

FAMILY

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

By Eric Samuelsen



CHARACTERS

The Hull Family

CRAIG HULL . . . also DAD, early fifties.
 MELINDA HULL . . . also MOM, in her late forties
 ASHLEY HULL JARVIS . . . 27, newly married
 DEANNA HULL . . . 24, R.M., in graduate school
 JACK HULL . . . 19, on a mission
 CARLA HULL . . . 16, in high school

And, the Visiting Teachers

SISTER DAWES
 SISTER SWANSON

CAST

Family was first presented by the Brigham Young University Department of Theatre and Film in the Margetts Theatre, 2–19 March 2005. It was directed by David Morgan.

The original cast was:

CRAIG HULL . . . Ward Wright
 MELINDA HULL . . . Tracey Woolley
 ASHLEY HULL JARVIS . . . Hollie Bellows
 DEANNA HULL . . . Renny Richmond
 JACK HULL . . . Slate Holmgren
 CARLA HULL . . . Michelle L. Hales
 SISTER DAWES . . . Denise Cutliff
 SISTER SWANSON . . . Bryn M. Fairclough

AUTHOR'S NOTE

YEARS AGO, I wrote *Accommodations*, a play about a somewhat dysfunctional LDS family where maybe one or two finally get their act together. In early 2003, I decided to experiment with a play about a more functional family, one in which the whole family is the protagonist. My own kids are becoming adults, ready to be out on their own, and I'm discovering that it is at this point that a family is really forced to redefine itself. So I thought I'd create a more positive family and focus on issues in LDS culture which could unsettle such a family.

We Latter-day Saints idealize families and family values, yet we don't often write about them very realistically. So I set up this play about people who pretty much feel they're ideal. They've decided who they are, they're settled, happy as is, finished thinking about themselves. But they don't realize that in order to move toward being Gods, which is the whole point, they have to constantly reinvent themselves, be reborn, re-think, re-decide.

And so the Hull family gets unsettled by real life, which of course includes disagreeing on trivial as well as important matters, getting on each other's nerves, giving no respect nor privacy, not letting anyone get away with posturing and pretentiousness, and yet somehow muddling through crises and coping with mistakes.

In *Family*, real life becomes a bad weekend for the well-educated, intellectual, gospel-grounded, well-to-do Hull family. One daughter has left her husband (whom she may or may not really have shot), a son has left his mission early, and another daughter, an R.M., has left graduate school. Not exactly ideal. And their dark space monologues reveal the reality they're in that they don't want to tell anyone and almost can't speak. Even the parents who burn the roast or buy the wrong salad have to re-decide who they are and what they mean to each other as individuals and within the family unit.

—ERIC SAMUELSEN

ERIC SAMUELSEN, Ph.D., is head of playwriting and screenwriting at BYU, where he has been on the faculty since 1992. This is his third play published in SUNSTONE (Gadianton, July 2001; Accommodations, June 1994). Sixteen of his plays have been produced professionally, and fundraising is underway for one, Peculiarities, to be turned into a film.



NOTE ON SCRIPT

A note about notation. In this play, a dash (—) indicates an interrupted line. An ellipsis (. . .) should suggest a pause, a line trailing off.

NOTE ON LOCATION

The play takes place in the Hull home, in San Jose, California. The time is late January 2003.

ACT ONE

Friday night and Saturday

(As the play opens, we see each of the members of the HULL family in spotlight pools. The music is Collective Soul: "I Tremble for Your Love, Always." DAD is reading a book, ASHLEY is dancing wildly, CARLA more wildly, DEANNA most wildly of all. JACK dances uncomfortably, sedately. MOM watches them all, troubled. As the song ends, lights up on the HULL living room. Sofa, coffee table, a bookcase, a piano. It's very nice. Off left is the kitchen and off right, the family room and other bedrooms and bathrooms. What we can see of both are very nice. Up some stairs is the master bedroom and two other bedrooms. All exceptionally nice, we gather, though we can't see them. Outside the HULL living room are a few Dark Spaces, poorly lit, barely visible. Lights up on MOM in her Dark Space.)

MOM: *(On a phone.)* Craig. Pick up. Pick up! No, I've already left a . . . Craig! You've got to come home, they just called from Jack's mission, they don't know where he is. *(Pause.)* I mean they don't know where he is. He's not with his companion, he's not anywhere they can—.

DAD: *(Enters his Dark Space on a cell phone, dialogue overlapping.)* AWOL? *(Pause.)* Because, you see, when you say he's AWOL, that implies a certain . . . *(Pause.)* Yes, President Garman, I am fully aware of the meaning of the acronym AWOL, which I would remind you is a military term, implying—.

MOM: *(Pushes a button on her phone.)* Sister Swanson, I'm just telling you what they told me, he apparently ditched his—.

DAD: My point is, President, I could be in San Diego in. . . *(Pause.)* No, look, I believe there are flights every two hours,

if not, I could drive it in about six. . . .

MOM: *(Phone.)* No, I still haven't heard anything. *(Pause.)* That really isn't necessary, Joan. *(Pause.)* Well, of course, but I don't want to be a . . . hang on, I've got a call on another line. . . . *(Pushes button on phone.)*

DEANNA: *(In her Dark Space, on a phone.)* Mom. Hi, it's me, Deanna. Uh, listen, I'm wondering if I could come home after all. School is, um . . . would that be all right?

DAD: *What?!?!?!?!?*

MOM: I just got off the phone with her, she called from one of those inflight phone—.

DAD: She's on a plane heading home *today*? *(Cell phone rings.)* Hang on, this might be—. *(Pushes button on phone.)* Craig Hull.

MOM: *(Pushes button on line.)* Joan, I do appreciate your concern, but. . .

DAD: *(On phone.)* So you're saying he *did* communicate with you?

MOM: I honestly do think that we. . .

DAD: Yes, all right, it's cryptic, but it would imply, would it not, that he's on his way here, home?

MOM: Yes, I suppose so. Come, I don't know what I'll have you do, but . . . Hang on. *(Pushes button on her phone.)* Bishop?

DAD: Yes, I'll certainly call you. *(Pushes a button on his phone, looks at it.)* Great, a message.

ASHLEY: *(In her Dark Space, on phone.)* Listen, Dad, I'm calling your cell because the home line's been busy. I'm just going to say this, I've left Steve, it's permanent, I'm coming home, I'll explain it all later. Look if you get this, can you pick me up? My flight arrives at, uh, three fifty-five, American Airlines, flight one eight nine. I'll wait by the baggage pickup, and if you're not there, I'll, I don't know, grab a cab. Something.

MOM: *What?!?!?!?*

DAD: You can hear it yourself.

MOM: And she left this just now? Today?

DAD: You can hear it yourself.

MOM: Unbelievable.

DAD: It's just an hour after Deanna's flight comes in, I'll get 'em both, I guess.

MOM: Ashley, *too*? *Today*?

DAD: It would seem so.

MOM: While you're out there, check on flights to San Diego.

DAD: I think he's coming home.
MOM: What did they tell you?
DAD: Apparently, he did communicate with them, left a message on the mission phone. Two words.
MOM: What did it say?
DAD: "I quit." *(Pause. DAD's cell rings. MOM jumps, then notices she's holding a phone.)*
MOM: I forgot, I've got the bishop on hold. *(Pushes a button.)*
Hi, Bishop, I'm so sorry, it's been quite the . . .
DAD: *(Answers phone.)* Craig Hull.
JACK: *(In his Dark Space, on phone.)* Dad, this is Jack. I'm at the airport. I'm home. *(Utterly depressed, he sits on his bag.)* I don't want to talk about it.
MOM: No, we don't know anything.
DAD: *(Cups phone, whispers.)* We do now.
(Lights up on DEANNA and JACK in separate Dark Spaces. MOM and DAD exit.)
DEANNA: Jack!
JACK: Deanna?
DEANNA: Jack. What in the world are you doing here?
JACK: I don't wanna talk about it.
DEANNA: You're supposed to be in San Diego, on your—.
JACK: I don't wanna talk about it.
DEANNA: Did you get sent home?
JACK: Dad'll be here soon. I just wanna tell everyone once, okay?
DEANNA: Whatever. *(Pause.)* Dude, what did you do?
JACK: Deanna. . . .
DEANNA: I mean, seriously, what did you—.
JACK: Aren't you supposed to be in Rhode Island? *(Pause.)*
DEANNA: I don't wanna talk about it.
JACK: What, did you flunk out?
DEANNA: Shut up. *(They look anywhere but at each other.)*
JACK: So, Dad's picking you up too, huh? Great.
DEANNA: We're supposed to keep an eye out for Ashley, too.
JACK: Ashley? Seriously?
DEANNA: Something about her leaving Steve.
JACK: No!
DEANNA: I don't know anything more.
JACK: Man.
DEANNA: Yeah.
JACK: Mom's freaking out, you know she is.
DEANNA: Yup.
(Lights down on them, up on the rest of house, doorbell rings, DAD sprints in, carrying his shoes.)
DAD: Honey, they're here.
MOM: *(Dashing down the stairs with an armload of fitted sheets, blankets.)* Why I ever agreed to let them come today of all days. . . . *(Shouts.)* Carla! *(Scurrying.)*
DAD: They're at the door.
MOM: I just have to. . . . *(And she's gone.)*
DAD: *(Slapping pockets.)* Keys, glasses, wallet. *(Checks the wallet.)* Honey? *(Doorbell rings again.)* Honey?
MOM: *(Off.)* Carla!
DAD: Look, do you have any cash?
MOM: *(Sprinting back on.)* I got it, I got it! *(Shouting upstairs.)*
Carla! *(To DAD.)* What?
DAD: Cash?
MOM: Don't you have your checkbook?
DAD: Airport parking.
MOM: Purse. *(DAD heads up the stairs. MOM does one quick dash around the living room.)* On the way, I need you to stop at the store and—.
DAD: I know, I know.
MOM: *(Shouts upstairs.)* Craig? *(Shouts downstairs.)* Carla? *(Sigh of frustration. Then, big smile, opens the door.)* They found him, he's okay.
SISTER SWANSON: Seriously? Oh, Melinda—.
SISTER DAWES: That's wonderful news!
MOM: Craig's going to get him now.
SISTER SWANSON: That's got to be such a relief.
SISTER DAWES: Absolutely.
MOM: It really is.
SISTER DAWES: Get him where?
MOM: The airport. Jack called us from San Jose Airport.
SISTER DAWES: So he's here, in San Jose?
MOM: Yes.
SISTER SWANSON: Well.
SISTER DAWES: Thank heavens, he's fine.
SISTER SWANSON: *(Another awkward pause.)* Do you know anything, what happened?
MOM: We don't really know much at this point.
SISTER DAWES: But you do know he's okay, he isn't hurt or . . . anything?
DAD: *(Enters.)* Honey, I couldn't find. . . . Oh, hi.
SISTER DAWES: Brother Hull.
DAD: Hello, sisters.
SISTER SWANSON: It sound like you've had some good news.
DAD: It's been a great relief. Good of you to come by.
SISTER DAWES: We had to. When we heard.
DAD: Yes indeed, very much appreciated. Melinda, did you need me to. . . ?
MOM: Just while you're out, something to go with the roast tonight.
DAD: There wasn't cash in your. . . . Never mind, I'll hit an ATM. Pasta salad, maybe, rolls?
MOM: Something suitable for company. The pasta salad, uh. . . . *(Lots of head and eye gestures.)*
DAD: *(Not sure, but okay.)* Right. *(He exits, out the door. Another awkward pause.)*
MOM: I do appreciate you being here for us, today.
SISTER DAWES: It's just pure chance we happened to call.
SISTER SWANSON: I was just calling to set up our usual visit, and I catch you in the middle of this, uh . . .
SISTER DAWES: Well, we obviously had to come by. We're just five minutes away, it was no trouble.
MOM: No.
SISTER SWANSON: But at least the news is good. That's what's important.
MOM: Yes.
SISTER DAWES: Not much to do but wait, I suppose.
MOM: No.



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pparently, he did communicate with them, left a message on the mission phone. Two words: "I quit."

SISTER SWANSON: Well. Perhaps we should begin our usual . . .
(With a look at SISTER DAWES.)

SISTER DAWES: It's really up to you, Melinda. Do you want a lesson? Company?

MOM: As a matter of fact, just some company would be welcome.

SISTER DAWES: Not a problem.

SISTER SWANSON: Well, I can only just imagine what you've been going through. Every single day that Charlie was out, I worried.

SISTER DAWES: I remember that.

SISTER SWANSON: I knew Australia was safe enough. But you know how it is, he's still your child, and he's on the other side of the world.

MOM: That's exactly right. I mean, Jack's been in San Diego, six hours drive.

SISTER SWANSON: But you worry. Every day.

MOM: Exactly.

SISTER DAWES: And you've been through it once, with Deanna.

MOM: That's right.

SISTER DAWES: Well. Why don't you catch us up? How's Deanna? I notice she didn't come home for Christmas.

MOM: None of the kids did this year, actually. Well, Jack is on his mission, of course. . . .

SISTER SWANSON: Of course.

MOM: Yes. (Pause.) No, Steve and Ashley spent the holidays with his family this year, in Montana. And Deanna . . . wasn't able to make it either.

SISTER DAWES: What a shame. To spend Christmas alone.

MOM: She felt she needed to work, she had a chance to pick up some extra shifts. (Explaining further.) The institute at Brown

had a special Christmas celebration together, so she was with friends.

SISTER DAWES: Brown is where, I know you told us, but. . . ?

MOM: Rhode Island.

SISTER SWANSON: That's right. And what was her field again?

MOM: An odd field, actually. Brown's one of the few schools in the country to offer a grad program in it. History of mathematics.

SISTER DAWES: Wow. History and Math. That sounds so . . . daunting.

MOM: Well, it's what she loves.

SISTER SWANSON: Still, I'm sure you missed her.

MOM: Yes. (Another pause.) Listen, sisters, I do appreciate you coming. (She stands.)

SISTER SWANSON: Well, we just thought it was the least we could do.

SISTER DAWES: But we mustn't outstay our welcome either. Joan, perhaps we should . . .

SISTER SWANSON: (Gets it.) Oh, yes. I'm sorry, of course.

MOM: Thanks so much, as always.

SISTER DAWES: Well, what's important is that Jack is safe. That's what matters.

MOM: Yes. That's true.

(The SISTERS prepare to leave. Enter CARLA.)

SISTER SWANSON: And here's Carla.

MOM: Carla. Jack's okay, he just called Dad from the airport.

CARLA: That's a relief.

