

*For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;
neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.*

~Psalm 22, 23-24~

In front of the meetinghouse, Leah McCorry stepped out of a large steel station wagon and into the baking heat of the summer sun. Since her father and fiancé were both stationed at the airbase thirty miles down the highway, it fell to twenty-three-year-old Leah to offer an arm to her grandfather as he pulled himself out of the car. After all, Leah's mother was in no shape to help at the moment and the oldest of the four boys was only in middle school.

"Thanks, honey," the old man said, taking his granddaughter's hand as the rest of the family got out of the vehicle.

Since the last helicopter had fled Saigon two months before—in late April 1975—Leah hadn't seen much of either her dad or her fiancé, Danny Turin. Before Danny had even had his first hour of flight time, though, Leah's father had navigated surveillance aircraft during the early days of the Vietnam War and her grandfather had fought in the Pacific before that. The strain of responsibility was nothing new for women in the family.

"Look at that dog," Leah's grandfather said, pointing out a long-haired mutt across the street as they walked up to the church. "Boy, he must be hurting today in this sun."

Leah's grandmother had endured a lot of strain, and joy, in seventy-three years on earth but her heart had finally given out earlier that week, suddenly and without warning.

"You know, I really need a dog," the old man said to his granddaughter, absent-mindedly.



Inside the church, the ward missionaries greeted Leah and her grandfather in the foyer and then welcomed her mother, three younger brothers, and all the cousins, nieces, uncles, and other

family members who made their way to the chapel over the next thirty minutes. Eventually, the missionaries found seats in the chapel themselves, and the service began once the casket was wheeled in with the family behind it.

After the bishop spoke, Leah's mother said an opening prayer in between tears, shared her testimony of Christ, and then sat back down.

In between hymns, Leah told a story about her time as a missionary in Rome and a cousin compared their grandmother's gardening to a parable from the New Testament.

When it was her grandfather's turn to speak, the thin old man collected himself, letting a smile escape from under his neatly trimmed mustache.

"Thank you, Bishop," he said from the pulpit, nodding to Bishop Haskell. "Thank you for everything you've done, for everything all of you here, today, have done. And thank you for not having us sing 'Nearer My God To Thee.' That hymn always got to me and I appreciate you letting me keep a bit of my dignity so far this morning."

Leah's grandfather went on to tell the story of how he had met his wife almost seventy years before, how, yes, she had loved her garden like their grandson had said, and how as husband and wife they'd loved to tease each other throughout the decades.

"If any of you want to come to the house afterward, you can help me dig out the old badger trap I made to scare her, back before the war," the old man said. "For those of you too young to remember, it's not a real badger trap—I can explain the whole apparatus better at a more opportune time. Better yet, ask the bishop. I let him bring it in to show and tell when he was a boy."

The bishop smiled from his seat. The Badger Trap, as Leah's grandfather referred to it, was a spring steel animal trap about the size of a dinner plate that the old man had rigged to come within four or five inches of snapping shut but to stop just short of wrapping its steel jaw around whatever object had released its spring.

Leah's grandfather would set the trap and, when an unsuspecting onlooker asked if that actually was an animal trap sitting on the floor or the coffee table or on the bus, the old man would say, "Oh, yeah, but it doesn't work anymore," and then smash his hand onto the trigger. At worst, it only resulted in a light bruise or pair of scratches for the old man and a jump scare for his target. Of course, as a diabetic in his seventies, cuts and bruises weren't such a joke for the old man anymore.

"Hey, don't blame me for what happened," Leah's grandfather said to Bishop Haskell. "Your dad told me to bring the trap to that school. He was a cop; I did what he said. Back then practical jokes were different, you could scare old folks, pregnant women...you know, the only person who didn't get scared of that badger trap was my granddaughter."

The old man turned to Leah and asked her why she didn't panic when he played the joke on her.

“Because Grandma warned me about what was going to happen,” the young woman said, brushing some hair out of her face.

