him from side to side, and then in his awful mushy voice he'd begun to curse her mother. Evelyn heard the words "whore" and "rutting." She slapped him as hard as she could in the face. He stopped and began to weep. Her mother said, "Evelyn, leave this room now." When her mother had finished making the bed, she came from the room and closed the door behind her. She said in a strange high voice as she passed Evelyn who was crouched against the wall, "How dare you strike your father."

"That's the way," Sister Aldis said, glancing over at Evelyn at a stopsign. "Cry it out, Evie."

Evelyn smiled and shook her head. It seemed funny to her that she was crying again and hadn't known it. "I'm really very happy," she said. "Daddy's been dead such a long time, don't you see?"

Sister Aldis said "The strokes took a terrible toll, didn't they?"

Evelyn wiped the tears from her face with the sleeve of her blouse. She didn't answer. After a minute, she said, "I wonder if the Relief Society has brought brownies over yet. Mom's probably gotten a month's supply of tuna casseroles by now, but I hope they've brought brownies. I feel like eating a brownie even if it does make my skin break out."

"Food can be a comfort, can't it?" Sister Aldis smiled a sad smile.

"I have a friend in California who says the Holy Ghost should be made of chocolate."

They drove the rest of the way in silence.

Evelyn walked into the house alone (it wasn't locked). She squeezed her eyes together, grinning suddenly at the peculiar Greening-family smell. She set her cases down. There was a hello note from her mother stuck to the refrigerator with a chipped tomato-shaped magnet that Evelyn had made in a Beehive class sixteen, no seventeen, years ago. She'd painted it red with a green stem and had given it with a matching zucchini magnet to her mother for mother's day. The zucchini wasn't there anymore. The telephone rang. She didn't answer it. It rang seven times. Last week she'd called Kirk at her apartment. He was staying there to feed Catface while Evelyn was on a job in Las Vegas, which he called outer darkness. A recording had come on the line, very manikin-y sounding: The number you have reached has been disconnected. Maybe she forgot to pay the bill, or maybe she dialed wrong, it didn't matter: Kirk probably knew by then that Claudia hated tuna Friskies and would only eat the Purina liver yuk in the cupboard.

It was weird though to call your house and have a manikin answer the phone and say that. She wondered what it would be like to not connect the phone again: now *that* would be outer darkness, living there on the cliff not even being able to wonder if some guy she went out with last Friday was going to call again, because he couldn't call at all. He probably wouldn't have anyway. Her romances usually lasted about two dates. She ran her hand over the yellow formica countertop her mother put in three years ago. Most of the girls she worked with went with guys for three months, six months, a year even. They slept with them, but eventually they broke up for whatever reasons and moved on to someone else. Doug and Lil, two people at the agency, had gotten married last month, but they'd lived together for three years and had a son named Nathaniel which meant "guileless" and that they were into honesty. Lil had had sex with some other guy last year. She told Evelyn about it and that Doug was real cool, whatever she wanted to do was okay. Evelyn thought that had to be bull: Doug probably wanted to punch the other guy out. She said so. Lil didn't talk to her as much after that. Evelyn didn't know if it was bull or not.

The couples she knew bumped into each other like

people at a rock 'n roll dance. The band might play a while, but sooner or later you bumped hips with someone else and that was it, a new song started, if you could call it a song, and you went jerking to a new beat. Evelyn walked from the kitchen into the living room. She ran her fingers over a few piano keys; they made dissonant tinkling sounds. None of the men and women she knew ever seemed to take hold of hands or rest an arm around their partner's waist or fall into a flowing kind of step together. People didn't waltz anymore. Her parents used to go dancing at the Terrace Ballroom every Tuesday night when she was young. Her mother wore long chiffon gowns. Evelyn's favorite had been lavender with a lace-tucked bodice. None of her friends in California knew turn and counter-turn and stand and touch, except maybe some of the couples who'd introduced themselves after sacrament meetings at the Mar Vista Ward.