MOM: It really is.

CARLA: What happened?

MOM: We don't know. Just that's he's okay, your dad's gone to get him.

CARLA: Man. Scary day, huh. Hey, Sister Dawes.

SISTER DAWES: I was hoping you'd say hello. (She gives CARLA a hug.) Are you okay?

CARLA: A little freaked out is all.

SISTER DAWES: We were all a little freaked out.

CARLA: So, Mom, did you need something?

MOM: It's okay, honey.

CARLA: I was at a place I couldn't save.

MOM: It's fine, honey. (With a hint of steel.) No reason you shouldn't play video games on a day like today.

CARLA: I figured you'd tell me if there was something I could do.



SISTER DAWES: So what were you playing, Carla?

CARLA: *Final Fantasy Ten.*

SISTER SWANSON: Oh, a video game? *(Kidding around with her.)*

Not one of those violent ones, I hope.

CARLA: Well, it's more an RPG than an FPS, but you can quest online, too; and that can get kinda deathmatch. It's not, you know, *Quake* or like *Halo*, but it's still pretty sick.

MOM: *(Quick save.)* She's doing a paper for school on role playing games.

CARLA: Uh, yeah. Um . . . ?

MOM: It's fine, honey.

CARLA: Okay. Hey, what were those calls about?

MOM: Letting the rest of the family know what's going on.

CARLA: Okay. I just thought I heard Dad swearing when he hung up that last—

MOM: But you didn't. Did you?

CARLA: Whatever. *(To the SISTERS.)* Good to see you. *(She exits.)*

SISTER DAWES: She's growing up so fast.

MOM: Yes, she is.

SISTER DAWES: And she's a Laurel now. I so miss the Young Women.

SISTER SWANSON: And she's doing well in school?

MOM: Yes. Carla, thank heavens, is doing fine.

(Sisters exit. MOM stands, irresolute, checks her watch, leaves. ASHLEY to her Dark Space.)

ASHLEY: So it's over. I still can't believe it. You get so used to it, married, a married woman. My husband this, my husband that. And now it's over. I dated so many guys, I know at the reception, they were all, why him? I mean, like: him? So of course now I'm beating myself up; why, when I knew all along we had nothing in common. I mean, outdoorsy Steve, and me. I met Steve at the Los Gatos REI, for heaven's sake. He hits on me, we start dating, and, you know, he took me nice places, museums, concerts, movies. And hikes, but I figured I could be a good sport and do the outdoors thing once in awhile, especially after I made him take me to see *The Vagina Monologues* in San Francisco, which he was a very good sport about. I mean, he's hunting-camping-fishing, while I'm your basic clothes, hair, and nails kinda girly girl, but, so, opposites attract, and he promised me, *promised*, that we wouldn't live in Missoula forever. I took him at his word. And there were times we were great together.

Then, when I shot him, you wouldn't believe the whining.

(She steps out of the Dark Space into living room.

Lights come up on the living room where DEANNA, JACK, and CARLA are now standing, suitcases on the floor, MOM and DAD sitting on the sofa.)

DEANNA: So it was just about Missoula?

CARLA: I mean, news flash, Ashley hates Montana. We *did* get your emails, Ash.

JACK: Do they even have a mall?

ASHLEY: Southgate Mall, with a Gap and an Eddie Bauer and the Maurice's I worked at, so not so bad.

JACK: You said you liked your boss.

ASHLEY: Brenda was terrific. She was a great buyer, and her husband is outdoorsy too, so we could commiserate. In fact, I've got to email her, let her know I'm fine.

DAD: So what happened?

ASHLEY: Okay, it's time for the deer hunt, which is a very big thing in Missoula. And he and his dad and his brothers, it's this major family thing, every year. And Steve wanted me to come along.

DAD: You shoot?

ASHLEY: I learned. Seriously, there's this shooting range, and I actually got pretty good, though it's death on your nails. So, up the mountain we go, me and Steve and his Dad and Larry and Bronco.

DEANNA: Bronco?

ASHLEY: Gives you pause? His real name's Brad, you met him at the reception. So there we are, up this mountain, and they say, I haven't been blooded; I haven't shot my first deer yet. So they tell me they'll find me this spot, sort of overlooking this ravine, and they'll drive a deer my direction, it'll be an easy shot. And I'm thinking, okay, I eat beef, veal even, still, I'm *not* shooting Bambi. So I'm primed to miss on purpose,

- take some gentle ribbing, and get back off the mountain to a hot bath and aroma therapy. And so I wait for a deer to come by so I can miss it. And I waited—seven and a half hours.
- JACK: Snipe hunt.
- ASHLEY: Is that what it's called? Finally, I get a clue, spend another two hours clodding down the mountain in these new astoundingly ugly Birkenstocks Steve got for me. I'm exhausted, I'm famished, I finally find the camp, and they're all settled around the fire. And they thought it was *so* funny.
- JACK: They put you through a snipe hunt.
- DAD: I don't think it's funny.
- ASHLEY: No it's not.
- DAD: Someone with no outdoors training or experience, alone on the side of a mountain, with a hunting rifle she barely knows how to use. Completely irresponsible.
- ASHLEY: Well, all right then. 'Cause Steve told me I was overreacting. He said I was just being hysterical.
- MOM: Did he?
- DAD: It's abusive, it's wrong.
- MOM: Sure, if that's what—?
- ASHLEY: Then, when I shot him, you wouldn't believe the whining. (*They all pause, stare at her.*) In the hand. It didn't even require a lot of stitches. (*Another pause. Then DEANNA laughs. After a second, the others join her.*)
- DEANNA: You did *not*.
- ASHLEY: I did. I shot him.
- DEANNA: You are such a liar.
- ASHLEY: Deanna—.
- DEANNA: Okay, Tim McCormack, remember him? You told us he'd run the lawn mower over his foot, cut his whole foot off? I cried for two days, 'cause I really liked him, and you knew it, and now he was gonna be amputee boy. Church that Sunday, he's walking around fine, he'd taken a little skin off one of his toes.
- ASHLEY: Okay, I know what you're—.
- DEANNA: Mark Martinez, remember, his "drug overdose?" Which turned out to be Tylenol? Tina Higginbotham, remember that bogus story about her getting pregnant? And that's not even counting the stories you told about yourself.
- JACK: Remember the time I was supposed to have blown up the school chem lab?
- MOM: I remember that one.
- DEANNA: You didn't shoot Steve. Get real.
- ASHLEY: I did, though. (*Skeptical looks all around.*) Okay, I didn't, you know, shoot him. Lethally. You know that little web, like between your forefinger and thumb? I got him there, just took a little skin off. (*Pause.*) The gun went off, I was holding it, the bullet got him in the hand. For real.
- DAD: Ashley, you'll understand that we're still a trifle skeptical.
- ASHLEY: I know. I've, like, cried wolf, in the past and stuff. Still. I'm telling the truth here.
- DAD: Then I need to know something, honey. Couple things, I guess. Is Steve all right?
- ASHLEY: He's fine. Like I said, it just grazed him.
- DAD: Are you in trouble, legally?
- MOM: Craig . . .
- DAD: I'm just asking. Have criminal charges been filed?
- ASHLEY: No, there aren't—.
- DAD: Is it possible they could be filed?
- ASHLEY: Dad. Steve's not going to file a complaint.
- DAD: You know this?
- ASHLEY: I do. We've talked about it. He's fine. We're fine. (*Defiantly.*) It just means he never wants to see me again. And that's fine with me.
- CARLA: The snipe hunt would have ended it for me.
- DEANNA: Amen.
- DAD: Ashley. Honey. (*He has her attention.*) I need to say this, and I hope you're listening. If you're telling the truth, and you can see we're still unconvinced of it—.
- MOM: To put it mildly.
- DAD: Right. But if you are, you discharged a firearm aimed at your husband. Whether he's badly injured or not, or whether or not there's a criminal complaint, that's a very serious matter, and one that has me concerned about you in ways I've never been concerned before. Do you understand me?
- ASHLEY: I do, Dad. (*Pause.*) It was an accident. I stumbled, the gun went off. That's all. I thought the safety was on. It wasn't. (*Another pause.*)
- MOM: All right, then.
- DEANNA: Ash, you know, the snipe hunt thing, that was rotten of him, okay. But then you make up these stories, and you do this, you really do, you think because you're cute and all you can get away with murder—.
- CARLA: Or attempted murder.
- DEANNA: I mean, you didn't check the safety? I don't anything about guns, and I know that you—.
- MOM: We don't have to talk about this.
- DEANNA: All I'm saying—.
- MOM: (*With a hint of steel.*) We don't have to talk about this. Not now. (*Pause.*)
- DAD: I would like to talk to you about this again later, though. Perhaps just the two of us.
- ASHLEY: Okay. (*Another pause.*)
- DAD: (*Awkwardly.*) Well. It sounds like we all have a lot to talk about. Beyond just hearing Ashley's story, I think it would—.
- DEANNA and JACK: Not tonight.
- DAD: Okay.
- MOM: Craig? (*At a loss.*) Fine. Dinner's served. Pot roast, everyone? (*Some weakly positive ad libs.*) And pasta salad? (*Even more weakly positive ad libs.*)
- (ASHLEY, JACK, DEANNA, AND CARLA exit.
Light shift suggests passage of time. MOM collapses on the sofa. After a moment, DAD joins her. Long pause.)
- MOM: None of them liked that pasta salad.
- DAD: Oh. (*Pause.*) It's a family favorite.
- MOM: No, you and Carla like it. That was what I was trying to signal you, just before you left.
- DAD: Oh. (*Pause.*) They choked it down.
- MOM: Yeah, well, the alternative was overcooked pot roast, so . . .

DAD: Once Ashley's flight was delayed, there wasn't much we could—.

MOM: I know. *(Pause.)* Real overcooked pot roast.

DAD: They choked it down.

MOM: Yes. *(Pause.)* Barely. *(They share a brief chuckle.)* You're so subtle you know, just quietly getting up, handing out the steak knives.

DAD: Well, I think the chain saw's out of gas. *(Another chuckle. Another pause.)*

MOM: I was just thinking. Five years ago. Next month.

DAD: I know exactly what you're going to say.

MOM: That twenty-four hours. I still remember, Dr. Seitz saying, you know, inoperable cancer, three months tops, get your affairs in order. He pronounced you, basically. And then the bishop did the same.

DAD: I took great comfort in that blessing.

MOM: Well, it was not a "rise and walk from your bed" kind of blessing. It was more like, "Brother Hull, go to the light!"

DAD: That's *not* what he said, and that's not all he said. I appreciated that blessing. It was a good blessing. *(Pause. Then, brief chuckle.)* All except for the "you're going to die" part. *(They laugh together briefly.)*

MOM: Thank heavens for second opinions. Dr. Holdman.

DAD: I love Dr. Holdman.

MOM: Oh, me too. Sweetest word in the English language. "Misdiagnosis."

DAD: It's actually a word of Greek derivation, *gnosis* suggesting knowledge, while—.

MOM: Good to know. But that twenty-four hours, before we saw him, when I knew, absolutely *knew* that you were going to be gone. The worst day of my life.

DAD: Until today.

MOM: Until today.

DAD: Strike one, strike two, strike three. Hat trick. If you'll pardon the mixed sport metaphor. *(He sighs.)* It's not as though we weren't warned.

MOM: No.

DAD: Deanna deciding to not come home for Christmas, for starters, and her emails explaining it. Too cryptic and too positive; they always struck a false note. And Ashley. . .

MOM: The calls.

DAD: At least twice a week, she'd call home.

MOM: Griping about Missoula.

DAD: Or Steve.

MOM: I don't think she's called home since August.

DAD: We've talked to her, every week.

MOM: Because *we've* called *her* on her cell. Has she called us once?

DAD: No. *(Pause.)* I thought she was adjusting. I thought her having Christmas in Missoula was a positive sign.

MOM: Me, too.

DAD: And Jack.

MOM: And Jack. *(Pause.)* He looks so thin.

DAD: He looks all right.

MOM: Thin and pale and exhausted.

DAD: All things considered, I think he looks fine.

MOM: I suppose.

DAD: All right, today was shocking. Admittedly. But we can't pretend we didn't know he was struggling. President Garman kept us well apprised.

MOM: Health, he said he was having health issues.

DAD: That's what I was saying. *(Pause.)*

MOM: So that is it, right, his health? He was sick, and he finally decided to come home.

DAD: I'm assuming.

MOM: You didn't talk to him about it?

DAD: He was so down, honey. I didn't have the heart to press him. Nor, I noticed, did you.

MOM: No. *(A pause.)* And then you bring home pasta salad.

DAD: As I recall, they also hate my biscuits and gravy. Got that for breakfast! *(They chuckle over this.)* At least Ashley would talk about it.

MOM: Oh, yeah. Ashley was just a . . . flood of information. Do you think she really shot him?

DAD: Typical Ashley, wasn't it, the big shocking announcement, then quickly backing down? Tomorrow, or the next day, she'll come to one of us and tell us the truth of things. Or some version thereof.

MOM: Sounds about right. *(Pause.)* You know the biggest mistake we ever made with her? Sixteen years old, paying for cheerleaders' camp.

DAD: I've often thought the same.

MOM: *(Starts to get up.)* Hey, in the car home?

DAD: What about it?

MOM: Okay, Jack was down, the others weren't ready or whatever. Did you talk? At all?

DAD: We talked. A pleasant chat. *(Another pause.)* Interesting word, chat; one suspects a French origination, something to do with yowling cats, but, no, it's Anglo-Saxon, I believe, derived from chatter, which was originally a descriptive verb akin to twitter, describing bird—.

MOM: *(Oh so patiently trying again.)* Is there information that was communicated to you that you might want to, you know, pass on?

DAD: We talked about the Sharks.

MOM: You talked hockey? Today?

DAD: It seemed to me that the alternative was to not talk at all. *(They exit. DEANNA steps into her Dark Space.)*

DEANNA: It wasn't a guy. The guys at Brown are . . . they all drink exotic coffees and smoke exotic weed and listen to bands like Modest Mouse and Pailhead, and Dandy Warhols. Like, White Stripes is too mainstream for them. Besides, you sort of don't date at Brown. You arrange to, like, sort of decide you're both going to be at the same place at the same time. And then the idea is you hook up, sort of drift effortlessly into a sexual encounter. Like, "not that it's important, but, whaddya say, do you wanna?" . . . The boxes got smaller and smaller: Californian, straight, a virgin, a Mormon. And show some, you know, enthusiasm for the subject matter, and you get all this bored East Coast attitude. Enthusiasm, a word Greek in origin, meaning possessed by a god, prophetic or poetic frenzy. *Enthousiasmos.*



W

ell, it was not a “rise and walk from your bed” kind of blessing. It was more like, “Brother Hull, go to the light!”