“Yeah, it really annoyed your grandmother when I’d do stuff like that. When nobody was looking she’d give me a sock on the nose, afterward,” Leah’s grandfather said, looking down at the casket that held his wife, who was dressed in her white temple clothing. “No, I’m just kidding. But she’d always get me back, she’d always have her revenge.”

The old man looked back over the congregation.

“When we were young she’d do whatever it took to get me to chase her,” he said. “I’d be on the grill and she’d pour water down my shirt and run away laughing. I’d look over and she’d be hiding behind a bush or something, peeking out at me. One time she knocked me off a step ladder. I mean, I’d play games but that woman was just merciless.”

A few members of the Ward laughed knowingly. Meanwhile, in the hallway outside of the chapel, someone was stealing a pair of twenty-dollar bills.

“I guess I could be pretty inappropriate at times,” the old man said. “And now...nobody’s gonna give me a sock on the nose anymore. Not for a little while, at least, until I pass through the veil, too. Leah’s grandmother always said that she was gonna pass over to the other side before me and I didn’t believe it. She was two years older than I was and made me a child bride when I was seventeen, you know?”

Except for a few titters, the room was quiet.

“I know I shouldn’t feel this but I’m feeling alone, right now,” the old man said. “I’m not proud of it but when I...when I found her on the ground in the garden and she was gone I...I didn’t know what to do. I’ve known what to do since I was this high.”

The old man held a hand to the height of his hip.

“I didn’t know what to do because she was already gone,” he said. “There wasn’t anything to do anymore. And I just thought of the Savior all of a sudden. I thought of the Atonement and how no unclean thing could be in God’s presence after the Savior took on all of our sins and how, for the first time in his life, even Christ felt alone in Gethsemane and then Golgotha.”

The old man dabbed his lips with a handkerchief from his vest pocket.

“I felt unclean, then,” he said. “And I thought of Christ on the cross. And I know the Savior was referencing a Psalm, but he still said, ‘Father, why have you forsaken me?’ Father, why have you abandoned me? It’s what I was thinking. And I hurt, there in the garden, just holding her hand. And I started to weep. I don’t think I wept since I was a young man, maybe this high.”

Again, Leah’s grandfather held a hand to the height of his hip.

“But I was grateful,” he said. “I was grateful for the power of the feeling that washed over me. God let me feel a little bit of what Christ must have felt in Gethsemane and I got to know my Savior a little bit better than, because of that feeling in my chest.”

The old man put both hands on the pulpit, bracing himself.

“See, this is why I didn’t want them to play ‘Nearer My God To Thee,’” he said. “It was the Spirit taking hold of my heart and letting me know that I was still alive, that there was something bigger than me, something overpowering in this universe. It was God. ”

The old man blew his nose but his voice was steady and his eyes were dry.

“God was there. And if God was there, my wife was with Him,” he continued. “And that meant she wasn’t alone. None of us is alone. I hope you all feel that. I don’t have much more to add to that so I’m just gonna close. And I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Instead of taking his seat behind the pulpit, though, Leah’s grandfather slowly walked out of the chapel and his granddaughter darted up to go after him, as solemnly as she could. Leah still wasn’t used to wearing high heels and nearly tripped as she headed out into the hallway. Although the wedding was only a few months away, Leah McCorry was more used to boots than a pair of pumps. Behind her, the service continued, and outside, in the parking lot, Leah found her grandfather leaning against the station wagon.

“Grandpa?” she asked, approaching him slowly. “Grandpa, are you okay?”

“I was looking for that dog,” the old man said. “You remember that shaggy one we saw on the way in?”

“Yeah, I remember it, Grandpa,” Leah said.

“I guess he wandered off somewhere,” the old man said. “I’d like a hunting dog, again. I know I’m too worn out for a horse but maybe...maybe I could train a dog again.”

“Sure, grandpa,” Leah said. “We’ll get you a dog, okay?”