She leaned her face up against the living room wall and looked at the companion portraits of her mother and father above the piano. She whispered, "I knew a woman lovely in her bones..." Her father had first read her that Roethke poem, years ago. He'd been an English instructor at East High School before he started the garden business which made him money. Before the strokes, when he didn't know Evelyn was there, she used to watch him sometimes while he watched her plump, soft, well-intentioned mother. He was a slow sort of man really. Tired from work in the greenhouses, his eyes would wander lazily over his wife's swaying frame as she kneaded bread dough or rolled out cookies, the late afternoon light playing on her pale wrists and floury hands. (Her father didn't count eternity in days or hours: Evelyn knew by watching him how her father measured time). When she was younger she had known she wanted to get married.

But now there were other things: there were pictures to take for stores like The Broadway—she'd done an ad that was in *Vogue* magazine; there were theatre-of-the-absurd plays to go to in Hollywood, and nightclubs—she took hits off anybody's joint if she was in the mood, which she usually wasn't (a joint got passed in a circle sometimes halfway around a club); there were sailboats at the Marina, she'd taken a class, the wind off the water stung your face with salt, and tangled your hair; there was listening to Kirk play clarinet, jazzy, at two in the morning; there were Church things even—she hadn't accepted a calling but once they asked her to play an organ solo in sacrament meeting, she played "Ave Maria," badly, and she wondered how they knew she played organ. But she could no longer imagine herself cleaning the soiled collars of a man's shirts with an old toothbrush and bleach, or making up goofy stories for kids sick in bed like her mother used to do for her and Reuben. Evelyn once put a match under the thermometer to fake a fever so she could stay home and be sick; her mother made being sick like a vacation. She ended up breaking the thermometer and having to dust the living room twice a week for a month to pay for a new one.

"When're you going to stop being so weird?" Kirk once asked. "A Mormon un-Mormon" he'd called her, warning that if she didn't go one way or the other she

was going to get spewed for being lukewarm. (Kirk said you could send shirts to the Chinese laundry.) "At least I'm in," he'd said, "Church and all, even if I'm wishing half the time I was out."

She'd answered, "Maybe it's not a question of in or out, but out or outer."

"I think that's probably shit," he replied, "but let me think about it."

She'd thought, if you think you're *in*, Kirk, you're so far out you don't know what in is. But she could be wrong about that: Kirk attended ward dinners and paid tithing and budget and was a fanatic to do his home teaching, and he believed. All those family sort of people he sat through choir practice and Sunday School with believed too, in Jesus, the Book of Mormon, main things. When Kirk broke his femur bone and had to be in traction in St. John's Hospital for a month, the Bishop's first counselor and a priest brought him the sacrament every Sunday; they blessed it right there with the curtains pulled in a circle around Kirk's bed.

After that conversation Kirk started calling her Ms. Spew. And she decided to give out (or *outer*, whichever) a harder try. The reason she hardly ever had more than two dates with a guy was because she didn't sleep around, at all. She didn't think it was conviction that stopped her—(but could a person ever really lose the fear of God?)—so why not let somebody touch her? Maybe she would make love. Maybe for a minute at least it would make her feel like she was a cog in some bigger motor than herself. But it didn't. It wasn't a very long time before, one night when she had a man in her room and the moon in blue slits through the matchstick blinds, she decided to quit trying: it was raining out and she said, "Oh God, I think I felt the house slip!" Then she pulled on her T-shirt and ran outside to look at the stilts. She did that because a man you met at work or in town or out on a job could be so close to you in your room like that, and then he would get up and dress, maybe stay for breakfast, maybe not, and then go back to his own place. Maybe, probably, he would call again, but it wasn't like he moved to the sway of you, not really. He wasn't a part of your life like your cat or your car even, but just something that happened sometimes. To have somebody be so close one minute and the next minute so gone-away was as weird as calling your house and having a manikin say "The number you have reached has been disconnected."

She laid down on her parents' sofa, careful to kick her shoes off before putting her feet up. The tweed upholstery was a familiar scratch against her face; they'd had that couch since Evelyn was nine years old. She curled her hands over her head. She wondered if she had been rude to Sister Aldis. She couldn't remember now what she had said. Maybe something funny. She wished she could remember it to laugh. People in grief were supposed to act strangely so it didn't matter. Probably nothing mattered. Cynical. She fell asleep.