(Sarcastically.) Yeah, if I’d really had that goin’ on, I’d a been all right. Anyway. So. Even half-stoned, listening to Portishead, I remained *virgo intacta*. No, it definitely wasn’t a guy.

JACK: Dee, I went to those kinds of parties too, but—

(DEANNA steps out of her Dark Space, confronts JACK who has entered the living room.)

DEANNA: I didn’t inhale and it didn’t get me high, instead it nearly choked me and I will really never do that again, ever.

JACK: I don’t want to know about it.

DEANNA: But I wanted you to know. Baby brother.

JACK: Well, I’m so proud of you. You only smoked pot. Boy, that’s sticking to your standards, sis, way to go.

DEANNA: Bite me.

JACK: Seriously, you’re on drugs? An R.M.?

DEANNA: I’m not on drugs, okay? I smoked grass once, it was no big deal.

JACK: It’s a big deal!

DEANNA: I gave into peer pressure, I’m a weak person, get off my case. At least I managed an entire mission, and not a third of one.

JACK: That’s a low blow.

DEANNA: So is you overreacting.

JACK: Peer pressure? A guy, right?

DEANNA: It was not a guy, I’m still a maiden, you’re a churl for asking, and I’m not talking about it.

JACK: Well, that’s a relief.

DEANNA: Whatever.

JACK: *(Pause.)* Good game last night.

DEANNA: Yeah. *(She decides to let him off the hook.)* I like moving

Graves to second line.

JACK: Me too. And that backhand goal Owen Nolan scored . . .

DEANNA: He’s so tough in the crease. *(Enter MOM.)* They can say what they want about Robataille, Yzerman, Sakic . . .

JACK: Nolan’s as good as any of ’em.

DEANNA: Total jerk, though. I bet they traded him.

MOM: Look who’s up.

DEANNA: Hi, Mom.

MOM: Hi. *(Nobody speaks.)* So, anyone want some breakfast?

JACK: Omelettes?

MOM: Sure. It’s not every day we have all the kids at home.

DEANNA: Mom . . .

MOM: What?

DEANNA: We said we didn’t want to talk about it.

MOM: *(As they head towards the kitchen.)* I said nothing, I was talking about breakfast. . . .

(They exit. JACK sits alone. Enter CARLA, passes him on her way to the family room.)

CARLA: Jack.

JACK: Hey, Carla. *(As she heads down.)* What’s up?

CARLA: Nothing much.

JACK: Mom and Deanna are doing omelettes for breakfast.

CARLA: Sweet. *(Pause.)*

JACK: Hey, Carla?

CARLA: *(Clearly antsy.)* Yeah.

JACK: How’s it going? I mean, you know, it’s been—

CARLA: Eight months. Since your farewell.

JACK: So. I saw you playing *Final Fantasy*.

CARLA: Yeah. *(Pause.)* *Ten*, it’s sweet.

JACK: Better than *Seven*?

CARLA: Storyline’s actually not as good as *Seven*, but the graphics are fly, and it’s got voicetracks instead of supertitles. And the mini-games are dope, like, instead of those lame chocobo races, you can play this thing called blitzball.

JACK: Who’s your character?

CARLA: Guy named Tidus, plus friends, of course, especially this hot, like “summoner” chick called Yuna. Oh, P. S.: the bad guy’s name? Sin, I’m totally not kidding.

JACK: The bad guy’s called Sin?

CARLA: Is that great? Way better than Shinra Corporation or whatever.

JACK: I may check it out later.

CARLA: Well, good luck, because when I’m not playing, Dad is.



Y

**ou only smoked pot. Boy,
that's sticking to your
standards, sis, way to go.**

JACK: Yeah, I saw that he got the new EA Sports NHL game.

CARLA: Yeah, he, like, plays dynasty mode, which used to piss me off, but then I realized, it's sort of an RPG too, only with sports instead of, like, elves and dwarves and dragons and stuff. Last week he played twenty seasons, took him, like, five hours. It's bad enough to get kicked off by Mom—her one-hour rule. Now Dad wants to hog it.

JACK: Uh, *my* system, right?

CARLA: Well, you're on a mission. Speaking of which. . . ?

JACK: I don't want to talk about it.

CARLA: Hey, you're sitting here, and you want to, like, make friends or something. And you totally freaked me out yesterday.

JACK: I'm sorry.

CARLA: San Diego's a big city, Jack. You coulda been anywhere, you coulda been in an alley somewhere, you coulda been dead. I mean, we were freaked out. I was (*Emotional, catches herself.*) I'm glad you're back, I'm glad you're safe. But I was thinking about where you could be, and yesterday was way too scary, you know? For you to come home and want to talk hockey and *Final Fantasy* and crap.

JACK: You were scared?

CARLA: Hi, you were lost, in San Diego—

JACK: I'm sorry.

CARLA: So. What happened?

JACK: I'm still not ready to talk about it. (*She turns to go downstairs as DAD enters.*)

CARLA: Whatever.

DAD: Heading for the Playstation? I was sort of hoping, later today—

CARLA: I just want to do one thing fast before breakfast, then I promise, I'll save.

DAD: Okay. (*CARLA's gone.*) Hey, son.

JACK: Dad.

DAD: Good game last night.

JACK: Yeah.

DAD: Love Owen Nolan in the crease.

JACK: Me too. He's kind of a jerk, though. I bet they trade him.

DAD: He's team captain, I think that's most unlikely. Paper?

JACK: Help yourself. (*JACK looks at DAD reading the paper for a moment, then steps into his Dark Space.*) I tried. You can say lots of things, lots of things about what kind of missionary I was, but one thing you cannot say is that I didn't try. I tried so hard. . . . I have eczema on the backs of my hands, groin, and armpits. I can't keep anything down. I have rectal bleeding from colitis, and acid reflux, and blood pressure 170 over 110. And, uh, less pleasant symptoms. The President, my mission president, agreed. I tried. I tried hard. (*Back into the scene.*) Dad?

DAD: Yeah.

JACK: Nothing. Omelettes for breakfast.

DAD: Great.

JACK: (*Abruptly.*) Dad. I tried.

DAD: I know you did, son.

(*Enter ASHLEY.*)

ASHLEY: *Don't* even look at me.

JACK: We won't.

ASHLEY: I'm a total mess, I know. *Don't* even look.

JACK: No.

ASHLEY: So, Daddy, do I call him or what?

DAD: Well . . .

ASHLEY: I wouldn't even come down here looking like this if I didn't really need to know, so seriously, you tell me, I can go either way, do I call him or not?

DAD: Steve?

ASHLEY: Of course, Steve. Do I let him know I'm here all right, safe, like he'd care, so of course I don't, what a dope, I'm divorcing him, but he might be worried too, I would, so let him, who gives a damn, I don't call him, obviously. Let him stew, you're absolutely right. Thanks, Dad.

DAD: You're more than welcome. (*ASHLEY heads off.*) They're making omelettes.

ASHLEY: Looking like *this*? Dad, honestly.

(*She exits. DAD goes back to reading the paper.*)

JACK: Did you understand any of that?

DAD: She's trying to decide just how final this divorce is.

JACK: I thought it was completely final.

DAD: That was yesterday. Comics?

JACK: (*Hands over part of the paper.*) Here.

(*MOM sprints into the room.*)

MOM: Paper away, twenty second clean-up, now. (*DAD and JACK pick things up quickly.*)

DAD: What's going on?

MOM: Visiting teachers.

DAD: They were here yesterday.

MOM: (*Frenetically straightening.*) Don't you know, visiting teaching is more than just one visit a month, no, it's essential you show a personal interest in the families of those you visit teach.

DAD: They heard something.

MOM: My guess, Sister Barnard blabbed. (*JACK leaves. MOM quickly straightens her hair as the doorbell rings, she opens the door.*) Sister Dawes, Sister Swanson. Why you were just here yesterday!

SISTER SWANSON: I'm so sorry.

SISTER DAWES: I know we were here yesterday, we just wanted to stop by.

MOM: It's fine. You're my visiting teachers. Always welcome.

SISTER SWANSON: It's just that . . . with Jack home.

SISTER DAWES: We called, the phone was busy, and we just didn't know—.

SISTER SWANSON: We went back and forth.

SISTER DAWES: If we could be of service, we wanted to be, but—.

SISTER SWANSON: But if you'd rather be alone together, then that's fine, too.

SISTER DAWES: On our way to the library we thought, two minutes, we'll just poke our heads in.

SISTER SWANSON: But I can see, we are intruding, and I'm so sor—.

SISTER DAWES: We want to do what we can. (*CARLA has drifted up, stands behind MOM.*)

MOM: It's really very kind of you. But everything's fine. (*Pause.*)

CARLA: Jack hasn't told us what's up, if that's what you're asking.

SISTER DAWES: Really?

MOM: That's not entirely true. Jack became ill and needed to come home immediately.

SISTER DAWES: Oh my.

SISTER SWANSON: I'm so sorry to hear that.

SISTER DAWES: Is he okay?

SISTER SWANSON: Was he in a hospital, perhaps? In San Diego?

SISTER DAWES: What sort of illness. . . ?

MOM: We have a number of questions ourselves about Jack's situation. His illness does not appear to be . . . life threatening. We expect he'll be back in the field in a couple of weeks.

CARLA: Well, he did leave a message on the mission phone saying "I quit," so I don't think he's planning to go back.

SISTER SWANSON: "I quit?"

MOM: (*Without MOM turning to look at her, we can tell that CARLA*

is dead meat.) Yes. As Carla points out, he called the mission and left a short message. That message. "I quit." What we don't know at present is his state of mind when he left it.

SISTER DAWES: No. Of course not. (*Pause.*) Well, we certainly must provide meals.

SISTER SWANSON: I feel so inadequate, a casserole, but if it would be of any help—.

SISTER DAWES: You're surely far too distraught over his illness.

MOM: Not at all, we're managing nicely. Very kind of you to think of meals, but we're fine.

SISTER SWANSON: Now, are you sure this isn't just obligatory "I don't want help" Mormon stubbornness?

SISTER DAWES: It's so hard to ask, I know it is.

MOM: That's really not—.

SISTER DAWES: Sometimes, just not having to deal with dinner can be a big relief.

MOM: Well.

SISTER SWANSON: A little break from the daily grind?

SISTER DAWES: And Melinda. You know my chili taco casserole.

MOM: (*She can practically taste the casserole*) I do. It's awfully tempting.

SISTER SWANSON: Has there ever been a ward potluck when that casserole lasted more than two minutes?

SISTER DAWES: Unless Jack's illness prevents. . . . It is a trifle spicy.

MOM: No. He should be able to handle it just fine.

SISTER DAWES: So, dinner, then? (*Pause.*)

CARLA: You'll need enough for six. Deanna and Ashley are home too.

SISTER SWANSON: Oh, my—.

SISTER DAWES: Goodness.

MOM: Yes. Thank you Carla. Yes, Deanna and Ashley are here to help out. Rallying around. The way families do.

SISTER DAWES: Well, that's very good of them.

SISTER SWANSON: Only what one would expect, of course.

CARLA: Jack doesn't look all that sick to me.

MOM: No. It's quite amazing. I can hardly tell that he's ill at all. But, doctors, you know. Better safe than sorry. Nonetheless, I think perhaps we'll take a rain check on your very kind offer of dinner.

SISTER SWANSON: Certainly.

SISTER DAWES: Of course.

SISTER SWANSON: Anytime.

SISTER DAWES: Please give our best to poor Jack.

SISTER SWANSON: Our prayers are with him.

SISTER DAWES: It's in my freezer, you just say the word.

MOM: Thanks again. And thanks so much for stopping by.

(*Mimes closing a door, with some firmness. Turns.*) Carla!

(*The rest of the family has gathered.*)

CARLA: What?

MOM: There are such things as family secrets. Things we don't just blab out, without any consideration for. . . . You're grounded!

CARLA: What did I say?

MOM: Do you really want us to be the most gossiped about family in the ward? Is that what you want?



DAD: Plus costing us a whole chili casserole all to ourselves.

JACK, DEANNA, and ASHLEY: Seriously?

CARLA: Mom, it's Saturday. Tomorrow, we go to Church.

Everyone will see 'em.

MOM: Yes, they will. They will indeed. And I want things settled before then. So we can tell people the truth and not have to hang our heads. I'm sick of this, this, this, "I don't want to talk about it, I'm not ready" act. Jack, you will tell us why you're home from your mission and what you meant by "I quit," we will decide what to do about it, and you will call the mission president and see what can be done to allow you to go back and finish honorably, and tomorrow, we will tell everyone what the problem is and what we're doing about it, and that's all. And Deanna, same with you. Home from graduate school, nobody just quits graduate school. I give you two days, two days, to get your head back on straight and go back to finish your degree. As for you, Ashley, if you really shot your husband, then, I don't know what to think, but I do know one thing, you can't stay here. Two days for you, too, two days to figure out what you're going to do, and then make a decision and go do it. I've had enough. Talking hockey and not saying anything, I've had it. I've got a nice breakfast in there, and we're going to go eat that nice breakfast, and we're going to say a blessing on the food, and we're going to feel good about saying that blessing on that food! *(They look at her, defiantly. No one says anything.)*

CARLA: I'm up for breakfast. *(Muttered agreement from everyone else. All exit, except MOM and DAD.)*

MOM: *(To DAD.)* Don't you start.

DAD: Not me.

MOM: It's all falling apart. And the kids hate me.

DAD: They don't hate you.

MOM: I just kicked three of 'em out, and grounded Carla.

DAD: They know you didn't mean it.

MOM: I *did* mean it. *(They laugh together briefly.)* What are we going to do?

DAD: We talk.

MOM: No, I know, but what are we going to *do*?

DAD: I don't know.

MOM: They really do hate me.

DAD: No, they don't. *(Pats her shoulder.)* Come on. Let's get some breakfast.

(Light shift indicates passage of time. ASHLEY, CARLA,

I 'd get anxiety attacks. I mean, I'd feel panicked, and, like, cold sweat, and I felt like I was going to pass out. . . . And it never got better, not even a little.

JACK, and DEANNA enter from the kitchen where they've just finished breakfast)

ASHLEY: I just hate it when she acts like that.

JACK: Drives me nuts, I just hate it.

DEANNA: That was what I was dreading, on the plane coming home.

JACK: But she just explodes like that. Dee, Ash, was she always like this, or is she getting worse?