“Girl, don’t talk to me like I’m senile,” the old man said, sharply. “I just wanted a hunting dog again. I was thinking of the dog I had when I was your age, that doesn’t make me incompetent. Come on, let’s go back inside.”

“I’m sorry, Grandpa,” Leah said. “Everyone will be out soon anyway to go to the cemetery.”

“Then let’s stay out here for a minute, okay? Just for a minute,” the old man said.

The tall, thin man and the thin, short woman stood in the lot together, quietly, for some time. The dry breeze tugged at her long, brown hair and played in his coattails, like a mischievous child.

“You know, it’s the best feeling in the world to see the whole family together today,” Leah’s grandfather said. “I can’t imagine where I’d be if I couldn’t see all of you kids growing up together. I think everything else I ever did would have been a waste if you all hadn’t been here with me, today.”

After a pause, the young woman spoke.

“You taught me a lot of good things, Grandpa,” she said, hugging the gaunt old man. “You taught me a lot of good things.”

“Help me find that badger trap when we get home, okay?” the old man said, patting his granddaughter’s hand.



Back inside the meetinghouse the service had ended and Leah’s mother sent one of the boys out to the parking lot so that the old man could join the pallbearers.

The graveside service and burial were simple affairs and afterward the family and close friends returned to the meetinghouse for a Mercy Meal that the sisters of the ward had prepared and laid out in the cultural hall while the mourners were still at the cemetery.

Back inside the church, Leah noticed a quiet commotion in the hallway, outside of the bishop’s office. She gave her grandfather’s hand to her mother, who seemed to be doing better now.

“Make sure he eats something, okay?” the young woman said. “I’ll be right there, just give me a minute.”

A number of brethren were talking in hushed tones with the bishop and Leah gently inserted herself into the circle to ask what was going on.

“It’s nothing, please, Sister McCory,” a counselor said, smiling feebly. “Please, be with your family.”

“Tell me what’s going on,” Leah said. “I can’t go be with them if I know something’s going on.”

The brethren looked to the bishop who then told Leah that one of the sisters had been robbed of forty dollars.

“It was during the service, apparently,” Bishop Haskell said. “She’d gone to use the restroom.”

“Who?” Leah asked.

“Sister Brandt,” the counselor said.

“Jennifer Brandt was here?” Leah asked, taken aback. The two young women had gone to school together. After graduating and then kicking around the town for a few years, they had both gone on missions. Jennifer had gone home early, though, to marry a bartender from Salt Lake City. The couple had broken up a month before anyone could even reply to the wedding invitations and Jennifer hadn’t been very active in the Church since then.

“Apparently when she put her purse down on the sink it had two twenties in it and when she picked it back up again there was only a dollar left,” another counselor said.

“Why did she leave her purse on the sink?” Leah asked.

“Leah, please, you don’t need to worry about this right now. I’m asking you, go be with your family,” Bishop Haskell said.

Leah nodded to leave but then turned back to the men.

“What do you mean there were two twenties in Jennifer’s purse and then there was only a one-dollar bill?” she asked.

“What do you mean?” the first counselor asked.

“You mean the thief made change?” Leah asked.

“That’s just what Sister Brandt told us happened,” the Bishop said. “She was probably mistaken and had forty-one dollars in her purse. Leah, this isn’t the day for you to worry about petty things like this. Let the Spirit be with you.”



“Of course, Bishop,” the young woman said. “Just, please make sure my grandfather doesn’t hear about this, okay?”

The brethren nodded and the young woman made her way back to the cultural hall. Inside, a collection of friends orbited Leah’s family. On her way in, though, Leah passed Jennifer Brandt. Jennifer asked if the family was doing okay and if there was anything she could do to help.

“I think we’re going to be okay,” Leah said. “Everyone’s just taking it one day at a time.”

“Listen,” Jennifer started, “you didn’t see anyone out in the hallway when you went after your grandfather, after his talk, did you?”

“No,” Leah said. “No, I didn’t see anybody.”