IT was a fragrance that woke her, lilac water that her mother had always worn, a gentle misty odor that hovered round her like an aura; Evelyn had been fifteen before she realized it was a smell her mother put in her bath water and in sachets in her temple garment drawer rather than something that was her mother's

self. She opened her eyes. Her mother sat in the rocker just next to the sofa.

Evelyn reached out a hand to her: "Why didn't you tell me you were home?"

"You looked so comfortable and tired I thought I'd let you rest a bit; no matter, I've enjoyed just sitting here looking at my girl."

Evelyn took her mother's hand and kissed the palm. She was drowsy and everything seemed so soft and familiar and safe; it was almost like her daddy might come into the living room with an issue of the *Improvement Era* or a copy of Charles Dickens to read out loud to them like he used to when she was a girl on Sundays. Her daddy. The sleep fell out of her brain at the thought of him. He'd started dying five years ago, just eleven months after she moved away to California, and he'd gotten deader and deader with every stroke, his real self going further and further away, lost out there somewhere—actually *in* there—deep, deep inside himself in a place where blood stopped and the intricate lacework of capillaries broke apart.

Evelyn sat up, "How are you, Mom?"

"We've known it was coming for a long time, haven't we Evie. It's over now." She pressed her fingers round Evelyn's hand. They didn't say anything for a moment. "Are you hungry, Ev? Why don't we get dinner. Vivian Bramwell dropped a chicken casserole by earlier."

"Okay."

It was strange when people died; other people just went on the same, sleeping and touching each other and eating. She walked into the kitchen with her mother.

"Rube and Deidre might stop by later with the kids, or tomorrow if they get tied up," her mother said.

"How's Wanda?" Wanda was her brother and sister-in-law's six year old foster daughter whom they'd had for five months and who had "emotional problems."

"She's stopped biting Joey and doesn't shirk her chores—they have her feed the rabbits, and she even says prayers at meals. They're really thrilled. They may adopt if things work out."

"That'd be nice for them." Her brother and his wife had gotten married in the Salt Lake Temple eight years ago, just two months after he got home from his mission to Argentina. They'd planned on having "at least five kids, maybe seven," but Deidre never got pregnant. They found out she couldn't. So they put in to adopt, but it was hard to get an infant. They'd had three different foster children. Joey was a part-Chicano boy they'd finally adopted two years ago. Now there was Wanda. Deidre didn't work, though they could use the money. She did tole painting and macrame which she sold occasionally. At lunch once, Evelyn told a secretary from the agency about them, and the girl, who had an eight year old son, had almost choked on a carrot stick: a kid of your own was hard enough to do, but taking on a bunch of other people's too?—it didn't make sense.

"Bottled green beans sound all right?" her mother asked.

"Sure. In the pantry or downstairs?"

"There ought to be a jar up here."

Evelyn went to the pantry. The shelves were lined with cans of Campbell's tomato and chicken noodle soups and quarts and pints of home preserved

vegetables and fruits, corn, stringbeans, peas, pears, and apricots.

"How many did you do last summer?" Evelyn asked. She couldn't count all the summer mornings she'd spent as a girl helping her mother bottle produce from their large kitchen garden and fruit from the trees in Grandma's yard. Even when finances got better and they didn't have to watch every dime her mother still canned her own fruits and vegetables. Evelyn ate a lot of Stouffer's or Weight Watcher's TV dinners now, but mostly she went out to eat, unless Kirk came over and cooked.

"Not too many this year," her mother answered, "with Dad so bad. Seventy-five quarts maybe, I don't really know." After a morning bottling pears, Evelyn had liked to look at the summer sunlight pouring over the gleaming jars of pale yellow fruit that stood row upon row on the kitchen table.

Evelyn opened the bottle of beans and put them in a pan to heat. Without thinking, she got out place mats (Deidre had made them), everyday dishes, silver, and glasses, and began to set the table. Her mother had a Kerr jar with two red tulips growing in it on the table. That was a trick of her mom's—she planted flower bulbs in jars and cans each fall and put them in the extra refrigerator downstairs. After six weeks, she'd bring one up every week or so and the family had spring flowers on the table all through winter.

"That's the last of them for this year," her mother said, noticing Evelyn's look at the flowers.