ASHLEY: Oh, you have no idea. Dee, remember that time?

DEANNA: Which one?

ASHLEY: That Halloween, you and me and Rickey—.

DEANNA: Rickey Blake.

CARLA: Was that when you were, like, toilet papering?

ASHLEY: It was totally no big deal, we only had three rolls, we were just hitting like the bishop's house and Sister Whatsis, remember Dee, the Young Women's leader we didn't like?

DEANNA: Sister Jenkinson.

JACK: I didn't know her.

DEANNA: No, they weren't here very long, moved out after about a year.

ASHLEY: Well, Mom totally freaked. It was horrible.

DEANNA: Grounded me for two weeks, you for like a month . . .

ASHLEY: Yeah, 'cause I was driving, and I was, like, the oldest, I should have known better.

DEANNA: And then the next weekend, there was this dance we wanted to go to in that stake in Los Gatos, and she let us go.

ASHLEY: Yeah, well, you were too scared to ask her. I had to for both of us.

DEANNA: But she said yeah.

JACK: What, you do the airhead space cadet act?

ASHLEY: No, that only works on Dad. With Mom, you have to be, like, sincerely repentant. But she let us go.

JACK: Well, listen, it's mostly about me this time, guys. I'm really sorry, home early from a mission, that's just the kind of thing to make her go off.

ASHLEY: I don't know. Blown marriage, home from grad school, we gave her a lot to work with. Let's admit it, guys, our timing all kinda sucked.

DEANNA: Seriously. Next time, let's coordinate a little better, whaddya say?

CARLA: (*Drily.*) There's going to be a next time? (*They all laugh.*)

ASHLEY: Oh sure. It'll be, like, "August, you can't have cancer in August, remember, my nervous breakdown?"

DEANNA: (*Going with it, leafing through an imaginary planner.*) "I'll come out of the closet in November, that'll give you October for your sex change operation."

JACK: "No, October's not good, that's when I'm having my affair." (*They all laugh together again.*)

CARLA: You guys are not setting a very good example.

ASHLEY: Okay, but see, Carla, this way, anything you screw up your whole life, you've got three bad examples to blame it on.

CARLA: I just think this isn't a very healthy dynamic.

DEANNA: What do you mean?

CARLA: What comes next. (*They stare at her.*) Dad comes in, sort of apologizes sort of explains, and he looks all puppy dog, and we all go, oh, great, it's Dad, he's the good guy. And we forgive him, and he's sort of adorable about it. And Mom's the bad guy. And we don't pay much attention, and that's too bad. Because, what if she's right. (*Pause.*)

ASHLEY: (*A little dangerously.*) You're saying she was right to go off on us like that?

CARLA: Well, you know, Jack scared the hell out of us yesterday. And we still don't even know what happened. (*Pause. They all look at JACK.*) I mean it, Jack. You're gonna have to tell eventually.

ASHLEY: I told. No way you get off.

JACK: Okay, fine. (*Pause.*) Tell Mom and Dad to get in here. I'm ready to talk.

CARLA: Okay. (*She exits.*)

JACK: Dee. You're next.

DEANNA: I'm still not ready.

JACK: Yeah, well, neither am I. But I don't get out of it. (*Enter MOM and DAD.*)

MOM: (*As she enters.*) I was working on the dishes.

DAD: Honey, when they're ready . . . (*To JACK. Awkward pause.*) Jack, I understand you have something to tell us?

JACK: Yeah. I guess I do. Look, Mom, Dad. First thing, I'm really sorry. To you all. I just haven't felt ready to talk about things, you know. But Carla, you're right. It's time.

CARLA: (*Under her breath.*) Duh.

JACK: (*Gives her a quick glare, but continues.*) You're probably all wondering if I *did* something, right? That I shouldn't have done?

MOM: Go on.

JACK: I didn't. I didn't break any mission rules, and I didn't do anything I shouldn't have, not until that last day when I broke a whole bunch of rules at once. And I'm not sick, physically. Well, I sort of am, but also not really. (*Pause.*) I just . . . I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it anymore.

DEANNA: Couldn't do what?

JACK: Any of it. Missionary work. I couldn't go door to door. I couldn't teach people. I just . . . couldn't.

MOM: And why couldn't you? What was wrong?

JACK: Mom, I'd get, I don't know what to call 'em, anxiety attacks. I mean, I'd feel panicked, and, like, cold sweat, and I felt like I was going to pass out. It was all I could think of, just this feeling of terror and panic and . . . and it never got better, not even a little. It got worse.

DAD: We knew all that, of course. Your mission president kept us well apprised.

MOM: You saw a counselor, right?

JACK: President Garman set me up with an LDS psychiatrist.

MOM: President Garman told us. A good LDS counselor who said your condition wouldn't prevent you from serving.

JACK: Right. He said I had something called acute anxiety disorder. But that I could overcome it. Will power, the power of prayer. I just had to want it enough.

DAD: (*Appalled.*) That's what he said?

JACK: Yeah.

DAD: That all you needed was more *will power*? For *acute anxiety disorder*?

JACK: Yeah.

DAD: That's the most appalling . . . that's medical malpractice, I'll have his license for—

MOM: Craig. (*DAD subsides, though he's still fuming.*) Jack, we knew about the diagnosis, of course—

DAD: But not his course of treatment!

MOM: Craig. (*DAD mutters to himself.*) We specifically asked President Garman if you could see another doctor, get a second opinion.

JACK: That never happened.

DAD: President Garman told us it did happen. And that the second doctor confirmed the opinion of the first one.

JACK: I went to see another doctor.

DAD: All right.

JACK: I went to see him. I sat in his office, the nurse called my name. I knew that I would see him. I knew what he would say. And I couldn't face it. I booked.

MOM: You left?

JACK: Swore Elder Stokes to secrecy, told the President the second opinion had been the same as the first. I lied, so I could stay on my mission.

DAD: My goodness.

MOM: We didn't know. President Garman told us—

JACK: He told you what I told him. (*Pause.*) I think the first doctor was right, you know? I've got symptoms, lots of symptoms. I'm not well. But it's all caused by anxiety. I'm actually fine.

DAD: You're actually not fine, son.

JACK: Whatever.

DEANNA: No, you're sick. A treatable illness.

ASHLEY: Acute anxiety disorder.

MOM: With symptoms, physical symptoms.

JACK: I'm a casualty.

DAD: What?

JACK: There was a guy, Elder Bowers. He got ulcers a couple months ago, and had to go home. And President Garman talked it about in zone conference. He said we missionaries, we were at war. A war against evil. And so, you had to expect a few casualties. *(Pause.)* I'm another casualty.

DEANNA: That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard.

JACK: No one came home early from your mission, Dee?

DEANNA: Lots of guys went home early, Jack. They weren't casualties.

JACK: What would you call it?

DEANNA: I'd call it—

MOM: Could we bring it back to yesterday? *(JACK and DEANNA glare at each other.)* Please?

JACK: Yeah, okay. *(Pause.)* I was sitting on a bus, and this rash on my leg, it just started itching.

DAD: President Garman said something about shingles.

JACK: Could be. Anyway I was scratching it. And it was getting painful, you know, like it really started hurting. It was driving me nuts. And I thought about it. Sixteen more months, my leg was going to itch like this. I mean, I had all these other symptoms, and just a freakin' itch. . . . *(Gets control of himself.)* Suddenly, I handed Stokes my backpack, and said "look out for this, would you." And I got off the bus, and he was slow pulling the stop cord, and by the time he musta pulled it, I'd gotten into a cab. I'd just gotten paid, so I had money for a plane ticket. Took a cab to the airport. Stopped on the way to use a pay phone, left a message for the mission president. "I quit." That was the message. "I quit."

DAD: We heard about the message.

JACK: Yeah. *(Pause.)*

CARLA: Shingles. What are shingles, anyway?

DAD: What Jack describes, really, a painful itching rash.

CARLA: And that's what set you off?

JACK: Could be. I don't know.

CARLA: So you're another casualty.

JACK: Yeah.

CARLA: I don't know about you guys, but that seems like a real Nazi thing to say. Casualty? You're not dead.

DAD: I agree, Carla, a very poor choice of words. Well, the whole situation was appallingly handled. Starting with that psychologist.

DEANNA: No kidding.

MOM: The point is. *(They all look at her.)* The point is, you actually are sick. Physically. You really are ill. Getting off a bus like that, it's a nervous breakdown, really.

JACK: Well, something.

MOM: A nervous breakdown. And shingles. My point is, we can tell people you're sick, and it will be nothing but the truth. And when you're well again, I expect you can finish after all.

DEANNA: Mom, not a chance, no way they'd even let him.

MOM: Maybe not. None of us knows the future. My point is, I didn't actually lie to the visiting teachers. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to take the sacrament.

DAD: And you're home. That's what matters.

JACK: Yeah. I guess.

MOM: I just wish you'd told us.

JACK: You would have insisted I come home.

DAD: Son . . .

JACK: You would have. And I was going to stick it out. No way was I giving in.

DEANNA: Yeah, until you had to.

DAD: I do think we need to have you see another counselor.

JACK: Whatever.

DAD: I really do think I'm going to have to insist on it, Jack.

MOM: Absolutely.

JACK: Yeah, okay, we'll see. *(Pause.)*

CARLA: Okay, I think it's time for the farming game.

DEANNA: Okay!

ASHLEY: Not me. Nails won't be dry in time.

DAD: We can wait. I think a little crop failure and incipient bankruptcy may be just what the doctor ordered.

CARLA: You up for it, Jack?

JACK: Yeah. Okay, sure.

MOM: The farming game sounds great.

DEANNA: Wo-oo farming game!

MOM: So we start with, what, twenty acres wheat? *(She exits.)*

DEANNA: Ten wheat, ten hay.
(Everyone but ASHLEY heads off. JACK goes to his Dark Space.)

JACK: They're not the ones who failed. Me. *(He starts to leave, then goes back.)* And we love to laugh, make jokes, not deal with things. And sure, they can laugh at President Garman all they want to. The casualty line. I'm the one who couldn't hack it. Fact is, he was right.
(He heads out of the Dark Space. Phone rings.)

CARLA: *(Off)* Ashley. It's for you. I think it's Steve. *(Pause.)*

ASHLEY: Tell him I've gone out. *(Pause.)* Tell him I've told you to tell him I'm not here. *(Checks her nails.)* Good enough.
(ASHLEY heads to her Dark Space.)

ASHLEY: What I liked about Steve was . . . the dares. He'd dare me. We'd be in a restaurant, and he'd be like, I dare you to flash the waiter. With that mocking smile. And I'd be like, I can't do that, I can't. And the waiter would come over, and I wasn't even wearing a bra. And so I'd dare him back, like, same date, to hit on a guy in the men's room. It got bad, like the time he dared me to kiss five total strangers at a party, or my get-back, which nearly got him arrested. I loved that about him. The dares. It's still what I miss. *(Ruefully.)* The least healthy part of, you know, us, and that's what I miss.
(She steps out of the Dark Space.)

CARLA: *(Off)* Ash? You gonna play?

ASHLEY: You guys start without me. I gotta call Steve.
(She exits. Light shift indicates passage of time.)
Enter DAD. He sits to read. Enter JACK.)

JACK: Hey.

DAD: Jack. *(Picks his book up again.)*



The boxes got smaller and smaller: Californian, straight, a virgin, a Mormon.

JACK: Whatcha reading?

DAD: Guy named Jared Diamond. (*Shows him the cover.*)

JACK: *Guns, Germs and Steel.*

DAD: Are you up for this? (*JACK nods.*) Well . . . I often find immersing myself in a good book helps when I'm feeling stressed.

JACK: Me too.

DAD: Terrific book, this one. Marvelous explanation for why some societies evolve differently from others. What material advantages did Mesopotamia have over other areas of the world? I mean, think of it, Sumer and Ur and Lagash and Eridu, why those cities, all there, at that time, 4000 BC, before the Egyptians—

JACK: I thought the ancient Chinese—

DAD: No, this is before the Chinese—I mean the Sumerians were maybe two thousand plus years before even the Shang Dynasty.

JACK: Ah.

DAD: It's marvelous. And then the conquests, the Akkadians, the Chaldeans. Hittites later on. Why there, why then? Why cultivated crops and domesticated animals, there, then, only at that place and time? Not Africa, where mankind evolved, not China, not Egypt. Mesopotamia, the Fertile Crescent. Well, maybe, just maybe, and this is Diamond's thesis, it's because there was cultivatable vegetation there, only there, there were domesticatable animals there, only there. An accident of geography.

JACK: Sounds interesting.

DAD: It's so marvelously exciting. I know your sister was going to do her research on the *suán chu*, the Chinese art of calculation, math. And here I was urging her to study Pythagoras instead. No, no, Sumeria, Mesopotamia, *that's* where it started.

JACK: Great.

DAD: And the implications of this on Book of Mormon studies.

Look at it, Enos talks of the Nephites as an agricultural society, and then talks about the Lamanites as this blood-thirsty society of hunters. Hunter-gatherers. But that's obviously nonsense, war propaganda really; the Lamanites outnumbered the Nephites pretty severely, and a hunting economy can never support that kind of population density. Obviously the answer is intermarriage, with, who, the people coming down from the Bering Strait? Besides, King Lamoni had herds, which clearly suggests an agricultural economy, the whole thing's so. . . . (*Looks at JACK, as though seeing him for the first time.*) I'm sorry. I haven't laid any kind of foundation for any of this. I just find this sort of thing so exhilarating.

JACK: I know you do, Dad.

DAD: Ever since Deanna got home, I've been dying to talk to her about this. Well, you too, obviously, both of you.

JACK: Yeah.

DAD: I have no doubt there are some who would argue that this kind of scholarship renders absurd the historicity argument for the Book of Mormon—

JACK: Actually, Dad, on my mission, when we'd teach people, that sort of objection didn't really come up much.

DAD: (*Laughs.*) Are you mocking me, son?

JACK: (*Grins.*) Just a little, maybe.

DAD: Well, mock away. I, for one, have no intention of changing.