“See, it’s just that someone took some money out of my purse today and I’d really like to know who did it so, if you think of anything, could you just let me know?” Jennifer said. “Again, if you need anything, please just let me know okay?”

Jennifer headed back out to the chapel and Leah found her mother.

“What did that girl want?” Leah’s mother asked as the twins played around their legs.

“Jennifer Brandt? It’s nothing, Mom,” Leah said.

Leah's mother said that Jennifer had asked her something about money and that it had felt quite rude, given the circumstances.

"Mom, she's gone, okay?" Leah said.

The mother and daughter spoke about the service briefly and then a couple of second-cousins walked up to the two women to offer condolences. Leah thanked them and went to check on her younger siblings.

Across the hall, the Nunez twins, two earnest and bright-eyed young boys who lived next door to the McCory's were talking with her oldest brother about summer camp.

"It's pretty cool," her brother said. "We get to make campfires and throw a tennis ball at anyone who talks after lights out."

Leah drifted in and out of similar, disjointed conversations for the next hour. She didn't feel like eating, even though the food looked delicious.

"Oh, yes, my Jonathan is just home from Brazil," one woman said to Leah's mother. "He's gained so much weight, I barely recognize the boy!"

"Leah was the other way," Mrs. McCory said, her spirits obviously lifting with the company of her friends. "She lost so much weight she looked like another person when she got home. Look at her, she's still a skeleton!"

Leah smiled respectfully but joined a different conversation before long.

"Oh, Leah, you should have heard it!" an Aunt said to her. "Jennifer's cousin from out of town was asked to give the closing prayer and she sang Ave Maria!"

"She sang 'Ave Maria'?" Leah asked.

"Well, it was something like that," the aunt said, and then turned to another woman. "Susan, did that girl Abbey sing 'Ave Maria' or am I mistaken?"

"It was just a verse, I think. She just spoke it, but it was nice," the other woman said.

Around that time Leah saw her two youngest brothers, the six-year-old twins, chasing each other through the crowd and went after the boys to calm them down. Taking their hands, she led them back to her mother who, in turn, asked if Leah had seen her grandfather.

"I don't see him," the young woman said, scanning the crowd. "Hold on, Grandpa's at the dessert tray. He didn't take his insulin yet, did he?"

After separating the old man from the cookies, sharing more stories with relatives, and saying goodbye to friends, Leah, her mother, grandfather, and the four boys eventually piled into the

station wagon and went back to the McCory home. Danny and Leah's father had both left messages on the answering machine but couldn't say when they'd be allowed to leave the base.

That evening, after her grandfather had gone to bed, Leah took her father's truck into town to spend some time by herself. She drove aimlessly up and down the grid of streets until she eventually came to the gas station where a couple of her friends worked.

Before going inside, Leah pulled up to the automatic car wash, put the Chevy in neutral, and let herself get pulled into the swirling mist of water and green foam of the machine. As the drum roller brushed up and over the roof of the cab, Leah let out one sharp, frustrated scream, composed herself, and waited for the conveyor belt to carry her out of the car wash.



Parking in front of the store, she went inside to see if Amanda Barnes and her brother Joey were working that night. Only Amanda was on shift, mopping the drink aisle. The two young women hugged, Amanda apologized for having to work that day, and after catching up, they started talking about the old days in high school.

"Jennifer was at my grandmother's service today," Leah said. "She almost made a scene. I was...so irritated."

Amanda stared forward, propped against her mop, and then looked down at her feet. Leah and Amanda had been friends since the nursery days and they couldn't hide much from each other.

"What?" Leah asked.

“Jennifer...she came in here this afternoon,” Amanda said. “She was pretty mad and, um, she was honestly saying some pretty messed up stuff.”

Leah asked what the other woman had said and Amanda told her that Jennifer had been suggesting that someone from the McCory family had taken the money out of her purse.

“She said that you and your grandfather were the only people she saw in the hallway after the money went missing,” Amanda said.

“You have got to be kidding me,” Leah said.