"Table looks nice," Evelyn said. In California she ate off of paper plates half the time because she hated to do dishes. She was going to buy a dishwasher one of these days. It was different being here in the kitchen with her mother. Evelyn looked at her wiping her age-spotted hands gently on her green-sprigged apron. The cloth was faded with washings. When she bent to open a cupboard the apron moved with her body.

The telephone rang. This time Evelyn picked up the receiver. "Hello?" she said, "This is Evelyn speaking."

"You're still answering the phone that way—" her friend Andrea's voice came from the other end.

"Andrea? No, I don't, it—Hi Andrea." Her mom had always insisted she and Reuben and their dad answer the phone like that. Back in Los Angeles, nowadays, she always just said "Hi."

"Hello Evelyn. It's *good* to hear you again." Evelyn had known Andrea practically all her life. They'd been best friends all through junior high and high school. She had married several years back in the Manti temple. Her husband was finishing a residency in child oncology at the University Medical Center. They had a sixteen-month-old daughter. Andrea had graduated from the Y in voice and had done a Master's in pedagogy at the U. "How are you doing, Evie? I was sorry to hear about your dad."

"Don't be," Evelyn said. "You know how he was."

"Yeah, I know. Sometimes it can be for the best." She paused. "Are you going to be busy tonight? John and I have to leave for back east for a conference tomorrow. I feel terrible we're going to miss the funeral, but I want to see you before we go. Who knows how long it'll be till you're up again."

"Reuben may come by, but don't worry about that. Mom and I are just getting dinner. Anytime after that is okay."

"Good. Well, I won't keep you now. See you in a bit. Bye, Evie."

"Bye, Andrea."

"It'll be good for you to see Andrea and an old friend or two while you're here," her mother said. "I was hoping she'd call."

"Andrea's okay, but I don't really care to see anybody else, Mom."

"Oh Evelyn, that's not the way to pick yourself up, honey."

"I don't need picking up; it'd just be weird with Shelley and Chris and the girls is all."

"What could be weird about being with friends? Why you've known those kids since you were in pigtails practically."

"That's just it. I don't braid my hair anymore."

"I don't understand that. What's a remark like that mean?"

"Nothing, I guess, but could you play it low if any of them call? I'm not up to seeing anybody, tell them whatever you want, I don't care." Evelyn sat down at the table. She stared out a window pane in the kitchen nook. There was a smooth stone in the center of the back lawn, a round grey rock matted and framed in bristly green. Where did it come from to get there like that? "Would you hand me my camera, Mom? It's by the door."

AT dinner they talked: "Phylis Sinclair in the ward, she has a son in law school down at San Diego, Evie. I met him last month when he was up for his dad's seventieth birthday. Nice looking boy. Returned missionary. Good to his parents. Phylis and I both thought, well—"

"I don't need dates, Mom. And I doubt I'm the kind of girl that would appeal to him."

"Evelyn, why shouldn't you ap—"

"I drink coffee," her voice was flip. She saw her mother's face fall. "Only once in a while to stay awake on a night job. I figured taking Excedrin for the caffeine was silly, so why not. Oh god, that was a dumb thing to say. Lawyers never like me, Mom, that's why I wouldn't appeal."

"I never heard your dad take the Lord's name in vain in all his life."

She had said another dumb thing. "Dad was amazing, wasn't he? Even with his temper he never did that." She picked at her string beans, moving them one by one across her plate to make a new pile. Her dad, when he was younger, could be yelling and cussing one minute and laughing the next. His angers never took root; they just blew away, and even when he was on fire he never struck Evelyn or Reuben or their mother or said vicious kinds of things. "Is Larkin's taking care of Dad?"

"Yes. They've buried all our dead for over twenty years now."

Evelyn ate a stringbean and set her fork down with a clatter on her plate.

"Evelyn, you've hardly touched your food. You've got to eat, honey, you're thin as air. Don't you get enough to eat out there in California?"

"I like being thin."

"When I was a girl, men liked it if a woman had a little flesh on her. I don't understand all this dieting and anorexia you hear about on the talk shows these days."

Evelyn didn't say anything. The only thing she'd eaten of the chicken casserole on her plate was the potato chip crumbs sprinkled on top.

Her mother ate for a moment, silent. Then, softly, she said, "It's the gospel that gives comfort in grief, Evie." She paused. "I know how it's hurt you with Dad being sick for so long, but you can't let hurt keep you from the only thing that'll help it. He's still ours, Evelyn. You know that don't you?"