(*JACK moves to his Dark Space.*)

JACK: Nearly every evening, growing up, we'd be at the dinner table, and we'd have family history lessons, he called 'em. And he'd read *everything*, it felt like, and remembered everything, and it was as though, I don't know, Hammurabi or Zoroaster or Cyrus the Great were his best buddies. I mean, you seriously didn't want Dad helping you with your history homework. He'd take a black magic marker and cross things out of your textbook. "They got it wrong," he'd say. And here's my Dad, and his degree's in accounting, and he's a supervisor for H&R Block. He's a tax law guy. I mean, he was on a first name basis with Hugh Nibley and Eugene England, guys at that level, and now he helps people do their tax returns for a living. But he got married right off his mission, and Mom got pregnant with Ashley his junior year



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estimony-wise, I try to avoid situations where they're going to, you know, pin me down.

at BYU, and he switched from history to accounting. Gave it up. Basically for us. And never once complained. And you've always got, you know like default mode; you can always talk to him about hockey and basically any time period in history. Yeah, I got real lucky when it comes to Dads.

(He steps out of the Dark Space, enter MOM.)

MOM: Are you still reading that?

DAD: Marvelous book.

MOM: And boring Jack to tears, I suspect.

JACK: No, it's interesting.

MOM: I bet.

DAD: You're welcome to it when I'm done.

MOM: Maybe so.

JACK: What are you reading these days, Mom?

MOM: Oh, you know me. Love my Anita Stansfield.

DAD: Blech.

MOM: Don't listen to your father. The man hasn't a speck of romance in him.

DAD: I beg to differ. *(Leans over and kisses her.)*

MOM: All right, you have a speck. I came down to say, Jack. Big day tomorrow.

JACK: I know.

DAD: We're there for you, son. You know that.

MOM: That's absolutely right. And Jack, if you're not up to going to church with us, that's your decision.

JACK: No, I'm going to church.

MOM: I hoped you'd say that. I love our ward, Jack, always have. But it has its share of wagging tongues.

JACK: Best to get the first Sunday over with, then.

MOM: Exactly. That's exactly right. Well, I'm exhausted. Honey?

DAD: Just want to finish this chapter.

MOM: Well, if you're more than half an hour, the light will be off. *(DAD waves her off. She heads upstairs.)* Don't stay up too late, honey.

JACK: *(Abruptly.)* Mom, Dad. *(They stop what they're doing. Look at him.)* Tomorrow's not really the problem.

DAD: Oh.

JACK: What do I do *Monday*?

MOM: What's Monday?

JACK: I'm an R.M. I guess. A returned missionary. Sort of.

DAD: Certainly.

JACK: What do I do? *(Pause.)* I mean, what do I do? *(Pause.)*

DAD: We'll have to spend some time tomorrow talking that one over.

JACK: I guess so.

MOM: Well. We still have church tomorrow, probably should make it an early night.

JACK: Yeah. Actually, I thought I'd play a little *Final Fantasy*.

MOM: If you can pry the controller from Carla.

JACK: She said she'd show me how to get past this dragon.

(He exits down, MOM exits up. DAD's still reading.)

ASHLEY, JACK, and DEANNA step into their respective Dark Spaces. CARLA is in her Dark Space, too, watching.)

ASHLEY: No. Steve, no, I don't think that's a good idea. No. No.

JACK: Some guys couldn't wait to get home. There's even a word for it: trunky.

DEANNA: *Suan Chu*. So, see, this Emperor Yu guy, a mythical ruler who almost certainly never existed, was bathing by the Lo River, and saved this magic tortoise, who gave him this divine gift.

ASHLEY: Because, I don't think it's a good idea.

JACK: I had this one companion, he knew exactly what he was gonna do, his first day back. He had a menu planned for dinner his first night back. He knew what TV shows he was going to watch.

DEANNA: The gift was a series of diagrams called *Lo shu*, which contained the principles of Chinese mathematics. One diagram, the magic square, was thought to possess magical qualities, and led to the development of the dualistic theory of Yin and Yang.

ASHLEY: Because, I don't think it's a good idea. I just . . . you don't have to remind me of . . . no.

JACK: Girlfriend. Their car. A job lined up. Some guys, they were counting the days.

DEANNA: Yin represents even numbers and Yang represents odd numbers. Or, conversely, men and women. Depending.

ASHLEY: You're not going to guilt me into. . . . because it's a terrible terrible idea, and you're *(She's weeping. Music starts up, U2's, "Original of the Species," from the album How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb.)*

JACK: But for me, a mission was the only thing I can ever remember wanting to do, the thing I dreamed of when I was a kid.

DEANNA: It's a gift of God, pluses and minuses, debits and credits. One plus two, plus three plus four. Peace, found in the harmonious balance of oppositions, the perfect alliance and also perfect enmity of numbers.

JACK: I had a message, this perfect, beautiful message, and all I wanted to do was share it. With everyone. Anyone.

ASHLEY: I *do* remember that night . . .

JACK: And nobody was interested. Nobody cared at all.

ASHLEY: I *do* remember.

JACK: So . . . what do I do now?

DEANNA: And it's so cool, and spiritual, and zen, and it leads me toward God, or Buddha. One, or both.

ASHLEY: *(Crying.)* No, Steve. No. No, I can't.

DEANNA: And I don't want to do it anymore. *(Looks at her father, reading.)* It's going to tear him up.

END ACT ONE



ACT TWO

Sunday

(Actors as at top of the show. Now the music is Indigo Girls, "Closer to Fine." Now the dancing is very subdued, contemplative. DEANNA dances with JACK, ASHLEY with CARLA. DAD continues reading. MOM watches. Lights down, all exit. Lights up again on living room. Enter MOM, dressed to the nines. She looks upstairs.)

MOM: Deanna? Ashley? *(Enter JACK, in his suit.)* Jack, thank heavens. We're running late.

JACK: Yeah.

MOM: I think that was Carla in the shower a few minutes ago.

JACK: I showered early. I've been up since six—you know, mission time.

MOM: Ashley? *(ASHLEY comes in, drowsy.)* Honey, we're leaving

in less than five minutes.

ASHLEY: Sorry, I slept in.

MOM: Have you seen Deanna?

ASHLEY: I don't think she's going.

JACK: She said something like that.

ASHLEY: You go without me.

MOM: No, you couldn't *possibly* be ready in time. This is very disappointing, Ashley. I would think you would want to support your brother—.

JACK: It's okay, Mom. *(Enter CARLA.)*

MOM: Carla? You're not seriously considering wearing that, are you?

CARLA: What? A skirt and top.

MOM: Something that casual, on the day your brother . . . oh, never mind. Let's go. Craig?

DAD: *(Enters.)* Ready. Where's Deanna?

MOM: Not going, apparently. Our one returned missionary, and she can't even . . . never mind, it doesn't matter. *(They all exit, except JACK, who goes to his Dark Space.)*

JACK: Aren't I a returned missionary? Don't we have two R.M.s in this family? Don't I . . . count?

(Frustrated, he exits. ASHLEY goes to her Dark Space.)

ASHLEY: See, here's the thing. I think being a Mormon is a very good way to live your life. It's a healthy lifestyle, basically, in lots of important ways, spiritually, physically. I've been a Mormon my whole life, and I expect to stay one. In fact, aside from an impending divorce, which believe me is not going to consume me, I feel like my life is going well right now. I'm in a good place, psychically. And that's what I wanted to say. *(She starts to leave, changes her mind.)* Now, the thing is, push comes to shove, I don't actually believe a lot of it. I don't think Joseph Smith was visited by any Angel Moroni or anything. I doubt there even are angels. I've certainly never seen one. Testimony-wise, I try to avoid situations where they're going to, you know, pin me down. You cross your fingers a lot and you try to word things just right, and you can skate through with minimum psychic damage. But tithing, no problem; I'd just waste it on clothes anyway, so why not do some good with it? Word of Wisdom, chastity, hey, that's all basically me. Bottom line, I think being a Mormon is a very good way to live your life, and I'm probably going to keep going to church and all. Probably forever.

(Light shift indicates passage of time. Lights back up on living room. MOM and DAD enter, collapse on the sofa, DAD whips off his tie.)

MOM: Well, that was gruesome.

DAD: It was, yes. *(Pause.)* Brother Mazer's Sunday School lesson, for example. That absurd assertion that the Jews were the only people in the history of the planet sufficiently wicked to crucify their Savior. Hah. Quite apart from the anti-Semitic overtones of such a statement, it's nonsense; the Hittites or the Medes would have crucified their God, and served him up on a bed of pasta with a red wine sauce.

MOM: The Medes had pasta?

DAD: Well taken. Bed of leeks, then.

MOM: I meant for Jack. And Ashley. Once she showed up.
 DAD: She was in Relief Society?
 MOM: Yes. The worst meeting of them all, and *that's* what she comes for.
 DAD: I know.
 MOM: It's all that kindness. Consideration. "We just want to support you in what we're sure must be difficult times."
 DAD: You'd prefer rude insensitivity, then?
 MOM: No. *(Pause.)* Is there such a thing as kind and compassionate insensitivity? *(DAD laughs briefly.)* I just hate being talked about. Ward council meetings, it'll be "and what can we do for the Hulls."
 DAD: At least there wasn't a talk about the prodigal son.
 MOM: Yeah, well, they didn't have time to prepare one.
 DAD: They care. They want to help. You've given a lot, over the years; they want to return the favor.
 MOM: I know. It doesn't mean I have to like it. *(DAD gets up.)*
 DAD: I'll get the potatoes in.
 MOM: Thanks.
 DAD: We can start broiling in an hour or so. *(He exits. Enter JACK.)*
 JACK: Hey, Mom. Paper here yet?
 MOM: Apparently the Sharks lost again.
 JACK: Great.
 MOM: Dad's doing steak and baked for dinner.
 JACK: Great.
 MOM: Did you get steak much?
 JACK: Oh, all the time.
 MOM: Seriously?
 JACK: Seriously. Top sirloin couple times a month.
 MOM: How did you afford it?
 JACK: Members. The last area I was in was pretty well off, considering. They'd feed the missionaries every Sunday. Food was not a problem.
 MOM: That's good to know. *(A rather lengthy pause.)*
 JACK: Some great people there.
 MOM: You miss it.
 JACK: I don't miss how I felt.
 MOM: No.
 JACK: Felt it all again today. That sick, you know, nausea feeling. "Oh, he's home. Sixteen months early."
 MOM: I know. *(Pause.)*
 JACK: I was thinking maybe San Jose State. At first. I'll need to find out when the term starts.
 MOM: Honey, I don't think....
 JACK: Today was the last time I will ever feel like that, Mom. Next Sunday will be bad again, but not as bad as today. And the next week will be better still.
 MOM: We'll see a doctor Monday.
 JACK: Mom, Monday, I'm looking for a job.
 MOM: Yes, fine. But you're also seeing a doctor. We're getting a second opinion.
 JACK: Mom . . .

(Enter DEANNA.)

DEANNA: Hey.
 MOM: Deanna. How are you feeling?

DEANNA: I'm okay. A little tired. *(A pause, and then MOM blows up.)*
 MOM: Well, I'm sorry to hear you're tired! Today was your brother's first Sunday back from his mission. An exceptionally difficult day emotionally for him, and for all of us, frankly. And you somehow found it impossible to get yourself up and dressed and to Church. Our one returned missionary, and you couldn't support the rest of the family in a time of difficulty and need. The selfishness that represents . . . *(She can't go on.)* Dinner in a couple hours. I'm going to go change.
 DEANNA: *(Quietly, not belligerently.)* I thought me being there might make it worse.
 MOM: *(Off.)* I don't want to hear it!
 JACK: *(Pause.)* Hey Dee.
 DEANNA: Hey. You okay?
 JACK: Yeah.

(MOM steps into her Dark Space.)

MOM: I live in a house of strangers. Five years ago, when I was certain Craig was going to die, that was my first thought—I'm going to be alone in a house of strangers. I'm going to lose my dearest friend, and afterwards be alone, with people who don't much like me, and who I don't understand at all. I pray every night that I go first, or at least that he'll be with me until they all leave home. Craig loves his word games, so here's a revealing one: I bore them, in both senses of the word. I gave birth to them. And now I've become this person, this preachy, conventional . . . mom. And they just don't find me very interesting. *(She exits.)*
 DEANNA: *(Pause.)* Seriously, how was it? Awful?
 JACK: What do you think?
 DEANNA: I am sorry, Jack.
 JACK: Yeah, it's okay. *(Pause.)* You shoulda been there.
 DEANNA: Maybe so.
 JACK: *(Pause.)* Like, they all wanted to ask, of course. Like, they were desperate to ask. But they also couldn't. And so we'd have these bizarre conversations. *(ASHLEY enters.)* Ash, did you get any of those?
 ASHLEY: Oh, it was great, you shoulda been there, Dee. It was excruciating; they'd come up to you, like "So, Ashley, how are . . . things?" "Things," I love that, with this contortionist's act—"How are . . . you and your folks and what is Jack doing home is he really sick and aren't you married and living in Montana what gives and what about the rumor that Deanna's home too, what the hell is going on?" . . . things.
 CARLA: *(Enters.)* Sundays suck.
 JACK: What, the no Playstation rule for the Sabbath? Addict.
 CARLA: That plus everything. Family time stuff.
 ASHLEY: You looked cute today.
 CARLA: Mom had conniptions. I think she wanted me in, like, formal mourning or whatever.
 DEANNA: Reason fifty-seven why I couldn't face it.
 CARLA: Yeah, well, thanks beloved sister. Making us go through it while you beauty napped.
 JACK: It wasn't so bad, actually. They're good people.



ASHLEY: Well, yeah. Anyway, I like that outfit on you.
 CARLA: Thanks.
 ASHLEY: Have you thought of some tint in your hair, just highlights?
 CARLA: Like, blue. Or stripes. Like a zebra.
 JACK: What'd Mom say to that?
 CARLA: Do I look stupid? It can wait 'til I'm eighteen, and then it'll be my business.
 JACK: *(Pause.)* So listen, Carla. You're a junior now?
 CARLA: Yeah.
 JACK: Have you been thinking about college?
 CARLA: I've been thinking a small place, Coe or Reed or, like, Carleton.
 DEANNA: Carleton? Seriously, from California to Minnesota.
 CARLA: It's a good school.
 ASHLEY: That's like in Northfield, isn't it? Where Jesse and Frank James went down, guns ablazin'.
 CARLA: *(Drily.)* Yeah, that's mostly why I want to go there.
 DEANNA: Do you have the grades for a place like Carleton?
 CARLA: Well, yeah.
 JACK: Have you thought about a major?
 CARLA: International relations, maybe. And then I thought the Peace Corps.
 ASHLEY: Seriously?
 CARLA: Well, yeah.
 DEANNA: Actually one of my roommates went to Carleton. She loved it.
 CARLA: Anyway.
 JACK: I can see you now. You're gonna dye your hair purple, and get a nose ring—
 CARLA: You bet. And tats. I want tats.
 JACK: *(They all laugh.)* Do us all a favor and don't tell Mom until we're there to watch.
 ASHLEY: I've got one.
 DEANNA: You've got one what?
 ASHLEY: A tattoo.
 DEANNA: You do not.
 ASHLEY: Do so. *(She turns her back to them, lifts her top a little to show her lower back.)* See?
 JACK: Ashley! President Hinckley specifically said—
 ASHLEY: Well, he wasn't there, was he?
 CARLA: So just a little rose. It's pretty.
 DEANNA: Now. Forty years from now—

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e said we missionaries, we were at war. A war against evil. And so, you had to expect a few casualties. I'm another casualty.