"I don't know what I know. Not anymore."

"You've been slipping from the Church."

Evelyn was silent.

"I've known that for a long time; did you think you could hide a thing like that from me?"

"Does it matter what I think?" She wondered what the dictionary definition of "matter" was.

"But do you attend your meetings, sometimes?"

"Sacrament. The others are too early."

"You used to read the scriptures in the mornings down at the Y. I remember you telling me how you enjoyed the Bible."

"The Bible has had a bigger impact on Western civilization than any other book." She didn't mean to sound like that.

"You know, while Dad was so ill this past year, sometimes I would read him passages from the scriptures for an hour afternoons. I don't know how much he could hear or understand, his mind so bad as it was, but I read. He'd always liked Third Nephi in the Book of Mormon, and Revelations. It was the parts about the Holy City and all those gates with the pretty stones he liked in Revelations. I must've read him about the Holy City seven times. I thought that just to have the words around him in the air would somehow be a comfort. Now wasn't that a funny sort of thing to think?"

"No, Mom, that wasn't a funny thing at all to think." A tear fell onto her plate into the neat pile of beans she was staring down at. She realized she was crying again.

"Evelyn."

The doorbell rang. That would be Andrea.

"Could you get it, Mom?" She hurried past her mother. She locked herself in the bathroom and filled the basin with cold water. She splashed it in her eyes. She dried her face then pinched her cheeks for color. She blew her nose. She walked into the hall toward the entryway. Andrea stood by her mother holding her sleeping daughter in her arms.

"Sorry I had to bring Abbie," she said to Evelyn, "but John got called to the hospital on an emergency, meningitis maybe. I don't think she'll even wake up though. She didn't nap today."

"Oh I'm glad to see her," Evelyn said. "She's gotten huge."

"What's it been? A year since you saw her last? They grow fast. I look at her sometimes and think, Oh stop, stop, you're still my baby, don't turn into a kindergartener yet."

"I don't think you have to worry about that for a while. Why don't we sit out on the porch steps? The evening is

so mild."

"There's a wonderful sunset."

"Salt Lake always has great sunsets." They stepped outside.

"You girls enjoy yourselves. Don't worry about the dishes, Evie."

They chatted about nothing for a minute, then Andrea, who sat rocking Abbie slowly with her whole body, said, "What do you do these days, besides work and all? Are you seeing anybody?"

"Oh, I go out now and then with a few guys, nothing serious. I go to a lot of plays and things, movies. I spent the weekend with a couple friends from the office who own a houseboat off Catalina a while ago." She picked at a chip in her clear nail polish. "Kirk and I spend a lot of time goofing around together. We went up to Big Sur three months back. Fantastic. I found this terrific abalone shell. You've got to see the Monterey coast sometime. Make John take you when he finally starts bringing in the bucks. I can't believe a person could get to be thirty years old and not have seen the California coast."

"I bet it's beautiful."

"Yeah. There's a ton of stuff to do out there. I couldn't get bored if I tried."

Andrea asked quietly, "Do you ever wish Kirk wasn't how he is? You know, could you go for him?" (Andrea had never laughed about Kirk's being inert with women.)

Evelyn scrunched up her nose and stared across the street at Sister Judd sweeping her walk. Sister Judd must have swept that walk every clear evening for thirty years. "We have good times together. I just never think of him like that. He's pretty straight Mormon."

"Did you quit believing?"

Evelyn ran her palm against the cool cement of the porch. "I thought I did for a while, long time ago. I was mad about Dad." The concrete was smooth and grey beneath her fingers.

Andrea pressed her daughter closer with a quick movement and said, "Yeah, I know. Pretty bad."

Evelyn leaned forward and put her forehead against her knees: "But how can you quit? The Angel Moroni and all that stuff, it's too bizarre for anybody to have made up." She curled her arms around her shins. "Or maybe it's just something that if it gets written in you before age two, it's impossible to get rid of." She paused.

Andrea said, "So?"

Evelyn sat upright: "So I don't care all that much anymore. It's dull. There's something in me that can't let go, but I don't have the energy for it or something. Believing takes a lot out of you, and the returns don't seem all that hot. Boring, I guess. I have a lot of things to do."