ASHLEY: Forty years from now who'll care how I look?
 CARLA: Cool. *(Change of subject.)* Anyway, seriously, Deanna, Church blew. You shoulda been there.
 DEANNA: Did anyone ask about you and Steve?
 ASHLEY: Sure. "How's Steve these days?" What I wanted to say was "fine, the gunshot wound's healing nicely." And then leave 'em hanging.
 JACK: You didn't though.
 ASHLEY: Sorely tempted. And by the way, beloved bro, that's three straight.
 JACK: Three straight what?
 ASHLEY: Weenie comments, weenie responses. "President Hinckley specifically said. . . ." You've reached your limit; time now for you to be amusing.
 CARLA: Have you filed?
 ASHLEY: Weenie comment.
 CARLA: I haven't reached *my* limit yet.
 ASHLEY: *(Pause.)* I just got here.
 CARLA: No, I mean, in the last five weeks, have you filed?
(Pause.)
 ASHLEY: What are you talking about?
 CARLA: You shot him on a deer hunting, trip, right? And Steve's dad and his brothers, Bronco and all, they deer hunt every year?
 ASHLEY: Like I said.
 CARLA: Which means they obey the law, get a license, they don't poach.
 JACK: Of course they don't poach.
 DEANNA: What's this?



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f I didn't have an intellectual testimony of the gospel, I wouldn't have anything at all. So why don't you try laying off me a bit.

CARLA: Trying to find out what's going on.

DEANNA: I don't think this is an appropriate—.

CARLA: I do. (*Boring in.*) It's January, Ash. Hunting season ended the 30th of November in Montana. Looked it up on the Internet, took me five minutes.

ASHLEY: Why would you do that?

CARLA: Your story doesn't hold up. You shot him, and then you came straight here? *Not*. So you hung around Missoula for five weeks, minimum five weeks. So did you file? Straightforward question.

JACK: I don't think this is necessary, Carla.

CARLA: Another weenie comment, Jack.

JACK: Lay off!

DEANNA: This interrogation isn't nec—.

CARLA: Probably not. I still want to know. Don't you?

DEANNA: It's Ashley's business.

CARLA: You're here, you want our help. It's all our business.

ASHLEY: You little creep. Last time I show you my tat. (*They're all looking at CARLA uncomfortably.*)

CARLA: Look. I'm the kid sister, and I should know my place. In the, whatever, hierarchy. You think of me as cute and little, right? Thing is, I'm not the one here in, you know, disgrace. I actually live here, getting good grades and not, you know, leaving missions or shooting people or whatever. So deal with me. (*Pause.*)

ASHLEY: No. I haven't filed. (*Pause.*)

JACK: So you hung around Missoula for five weeks? Before you came home.

DEANNA: What did you do?

ASHLEY: I hung around. I did stuff.

CARLA: Like what?

ASHLEY: Okay, I quit my job, I cleaned out my bank account, I bought a plane ticket and I lived off what was left. I checked into a motel and I watched a lot of daytime TV. (*Pause.*) And, you know, thought about things.

DEANNA: Steve must have been going nuts.

CARLA: He never called here.

ASHLEY: Steve knew where I was. I talked to him every night on the phone, from the motel.

DEANNA: He knew which motel it was?

ASHLEY: He stopped by a couple times.

CARLA: Really?

ASHLEY: Spent the night twice.

DEANNA: Seriously?

ASHLEY: You want details?

CARLA: Okay, that's a big TMI.

JACK: But then you came home. You used the plane ticket.

ASHLEY: I had to decide. What I was going to do. And then I decided, and then I used it and flew home. (*Pause.*) You don't know what it was like. I . . . (*Composes herself.*) Thing is, I love Steve. I really do. (*Pause.*) He's just great, and he's good for me, and he's good to me. And I'm this total spoiled brat. And we'd pray, you know, he'd mostly pray but then sometimes we'd pray together. I'd say a prayer too, to make him feel better, mostly.

JACK: And you got an answer?

ASHLEY: Yeah, well, okay, what does that mean, an answer? You know, you think and you worry and you think and you study it out in your mind, and . . . you pray. And this big stone wall, you know, like there's this big stone wall between you and, whatever, the ceiling. God. So, we all know the formula, right?: wrong answer, stupor of thought; right answer, heartburn. Hey, I'm blonde, I don't get anything but stupors of thought. (*A quick laugh.*)

JACK: (*Drily.*) That's true enough.

CARLA: No argument there.

DEANNA: Okay, that's totally bogus, you know.

ASHLEY: What is?

DEANNA: Well, for starters, your whole dumb blonde act. We know better, Ash.

ASHLEY: Okay, grad student genius girl, remember you're talking to a college drop out.

DEANNA: Yeah, and someone who had like a three eight when she—.

ASHLEY: Hey, flirt with a teacher, tight sweater, good grades are not a—.

DEANNA: Okay, whatever. Point is, the prayer thing, that formulaic understanding of D&C nine? It doesn't work that way.

JACK: It does too.

DEANNA: *(The next twelve line exchange between JACK and DEANNA, they interrupt each other.)* Not for me, bro. Treating talking to God like some switch on switch off binary—.

JACK: The scriptures say plainly—.

DEANNA: Jack, some kind of oversimplified—.

JACK: . . . set out for us a model for spiritual—

DEANNA: . . . So dealing with our sister with some small degree of sophis—.

JACK: Hey, I'm going to stick to revealed scripture, if you don't min—.

DEANNA: I don't mind, but I do mind not *having* a mind or being willing to use—.

JACK: There you go, intellectualizing the—.

DEANNA: . . . oh, oh, oh, and some oversimplified version of one of the—.

JACK: Hey, if there's one thing I know—.

DEANNA: Yeah, that's about right Jack, you know about maybe one thing—.

JACK: It is that an intellectual testimony will not stand. It's built on a foundation of sand—.

DEANNA: If I didn't have an intellectual testimony of the gospel, Jack, I wouldn't have anything at all. *(Pause.)* So why don't you try laying off me a bit. *(Pause.)*

ASHLEY: So. *(Drily.)* I can maybe get answers to prayers other ways, is that what you're saying?

DEANNA: *(Still glaring fiercely at JACK.)* Absolutely. You have gifts most blondes are denied.

ASHLEY: But what you don't know, darling sister, is that I really am blonde. Like, spiritually.

JACK: And we all know you better than that.

DEANNA: Exactly.

CARLA: What he said.

ASHLEY: Yeah, you all know me so well.

JACK: Better than you think, Ash. *(Pause.)*

ASHLEY: But see, I don't mind. It's a way to like yourself. To look in the mirror and think, "Maybe I don't look so bad." It's something. Could afford to lose ten pounds.

CARLA: Who couldn't?

ASHLEY: But you know, I just don't think your God likes the package. You know? And the package is what I got. *(Pause. Harder.)* And Steve's dream job is in Missoula. And me in Missoula the next thirty years is not gonna happen. And it's a drag, because I really do love the big jerk. I really think I do. *(Pause.)* But I shot him, shot at him, I wanted to shoot him; I'm gonna hurt him, I'm gonna keep hurting him. So if I love him, what's best for him. . . . *(Fiercely.)* And no kids yet, and I still look okay, so if I want out, try again, I better do it now. Maybe I marry money next time.

JACK: And that's what you came to? Thinking it out?

DEANNA: It does *not* make sense. Ash, this is not right, this doesn't even sound like you, this isn't you.

ASHLEY: Isn't me? I'm Ashley the airhead, of course it's me. *(Enter MOM and DAD. They all pause.)*

DAD: Hey kids. *(They ad lib hellos)*

ASHLEY: *(And now she loses it.)* Oh, Daddy. *(And she collapses into his arms. He pats her on the back, says "there there" and "it's okay honey," ad libbed.)*

MOM: This was sounding like an interesting conversation.

CARLA: *(To MOM.)* Ashley was telling us that she hadn't filed yet.

MOM: No? Why would she?

DEANNA: Long story, we'll catch you up. *(Takes her aside.)*

MOM: *(Breaks away from DEANNA, goes to her Dark Space. Staring at DAD and ASHLEY.)* His bond with the children is, well, cerebral. Family history lessons and "I just read the best book." It's why they're all so insufferable; everything came back to books, growing up. But when it comes to the hugging, the one-on-one stuff, the nurturing stuff, the emotional, painful, "I need comfort" stuff . . . it's him then, too. *He's* who they want. *(Not quite bitterly.)* I'm the one who keeps the schedule, keeps things running smoothly. That's when it's not me who's the one who said the thing they need comforting from. *(Pause.)* Of course it's not fair. I don't expect it to be. I just think I got the crappy role here, and somebody had better make it up to me, that's all I can say. *(Looks up.)* You hear that? You owe me big time. *(She steps back into the action.)* Kids. Ash and her Dad need a moment, here. Let's get the table set or something.

(They all exit. Light shift indicates passage of time.)

MOM and DAD enter to the sofa. DAD's reading.)

MOM: Dishes are done.

DAD: Mmmm.

MOM: Kids are off, doing whatever. I'm suspending the rule about Playstation on Sundays. It got Jack and Carla out of the way.

DAD: I'm sure that's okay.

MOM: So? *(DAD puts his book away.)*

DAD: I'm sorry.

MOM: Wow, your undivided attention. First time in twenty-eight years.

DAD: Yes, I'm sorry. So, Ashley?

MOM: I guess the first big question is, did she really shoot Steve?

DAD: At least I can say that her version of events didn't change from before. I'm not sure I entirely believe it.

MOM: That the gun simply went off.

DAD: It's not implausible. It was dark, she stumbled down the mountain with a rifle she hardly knew how to use.

MOM: I thought she'd learned how to shoot.

DAD: One half hour session at a shooting range. Anyway, she was furious about the snipe hunt aspect of things, and even more livid at their laughter. Which I really do understand.

MOM: Me too.

DAD: Do you remember their reception?

MOM: Of course I do.

DAD: Remember the cake thing? He cut the cake, but instead of feeding it to her, he ground it into her face, made a huge mess? And his Dad and brothers laughed?

MOM: And you didn't laugh.

DAD: No.

MOM: Nor did I.

DAD: As long as she took that morning, getting her face and hair looking perfect. She was so lovely. And then for him to treat her that disrespectfully. They were a married couple at that point; there wasn't much I could say. But I was appalled.

MOM: It's pretty common nowadays, in Mormon receptions. I think it's distasteful, but it has become commonplace, like throwing rice, like throwing the garter . . .

DAD: That doesn't make it any less despicable.

MOM: No, I agree. So, the snipe hunt, she comes off the mountain, they're all laughing. . . .

DAD: She stumbled, the gun went off. That's her version. Shocked her, she said, because she thought the safety was on.

MOM: Typical Ashley?

DAD: Maybe. As I said, I don't entirely buy it.

MOM: But it's also possibly true.

DAD: Yes. (*A pause.*) She comes off the mountain, furious, livid. She looks at Steve. Laughing. She told me, she wanted more than anything to "wipe that smirk off his face." She's maybe twenty yards away, a campfire between them. She squeezes the trigger. A private moment, imagining shooting him, thinking about it, a harmless fantasy, really, because the safety was on. (*Pause.*)

MOM: Except the safety wasn't on.

DAD: And she had a round chambered. Which she'd also forgotten.

MOM: That sounds like her, too.

DAD: It does.

MOM: And we'll never know, will we? What really happened?

DAD: No. (*Pause.*) I choose to believe her. I choose not to believe my daughter could aim a firearm at a man and pull the trigger.

MOM: (*Drily.*) Well, I'm glad that's settled.

DAD: Accident or design, we're fortunate in one respect. She's a lousy shot.

MOM: So is she divorcing him or is he divorcing her?

DAD: She says Steve's willing to forgive and forget. It's really her call.

MOM: Has she decided?

DAD: No. (*Pause.*) I had no idea what to say to her. I listened mostly. Urged her to pray. She said she has.

MOM: To no avail, right?

DAD: That's what she says.

MOM: That "stupor of thought," "burning in the bosom" thing never worked for me, either.

DAD: It has, sometimes, for me.

MOM: Not for me. I get answers other ways.

DAD: Yes. Anyway, I finally did suggest something to her.

MOM: What?

DAD: I asked her if she wanted a father's blessing.

MOM: A priesthood blessing.

DAD: Yes.

MOM: What did she say?

DAD: She said she'd think about it. (*Pause.*)

MOM: You know, when she got married, I thought, well she's moving on. Up. Whatever, a direction. Finally.

DAD: Me, too.

MOM: She's twenty seven!

DAD: I know.

MOM: They are *all* too old for this! That's the thing, they're all like that!

DAD: Drifting, rootless.

MOM: They're not supposed to be rootless. It's our job to give them roots!

DAD: Or suggest places where roots might be found.

MOM: You know, times like this, you drive me crazy.

DAD: What do you mean?

MOM: You, sitting there, analyzing it. Sort of sadly. Saying things like "places where roots might be found."

DAD: Do you analyze it differently?

MOM: I don't turn neat phrases for it. I get pissed off!

DAD: Okay. . . .

MOM: What do you plan to do?

DAD: What do you mean?

MOM: About Jack, about Ashley, about Deanna! What are you going to do?

DAD: Wait. Support them. Pray for them.

MOM: And that's all?

DAD: Support their agency. I'm sorry, honey, but I do not believe that the sole measure of parenting is how the kids turn out.

MOM: It's a measure!

DAD: Granted. It's a measure.

MOM: (*Saying "damn" is hard for her, but she's on a roll.*) Look, forget about it. Okay? Go back to your . . . damn . . . book.

DAD: If we need to talk—

MOM: No. We always do that. You're better at talking than I am, and it'll just piss me off worse. But we have a problem and I don't know what to do about it. And so we'll do nothing, as usual. (*As she exits, she turns to him.*) And now you're gonna go all wistful. And that pisses me off, too.

(*And she's gone. DAD looks at his Dark Space, yes, a bit wistfully. Sighs, crosses to it.*)

DAD: (*Holds out the book.*) In some respects, I'm having a crisis of my own this weekend. Jared Diamond really threw me. Evidence always trumps opinion, and his evidence is so compelling, and the resultant conclusions so inevitable, I frankly find myself rather shaken by him. Can I reconcile his ideas with the notion that the Book of Mormon is a genuine historical record, about people who really existed? My initial conclusion was that they couldn't be reconciled; that I must, at the very least, rethink issues I'd come to regard as settled. And then it turned out, I didn't have the leisure to spare for it. (*Pause.*) Isn't that exhilarating, though? Doing as



B.H. Roberts did, starting from scratch, blowing every settled conclusion to smithereens, rebuilding my testimony from the foundation up! What a marvelous gift a good book is, especially one like this, one that genuinely forces you to confront bedrock beliefs, rethink everything. Contemplating the gospel, thinking about it, taking it seriously, it's a feast, a banquet, not just correlated cream of wheat. I wanted to share my thoughts with them, especially with the ones most likely to get it, Deanna and Ashley. And then, instead, my children come home, all in a state of crisis, forcing me to rethink *them*, too—reevaluate, arrive at a second opinion. And they're hurting, in pain, and nothing I have ever done before has prepared me for this crisis. It overwhelms me, it's so immense. And we're tied together by priesthood, and more importantly, by love, and all I can think is how very very good God is to us all. What a tough and terrible tutor crisis can be. (*Looks tenderly where MOM just exited.*) And yes, short term, while we're in the moment itself, it pisses me off, too.

(MOM enters.)

MOM: Everyone, living room, NOW! (*They all start to gather.*)

DAD: What?

MOM: They're back! (*Another quick, flurried pickup. Another doorbell.*) Craig, dishes away, Deanna living room, Jack, upstairs by the bookcase, Ashley, do *something*, Carla, put away all evidence of Playstation—.

CARLA: It's in the family room!

MOM: They can see it from here and believe me they'll check.

Move. (*Flurry of movement. They all put things away. MOM stands by the door, quickly checking hair, dress. Opens the door.*)

Sister Dawes, Sister Swanson. Three visits in three days!

SISTER DAWES: I do so hope we're not intruding.

SISTER SWANSON: If this is even the tiniest bit inconvenient—.

MOM: Not at all, always have time for visiting teachers. Please, come in.

SISTER DAWES: I was thinking about you, Melinda, and, well... (*Holding out a casserole dish.*) Lemon bars.

MOM: How very kind. (*Takes the dish.*) Craig, look. Sister Dawes made her lemon bars.

ASHLEY: Oh, man. (*Reaches in, takes one.*) These are the best, I remember 'em from girl's camp. Dee, check it out, lemon bars.

DEANNA: I love these!

I sn't that exhilarating, though?
**Doing as B.H. Roberts did,
 starting from scratch,
 blowing every settled
 conclusion to smithereens,
 rebuilding my testimony
 from the ground up!**

MOM: Get a plate, girls, we eat from plates in this family.
 (*ASHLEY dashes off.*)

DEANNA: Jack, lemon bars.

JACK: Sounds great.

MOM: This really wasn't necessary.

SISTER DAWES: Nonsense. It's no trouble at all, and besides, it gave us an excuse to give our regards to Jack.

SISTER SWANSON: There was such a press of well wishers in church. . . .

MOM: Of course.

SISTER DAWES: And I must say, Jack, it's wonderful to have you back.

SISTER SWANSON: How is your health?

JACK: I'm doing all right.

SISTER SWANSON: Well, you look rather thin to me.

SISTER DAWES: You should know, Jack, that my lemon bars are utterly fattening, and no good for you at all.

JACK: (*Smiles a little.*) That's good to know.

SISTER SWANSON: We just hold you in such high regard, Jack. Your whole family, of course.

JACK: Sure.

SISTER DAWES: Well. I suppose we'd best be off.

SISTER SWANSON: Yes, we don't mean to disrupt your Sabbath. Just wanted to make a quick delivery.

MOM: Thanks once again. Girls?

CARLA: (*Mouth full.*) These are awesome, thanks! (*DEANNA and ASHLEY, who has returned with plates, mumble thanks.*)



They're all such amazing navel gazers, like, "Oh, how do I feel today? Oh, it's all so hard."

MOM: Once more, it was so good of you to stop by. *(The SISTERS head for the door.)*

JACK: Sisters?

SISTER SWANSON: What is it, Jack?

JACK: Can I ask you a question?

SISTER DAWES: Of course.

JACK: This is a really stupid question, I guess. And you're just two sisters, friends of my Mom and all. You're not the whole ward, is what I mean.

SISTER SWANSON: Go on.

JACK: Am I an R.M.? I mean, do I . . . *count*?

SISTER DAWES: I'm not sure I understand what you're asking, Jack.

JACK: Never mind, it was a dumb question, I just—

SISTER SWANSON: Jack. You're asking if we consider you a returned missionary.

JACK: I came home early. I didn't finish two years, not even one year. *(Pause.)* What am I? I mean, what *am* I?

SISTER DAWES: Jack, I don't know all the details of your return, nor are they any of my business. I understand you were ill. That's enough. In my mind you are certainly an R.M.

SISTER SWANSON: A returned missionary, every bit as much as my Charlie.

SISTER DAWES: Or your sister, for that matter. *(Pause.)*

JACK: *(Very moved.)* That . . . that means a lot to me.

SISTER SWANSON: I know why you felt the need to ask. One hears silly things from time to time. People who came home early don't really count as R.M.s, that sort of nonsense. Why I have a sister-in-law who took all sorts of grief because she married a convert!

MOM: I remember that.

SISTER SWANSON: Joseph Smith was a convert, you know. Brigham Young was a convert.

SISTER DAWES: That's mostly a Utah thing, I think. Thank heavens we California Saints are more sensible.

SISTER SWANSON: *(To JACK.)* Jack, if you're in need of a job, Barry's hiring at the Cupertino store. Stock boy, not exciting work, but it's better than minimum wage.

JACK: Thanks. I'll stop by tomorrow.

SISTER DAWES: And it's really good to see you again.

JACK: Thanks. *(They start to leave.)*

CARLA: Oh, also, Ashley's getting a divorce. Ash, you wanna tell everyone about that, too? And Deanna's quit school or something; we're not sure quite what.

SISTER SWANSON: I think perhaps we'd best leave your family alone. *(Notices MOM.)* Melinda, it's going to be fine.

MOM: I know. *(Genuinely, this time.)* Thanks for stopping by.

SISTER DAWES: We're your visiting teachers. It's our responsibility. *(Hugs all around, ad libbed goodbyes, and they leave.)*

DAD: Well, that was something. Unexpected.

MOM: They're good people.

DAD: Yes, they are.

MOM: And Carla. You're out of the will. *(Laughter.)*

CARLA: No fair!

DAD: I'm with your Mom on that one. *(More laughing.)*

ASHLEY: Jack, you really wanna be a stock boy at Barry Swanson's store in Cupertino?

JACK: It's a job. I need a job.

DEANNA: Do you know anything at all about paint?

JACK: I'll learn.

DEANNA: Well, those lemon bars were great. *(And everyone swivels to look at DEANNA.)* Who's up for euchre? *(No takers.)* Hearts?

ASHLEY: I think we're all up for a spill-the-guts session.

DEANNA: I'm not ready.

CARLA: We're ready!

ASHLEY: I say it's time.

MOM: *(Starts a chant, which the rest join in.)* Spill the guts! Spill the guts! Spill the guts! Spill the guts!

DEANNA: I said I'm not ready.

CARLA: Look, could it be worse than Ash's attempted homicide?

ASHLEY: Or Jack leaving his mission?

DEANNA: It's not, it's just. . . . *(Looks at her DAD quickly.)* I'm

sorry, I. . . . (*Dashes up the stairs. After a moment.*)
MOM: I get so tired of this from her. Excuse me. (*She exits too.*)
DAD: (*Looks around.*) We still have enough for euchre.
(*They all exit, CARLA steps into her Dark Space.*)
CARLA: Okay, the *Final Fantasy* stuff; yeah, I'm addicted. That's the kind of person I am, like, if there's a puzzle, I just have to finish, like, I can't stand the thought of not finishing. Once I'm done with *Ten*, I'll probably never play again. It makes the others not take me seriously, which makes sense because I was like seven when Ashley went to college. But the thing is, they kinda drive me nuts too. They're all such amazing navel gazers, like, "Oh, how do I feel today? Oh, it's all so hard." And meanwhile there are hundreds of thousands of orphans with AIDS in West Africa. You know? And we've got this great house, and life, and what are we doing? You know? And, like, Iraq, and the Sudan, and, like, starving kids in Haiti. And like that. The world's a mess and we don't even wanna think about it. And I think it's time I take, like, King Benjamin seriously and, you know, maybe, help. So Peace Corps for starters, and then, I don't know, journalism, maybe something with the State Department. I get that from Mom, not Dad. He'll say all the right stuff, but she's the one who gets her hands dirty.

JACK: (*In his Dark Space.*) Deanna's thing, her problem.
CARLA: I can't get worked up over it.
JACK: It's a guy. It's gotta be a guy.
ASHLEY: (*In her Dark Space.*) She says it's not a guy, and I believe her.
CARLA: It'll be something she thinks is impossible for us ordinary mortals to even begin to comprehend. And it'll be something totally obvious and stupid.
JACK: She intellectualizes the gospel and she's not open to the Spirit.
ASHLEY: She's probably like me. "Hello, God?" Oops, can't get through.
CARLA: She's the deepest one of us. *Self-appointed* deepest.
JACK: She's my sister, and I love her and there was a time I really looked up to her. But does she feel the Spirit?
ASHLEY: It's not a guy. It's something else.
(*DAD enters and crosses to the sofa with a different book. All others exit their Dark Spaces. He reads. After a moment, MOM enters, plops down next to him.*)
MOM: What a day.
DAD: Indeed.
MOM: I'm totally pooped.
DAD: Yes.
MOM: What Sister Swanson said. About Jack.
DAD: Yes?
MOM: So does he count? As a returned missionary?
DAD: I don't know why not.
MOM: Don't you have to finish the whole thing?
DAD: There aren't rules for it. It not like there's a Returned Missionary merit badge.
MOM: No, but if you call someone an R.M.—
DAD: I think we just decide. We just tell people, we have two children who served missions. Honorable missions.

MOM: Okay. It's still gonna be tough for him.
DAD: I know.
MOM: Honey? (*DAD grunts.*) Honey?
DAD: (*Puts his book down again.*) I'm sorry.
MOM: I want to ask you a question. About hockey.
DAD: (*Surprised.*) Shoot.
MOM: Now, you know how I feel about hockey.
DAD: I promise, we've never held it against you.
MOM: So big of you. No, but see, I remember once in a moment of feigned interest, I asked about the playoffs or whatever—
DAD: To win Lord Stanley's Cup.
MOM: I don't think we're going to make it. I don't think they're a very good team.
DAD: Quite true. It's been a disappointing season.
MOM: We're a really bad team.
DAD: Unfortunately. They've not played well. What makes it worse is, their team captain, Owen Nolan, is unhappy. They're almost certain to trade him.
MOM: Well, that option's out for us. Though I wouldn't mind seeing what, say, the Bennetts would want for their Barbara.
DAD: Oh, I'd think Deanna, Carla, and a draft pick. Not a good trade, that one.
MOM: No, I think we're stuck with what we have. (*Pause.*) Why do you all like the Sharks so much? I mean, you guys are anatical, have to watch *SportCenter*, see how they're doing.
DAD: They're ours. That's all that matters. They're *our* Sharks.
MOM: But you could pick a different team to root for. A better team, one that might win.
DAD: That, my dear, would require that I root for the Detroit Red Wings. And *that* I will *never* do.
MOM: So you cheer for San Jose.
DAD: With great hope and determination. (*Goes back to his book.*)
MOM: So what are you reading now?
DAD: Nothing important.
MOM: You've finished it, that Diamond book?
DAD: Yes.
MOM: Geez, our lives falling down around our ears and you still found time to read some honking big intellectual—
DAD: I find it helps.
MOM: So what are you reading now?
DAD: It's really nothing.
MOM: Come on. I wanna see. (*She grabs at it.*)
DAD: Why are you so—
MOM: Let me see—
DAD: Honey, please, if you—
MOM: *Louis L'Amour*?
DAD: Yes.
MOM: You're reading Louis L'Amour?
DAD: Light escapist—
MOM: In hardback? Let me get this straight, you went to the library in order to check out an edition of Louis L'Amour in *hardback*?
DAD: It's an annotated edition.
MOM: Of Louis L'Amour?

DAD: He was quite an interesting Western historian.
MOM: He wrote cowboy books!
DAD: Actually very few of his books dealt specifically with—
MOM: And you got it in hardback so we wouldn't notice it was Louis L'Amour.
DAD: Well, actually, Arthur Henry King used to say that reading a paperback was an insult to—
MOM: (*Hooting.*) Big Mr. Intellectual, head always buried in some heavy duty hardback, and really it's . . . let me see this. (*Snatches it from him.*)
DAD: There's really no need to—
MOM: Okay, okay: *Utah Blaine*? What is that, a title?
DAD: And the name of the leading character.
MOM: You're reading a book called *Utah Blaine*?
DAD: (*Ashamed.*) I am.
MOM: Sounds like an Amway salesman from Provo. Utah Blaine? With a character who, oh, this is great: (*Reads.*) "had a face as sharp as a Paiute tomahawk."
DAD: I know. I'm a total fraud.
MOM: You are. "Pay no attention to that man behind the curtains, he's reading *Utah Blaine*."
DAD: It's been a hard day, I wanted to read something reasonably mindless.
MOM: I sure understand that.
DAD: Now I've shattered all your illusions.
MOM: Honey, if I ever had illusions about you, I lost 'em a long time ago. (*Pause.*) It's gotta be past midnight, I'm totally exhausted, and I can't go to sleep.
DAD: Yes. Well, hence my choice of reading material. (*Pause.*) You want it when I'm done?
MOM: I saw Diamond laying around the other day and actually started it.
DAD: Really?
MOM: Yeah. It's interesting.
DAD: Let me know what you think of it?
MOM: I will. (*Pause.* DEANNA comes down the stairs.)
DEANNA: Mom? Dad?
MOM: Deanna?
DEANNA: Hi.
MOM: You okay?
DEANNA: Yeah. Yeah, I think so.
DAD: It's awfully late. We were just going to bed.
DEANNA: Oh.
MOM: We could stay up a little longer. If you need us to.
DEANNA: Oh, no, it's okay.
DAD: Come on, sit down.
DEANNA: I don't want to keep you guys up.
DAD: Nonsense, we always have time for our daughter.
DEANNA: The thing is, I think maybe . . . (*Her voice trails off.*)
MOM: Ah. (*Gets up.*) I understand completely, you want to talk to your father. Get the lights when you're finished, will you?
DEANNA: Actually . . .
MOM: What is it, honey?
DEANNA: I'd rather talk to Mom.
MOM: Oh.
DAD: (*After a pause.*) Oh my.