"Houseboat kind of things?"

Evelyn laughed, "Yeah, yeah, and don't forget abalone shells—superficial, that's me."

"I didn't mean it like that."

"I know. I'm sorry. So how's life with John anyway?"

Andrea paused and looked at her for a minute, then said, "We get along. Nice. Abbie's fun sometimes, a lot of trouble too. I don't sing as much as I used to, just for Church once in a while. It's good though. I might start

teaching voice again; we've got a great music room in the basement." She pressed her lips against her sleeping child's forehead and fingered the toddler's fine blonde curls.

The phone rang inside the house. After a moment, Evelyn's mother came out and said, "It's for you Andrea. It's John."

"Will you hold her a minute?" She handed Abbie to Evelyn, then went into the house. The child stirred and Evelyn began to rock her like Andrea had done. She blew air through Abbie's downy hair. When was the last time she had held an infant? A pale memory of herself and her father shimmered now in her mind: he stood beneath the limbs of an apricot tree, or apple. Evelyn thought it was the day of her second birthday; he held her on his shoulders—her legs straddling his neck, his big hands tight round her ankles. Pick one, reach up, he said, and pick one. But Evelyn wound her arms about his head and pressed her face into his rough black hair. He wore her like a helmet as he walked back across the grass. When she was older, he let her ride piggyback. She would hold onto his shirt and fling her head back to the air. Then she was too big for that, and sometimes he held her hand as they walked to Church or even when they crossed the lawn to check the mailbox on Saturdays. He touched her arm or shoulder only once in a while when she was grown. Evelyn reached for Abbie's curled hand. She pulled one finger straight. The tiny nail looked like something to kiss. She thought she and Abbie would make a good photograph at that minute, but there was no way to take it of herself without equipment. That was too bad. It would have been something to look at. It would have been.

"John left an important case history home," Andrea said, letting the screen door swing shut behind her. "I've got to whiz it up to him. Sorry I can't stay, Ev. I'd have liked to talk longer. Really, I would."

"That's all right. You know what an arch-forgetter I am so I know how he's probably feeling right now." She lifted Abbie up to Andrea. "Take care in Washington or New York or wherever you're going."

"Maryland."

"Pretty there."

"That's what we've heard. When do you take off for L.A.?"

"Sunday."

"We won't be back. Write me, won't you? Please? Let me know what's up and stuff. I wish I could be here Thursday."

"I'm fine. Don't worry about it. See you, Ann. Now hurry so your man doesn't get hell or whatever doctors get when they do something bad."

Andrea laughed and waved as she crossed the walk to her VW station wagon. She loaded Abbie into the back and propped some pillows around her. "Bye, Evie. Don't stay away too long this time, okay?"

"Sure," Evelyn said. She turned and went into the house.

She took her suitcases down the hall to her old bedroom. On her way back out to the kitchen she passed the den. She stopped and leaned her head against the doorframe. Her father's hospital bed was flat and pushed into a corner. Her mother had dozens of old family

photos taped to the walls so that he'd been able to look at them. They'd have to all be re-pasted in the photo albums she'd taken them from. There was also a cheap framed print of Christ she'd probably gotten at Deseret Book. "Deseret Book" Evelyn had once called it to Kirk, "where one can breathe deep of a lot of hot air." She didn't mean that completely, but it sounded funny. She'd say about anything for a laugh. She walked into the den and sat down on the bed. There was only a plastic mattress cover on it. When she was little she'd always wanted a hospital bed because it would have electric controls and you could put it into a lot of different positions. The people from Robinson's Medical Mart would probably come and take this one away tomorrow or next week.

"It wasn't such a bad room for him to be in all that time," her mother said, entering the den.

"No, Mom. It's a nice room. You did a good job fixing it up."

"I tried to do as best I knew how."

"That's all you can do." A sudden wave of lilac water cologne washed over her.

"He died, here in this bed, you know."

Evelyn said quietly, "He couldn't die, not with you here reading him Third Nephi and Revelation." Her mother didn't say anything; she stood near. Evelyn closed her eyes and breathed deep the lilac smell. "He just went to another place is all," she whispered.

"Now that's my Evelyn talking. It all goes on and on, doesn't it?"

"It can, I feel. Sometimes I feel." For a minute she forgot she lived in Los Angeles; the City of Fallen Angels Joni Mitchell called it. She lived here, on Sixth Avenue and C Street. She had always lived here. She let her body fall slowly to one side. Her cheek pressed against the plastic cover.

"Tired, Evie?"

"Uh huh."

"I wish you wouldn't push yourself so hard with that job."

"I like taking pictures."

"I know. I just mean slow down a bit. What are pictures, after all?"

"Things to look at," Evelyn murmured, "like Daddy looked at the pictures all taped to these walls." There were pictures of her grandparents and their parents and of her and Reuben and their mother and of the houses they'd all lived in and the Christmas trees they'd had, most of the pictures taken on an old Brownie camera or a Kodac Instamatic. At her job, Evelyn took pictures of china, and liquor bottles, and gamerooms in hotels, things like that. "Last week, I photographed wood-inlaid backgammon boards," she said. The lilac smell was faded now, suddenly, like it had come.

"Remember how I used to rub your feet? Would you like me to give you a foot massage, Evie? I think it might help you relax." Evelyn didn't answer. "I've got some Alpha Keri right here in the closet." Her mother went to the closet and got the lotion. She sat down at the end of the bed. "Stretch out now, and let me have your feet in my lap." Evelyn did as she was told. Her mother unbuckled her sandals and slipped them from her feet. She wasn't wearing socks or nylons. "I gave Dad a good

rubdown every night with the Alpha Keri. A good rubbing is a comfort."

Evelyn thought of the chocolate Holy Ghost and laughed against the plastic.

"What's my girl laughing at?" her mother smiled as she began massaging the sole of Evelyn's foot.

"Do you think chocolate is a comfort, Mom? Why don't we get a big box of Mrs. Cavanaugh's chocolates to have here in the house? Can we?"

"Why of course we can, anything you want. Maybe that'll put some appetite back into you." Her mother rubbed her feet for five minutes and she and Evelyn didn't talk. It was like her mother's hands massaged nerves all the way up Evelyn's legs and spine and into her head. There was the slow liquid feeling of lilac water smell again. It seeped into her feet and rolled through her calves and thighs and into her body. "Are you going to go back to nursing, Mom?" she asked softly, her eyes closed.

"Oh, maybe a day or so a week, up at LDS like I did before Dad took sick. I'll have more time for Grandma now, and Reuben and his. I guess I'll be busy enough if that's what you're wondering." She massaged Evelyn's feet in the quiet dusk of the den. She said in a sad voice, "It's funny. I'll miss it, tending him and that. It was a time." Her hands were strong and soft against the soles of Evelyn's feet. Evelyn rolled from her side flat onto her back. She lay quietly while her mother worked. Her father was in her mind and then her mother.

"I didn't mean to think that," she said, strangely.

"What's that. Think what, Evie?"

She didn't answer. She had thought as she lay there of her friend Mona's analyst, and how Mona had said she laid on a couch when she went to him. Mona had gone to Dr. Lloyd for two years twice a week. Now Mona knew almost how every part of herself worked; she'd talked through herself piece by piece. What Evelyn had thought was a funny thought—that her mother could put a sign in the living room window: FOOT SHRINK \$60/hr. Nobody that came to her mother would have to say anything at all. But she didn't mean to think that because it was a strange disconnected kind of thought to be having right now; it didn't fit with what she was feeling at all, but she laughed anyway. She couldn't help it. Her eyes were open, and she stared at a tiny tan-colored spider crawling upside-down across the ceiling: how did a spider do that? Crawl upside down with nothing to hold onto, but not fall off? She felt a wetness, a tiny line, run down her right temple and to her ear. She knew in the darkness the tears made silverish paths down her temples.

"Where's my girl?" she heard her mother's worried voice. "What does she want? Is it her dad?"

Evelyn closed her eyes and felt the heaviness of her head against the flat, plastic-covered mattress. "No, I don't know. Maybe I want to be home."

"Of course you do, Evie," her mother said quietly, "and you will be after Sunday. It's natural to be out of kilter when you're not in your place you live."

"I know," Evelyn said. There was a kind of graveness in her voice.

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