DEANNA: I'm sorry, Dad, but this is—
DAD: It's perfectly all right. I'm perfectly fine.
DEANNA: This is hard for me.
DAD: Yes. Meanwhile, I've got a good book to read, I'll head upstairs where I won't disturb you.
MOM: (*To DEANNA.*) Are you sure?
DEANNA: Yeah, I am.
DAD: Then I'll make myself scarce. (*Kisses MOM.*) I may be asleep when you come in.
MOM: Of course. (*DAD exits. MOM sits, uncharacteristically anxious.*) Well, sit down, honey.
DEANNA: Thanks. (*She does.*)
MOM: Can I get you some hot chocolate?
DEANNA: No, I'm fine. (*Awkward pause.*) This was a really tough day, wasn't it?
MOM: Oh yeah. You remember that time, few years ago, when your father was diagnosed with cancer.
DEANNA: I remember. You told us all we had to prepare ourselves, you had some terrible news.
MOM: And it turned out to be nothing. A mistake.
DEANNA: I remember.
MOM: Your Dad and I were saying yesterday, this, having all of you come home like this, this was as bad.
DEANNA: Seriously?
MOM: Oh, yeah.
DEANNA: But we're all okay. I mean, basically, we're okay.
MOM: I suppose.
DEANNA: In fact, that's part of what I keep telling myself, that what I'm going through is not actually that big a deal. I mean, it's not like a divorce, or even Jack and his mission thing. I'm sort of, maybe, inflating it all in my head or something. I keep telling myself that, at least.
MOM: It must have been somewhat serious. Enough to come home. When you couldn't even come home for Christmas.
DEANNA: I thought about this the whole break. That's all I did, work and think about this.
MOM: We missed you.
DEANNA: I missed you, too. (*Deep breath.*) Basically, it's a guy.
MOM: Someone you've been seeing.
DEANNA: Sort of. We haven't actually *dated*; people sort of don't date at Brown. But we talk, wonderful conversations. We go on walks, that amazing frosty air in Rhode Island. We argue.
MOM: What's his name?
DEANNA: Seth. Seth Cohen.
MOM: LDS?
DEANNA: Oh no, no, the guys in Institute, there aren't many of them anyway, and it's a real . . . I just didn't fit in. No, Seth's Jewish. Non-practicing.
MOM: And because of this guy, this Seth, you had to come home?
DEANNA: No, it's not like that, it's . . . I don't believe in anything.
MOM: The gospel, you mean.
DEANNA: No, I'm not saying that, it makes sense to me, it's comforting.



MOM: What is it, then?

DEANNA: (*Exploding.*) I mean, I don't believe in *anything!* I mean, Seth believes in so many things. He believes, with all his heart and soul. In, you know, politics, and feminism, and the environment, and gay rights. And he was in law school, actually, and he switched to social work administration, and he believes in Derrida and in Foucault and power structures in a culture and post-structuralism. And he's against war, and he's so passionate about all of it, *all of it*. He believes, and and and he acts on what he believes, like he marches and and and here I am, a Mormon girl from San Jose; he can hardly believe it, he's having these arguments with a Mormon, we're everything he loathes, homophobic and conservative and pro-life and anti-environment and sexist and Republican! The Christian Right. The only way he'd talk to me at all was when I told him on my mission evangelicals hated us as much as they hate what he stands for.

MOM: Sounds like a good liberal.

DEANNA: Yes! And he's kind and he cares about people and not just abstractly, he works in a soup kitchen Saturday mornings and he, he . . . He wanted to sleep with me, he told me so, and when I told him I couldn't, wouldn't, he understood completely. *Completely*. That was Thursday, and Friday I packed and came home.

MOM: Well, good for you. Holding to your standards.

DEANNA: It had nothing to do with standards. I wasn't sure, I *wasn't* ready. It took me by surprise. Next time he asks, the answer might be different. I don't know.

MOM: But you came home. Got out of the situation.

DEANNA: Mom, this *isn't* about chastity.

MOM: It certainly sounds to me as though—.

DEANNA: Mom, tell me something. How did you get up this morning?

MOM: I don't know, Church is at nine, around seven I—.

DEANNA: No, I mean *how*. How did you get up?

MOM: I don't understand what you're—.

DEANNA: Grudgingly? Angrily? Hit the snooze alarm four or five times?

MOM: Certainly not. That's your father's way, of course. But I had to get ready. It was Sunday, and it was sure to be an awkward day.

DEANNA: Do you bound out of bed, like you can't wait to greet the day? Like, it's so exciting to be up?

Y

ou pray. And this big stone wall, you know, like there's this big stone wall between you and, whatever, the ceiling. God.

MOM: I get up when the alarm sounds, because I have things to do.

DEANNA: Seth jumps out of bed. Like he can't wait to see what's in store that day.

MOM: You know this *how*?

DEANNA: He told me. See, he's non-practicing, but he said that it's a commandment, like the Jews have something like three hundred commandments, sort of sub commandments under the big Ten, and one of 'em is to get up excited, thrilled to be able to worship God that day.

MOM: I think I—.

DEANNA: I have never in my life felt that way! Passionate, excited, energized! And especially not Sundays, where I can hardly bear to face it, Church, and all those droning dreary talks and songs too slow and . . . I don't believe in anything. Seth made me realize. No, I have a testimony. I believe in God. I find the gospel comforting, it makes sense. That's all.

MOM: I think I understand.

DEANNA: So I had to come home. I *had* to.

MOM: I thought you loved your major.

DEANNA: I love Dad. And Dad got pretty passionate, sometimes, about books and history and some new connection between things he'd discovered. That's the closest thing to it I've ever felt, watching Dad. Seth's like that all the time.

MOM: Jack's like that.

DEANNA: Yeah, and that's why he came home. It was making him sick.

MOM: I suppose.

DEANNA: I can't borrow . . . energy, passion, from Dad anymore. And it's not good for me.

MOM: In what way?



DEANNA: Oh, man, I was doing all this stuff about Emperor Yu and his magic tortoise, and I got to thinking, hey, what's the difference between believing in that and believing in Joseph and his golden plates? They both seem just as absurd.

MOM: I would say there's a *big* difference between—.

DEANNA: And everyone wants the same thing preached every Sunday, basic doctrines. No . . . controversy, no disagreements, no passion.

MOM: They find it comforting. To—.

DEANNA: I don't think so, I think they're just afraid. I think they're terrified. Jack says I only have an "intellectual testimony," and I'm going to hell because of it, and he's right, that's about all I have left, but wanting to hear the same five talks and the same four testimonies every week, that's an intellectual testimony, too; you're going to hell, too. Just not a very interesting one.

MOM: There's a good deal more to Church than—.

DEANNA: No, there is, you're right. But Mom, what am I gonna do?

MOM: I wish I knew.

DEANNA: I miss him. I miss being around him, all that energy.

MOM: I certainly do understand that.

DEANNA: Mom, what am I gonna do? *(Pause.)*

MOM: We're not, you know.

DEANNA: What?

MOM: What he says we are. What you're saying. We're not.

DEANNA: We sort of are.

MOM: I don't get up in the morning all excited to worship. I probably should, and it's probably a good idea, but I don't. But I do get up, immediately. With energy. Because there are things to do, and it's my job to do them.

DEANNA: I know, Mom, that's not the same—.

MOM: I get up because I have to make the beds and maybe someone's had a baby and I have to make dinner for them, or because I have my visiting teaching.

DEANNA: Mom, you don't—.

MOM: In fact, the more I think about it, the more pissed off I'm getting.

DEANNA: Mom—.

MOM: Don't tell me I don't have energy! Don't tell me I don't have passion. Don't tell me my testimony isn't spiritual enough just because I don't care to argue in Sunday School. Or that I'm going to hell for it.

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on't tell me my testimony isn't spiritual enough just because I don't care to argue in Sunday School.

DEANNA: I didn't say—.

MOM: This Seth person, he's not here, and he's not right.

DEANNA: He's sort of right.

MOM: He's not right at all!

DEANNA: He's right when he's talking about me.

MOM: No. Not true.

DEANNA: I think he is.

MOM: Deanna, do you want my advice?

DEANNA: I do, yeah.

MOM: I think you need to stick up for yourself. I think you need to show some backbone.

DEANNA: *(A bit offended.)* I don't think—.

MOM: I think you should go back to Brown, and I think you should go see this Seth, and I think you should have a good long fight with him. And don't give an inch, not on anything. Defend who you are and what you believe in, because it's worth fighting for.

DEANNA: I don't know that that's—.

MOM: Because you've done nothing but back down. You've conceded every point. Haven't you?

DEANNA: No!

MOM: You can too get passionate about the gospel. I know you can, because I've seen you.

DEANNA: Not for a long while.

MOM: Because you're embarrassed. "Just a Mormon girl from San Jose." Nonsense! You're my daughter, and your father's daughter, and you're a returned missionary, and you're not some little Mormon mouse. You've let Brown University intimidate you. Get over it.

DEANNA: It's not easy.

MOM: You want it to be.

DEANNA: I never said that I wanted an easy road.

MOM: But you do want it to be more exciting.
 DEANNA: I think there's something wrong with a culture that—
 MOM: Never mind that!
 DEANNA: No, but I think that there is.
 MOM: Well, what have *you* done about it? I say, defend the faith, and you'll feel the passion.
 DEANNA: I wish I knew.
 MOM: And *conservative*—you let him call you a conservative!? Excuse me, but I have been Democratic precinct captain for San Jose Eighth for fourteen years! Nobody calls *me* a conservative!
 DEANNA: No, that's true.
 MOM: Go back to Brown. Go back to Seth. And fight with him. And make it a good fight. A hard fight. Let him know he's been in a tussle.
 DEANNA: If I do, there's a pretty good chance I'll end up wanting to marry him.
 MOM: We'll cross that bridge when we come to it.
 DEANNA: I don't know that I can stay in that major.
 MOM: Well, what other majors have you considered?
 DEANNA: (*Laughing, a little.*) You're putting this all back on me, in other words.
 MOM: Yes. I *am* putting it all back on you. (*Enter CARLA to a Dark Space, where she listens intently to the conversation.*) Your father is upstairs. You need to tell him what you told me, about your major.
 DEANNA: I will.
 MOM: Deanna. On your mission, you told me in Taipei you taught a first discussion to a young woman you saw sitting on a park bench.
 DEANNA: I remember.
 MOM: A first discussion, about Joseph and the plates. The story you say now reminds you of Emperor Yu's tortoise.
 DEANNA: Yes.
 MOM: And then the Spirit told you to challenge her to baptism. And you did.
 DEANNA: And she accepted. Fifteen minutes after we met her. Chen Wei, I got a letter from her a couple months ago. I know where you're going with this.
 MOM: Who was the girl who taught that discussion?
 DEANNA: Mom, I don't know her anymore.
 MOM: Well, you should reintroduce yourself. Because she was, and is, terrific. (*MOM and DEANNA cross to their Dark Spaces.*)
 CARLA: Family is a big puzzle sometimes, who fits where, who does what. And to make it worse, we don't ever stay the same. Or act predictably.
 (*JACK to his Dark Space.*)
 JACK: To keep Mom happy, I did see a doctor, who confirmed what my mission doctor had told me. (*Pause.*) My mission is over.
 (*ASHLEY to her Dark Space.*)
 ASHLEY: And I can't go back to Steve. I cannot, cannot live in Missoula.
 DEANNA: But I'm going back to Brown. And I'll finish my degree in History of Mathematics. It's only a master's and I can switch gears for the Ph.D.

(*DAD enters his Dark Space.*)

CARLA: Mom told us all about Seth.
 JACK: I knew it was a guy.
 ASHLEY: You can't keep secrets in a family.
 CARLA: And Dad reading crappy Westerns! (*They all laugh.*)
 DEANNA: We'll tease him about that for the next ten years.
 JACK: I believed with all my heart. Tried to serve with all my soul, all of it. It wasn't good for me, it made me sick. What I need is, I don't know, more balance.
 DEANNA: Yin and yang. One, plus two, plus three plus four.
 ASHLEY: I figure I just need to meet a new guy. A better guy. So, quickie divorce and back on the circuit. But then that blessing of Dad's kinda messed that up for me.
 DAD: I believe that Steve is far more abusive than she's been willing to share with us. And that was confirmed for me when I gave her the blessing.
 ASHLEY: Some of the things Dad said about Steve didn't sound right to me. Abusive? He's never hit me. But what do I know about the Spirit? At least I felt *something*. Something . . . different. I'm still trying to figure things out.
 CARLA: Dad's always gonna be the cerebral one, and he's always gonna have these enthusiasms. And he talks about publishing a book some day, and he never will.
 ASHLEY: But he's there for us, all right, every time.
 CARLA: And Mom keeps things running.
 DEANNA: I'm scared. I'll try to stand up to Seth and he'll overwhelm me, all that energy, all that passion. Am I up to it?
 ASHLEY: I'm scared. All I got's the package, and the package needs some work.
 JACK: I'm scared. I gave myself so completely and it didn't work.
 CARLA: I'm never scared of anything. I just watch it all unfold, figure out my own way, where, maybe, I can help.
 MOM: I'm scared for all of 'em.
 DAD: And I think I speak for all of us when I say I'm scared most of all for the San Jose Sharks.
 MOM: I'm scared for you, Craig. Second opinion and all, I'm still terrified.
 DEANNA: But I'm going back to Brown, and I'm going to carve out time to do some reading I've neglected.
 ASHLEY: Me, too.
 DEANNA: I, Deanna, having been born of goodly parents. . . .
 JACK: Therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father. . . .
 ASHLEY: And being richly favored of the Lord in all my days . . .
 CARLA: Therefore, I make a record. Of our proceedings.
 DAD: Of *all* our proceedings.
 CARLA: We listen and we bicker and we tease. And share the same dumb jokes, and work to solve the puzzle. The greatest puzzle of all. Family. ☺

(*Music. They all dance, this time to Bob Dylan's "Shelter From the Storm."*)

FINAL BLACKOUT