“Look, she’s just jealous of you and Danny,” Amanda said. “Nobody’s taking her seriously and it’s not going to have any effect on you, okay?”

“Yeah, I’m not doing this today,” Leah said. “I’m not letting this evil inside me. It’s gonna be good. Things are going to get better from now on. This has been a stupid week and it’s turning around, right now, because I’m turning it around. So, like, let’s talk about good stuff. How far along are you now, four months?”

“Five,” Amanda said, rubbing her belly through the gas station smock. “Ephraim said I could leave work after the second trimester and I’ve totally got senioritis to get out of this place.”

“Amanda, oh my gosh!” Leah said, smiling.

“Money’s gonna be tight but Ephraim said he doesn’t want me to have to worry about cleaning bathrooms or pumping gas. I mean, Joey does all the gross stuff whenever he’s on shift with me but he’s been sick so I’ve been covering for him,” Amanda said.

“How’s Ephraim doing out at the oilfield?” Leah asked.

“He’s good. Like I said, cash is kind of tight if I stop working but Ephraim got a promotion and he’s feeling pretty good about that so I’m not going to argue,” Amanda said. “We can’t all marry astronauts, sweetie.”

“It’s going to be a long time before Danny is an astronaut. I mean, you know, it might never happen, but he’s got the Physics degree, he’s flying the B-52’s, he’s doing everything right,” Leah said. “It’s his dream and even if he doesn’t get into the program he’s doing well enough for me. I’m so jealous.”

“Of what?” Amanda asked.

“Of you! I want to be a mom, too,” Leah said, smiling.

“I know it’ll happen. You’ll have a little one running around before you know it,” Amanda said. “Did you guys have any trouble getting a reservation at the temple?”

“Oh, it was fine. It’s not as busy in the Fall. The wedding’s only a few months away now,” Leah said.

“October 5th?” Amanda asked.

Leah smiled, said yes, and Amanda started counting on her fingers.

“Okay, so, if you get married in October you should have a fat little baby in your arms by July of next year, then, right?” Amanda said.

“I hope so,” Leah said, smiling. In school, Jennifer Brandt had always teased Leah by calling her ‘Mom’ behind her back, mocking her modest clothes and responsible demeanor. Of course, Leah had been forty pounds heavier in school, too, and that hadn’t made things easier, either.

Leah and Amanda hugged again, Leah bought a club soda for the ride home before leaving, and was asleep within the hour.

The next morning, after getting the boys up and making breakfast for the family, Leah kissed her grandfather on his head and took the truck back into town. There wasn’t a cloud in the late morning sky, as was common in that part of Utah, and as Leah turned onto Center Street she committed once again to be positive and humble and kind that day.

At the stoplight, she closed her eyes and said a quick prayer.

“Heavenly Father, just let me rise to the challenges you give me. Don’t let me be a bad person and don’t let me hold onto anger. Please give me something positive to do today and let me contribute something,” Leah said. “I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.”

The light had turned green while her eyes were closed and, flustered, she eased off the clutch and into first gear. It wasn’t long before Leah’s prayer was answered.

Having spent nearly all of her twenty-three years in town, Leah recognized just about every face on every street. People who were just visiting tended to stand out. Of course, the girl’s ripped tights and neon top also made her stand out to Leah as well.

Brushing the long brown hair out of her face and straightening her posture, Leah pulled the truck over to the side of the road and cranked down the passenger window.

“Abbey!” she said, from across the cab. “Hey, Abbey, it’s me, Leah! Thank you so much for coming to the service yesterday!”

Jennifer Brandt’s cousin from out of town said ‘hello’ awkwardly and looked down the street, as if she wanted to keep walking.

“Do you need a ride somewhere?” Leah asked. “It is gross out today! It’s so hot. Come on, let me give you a ride.”

“No, it’s okay, really,” the girl said. “Thanks but I’m okay.”

“I’m just on my way down the street to get some ice cream. They’ve got these blueberry cheesecake shakes at Reidel’s Creamery that are awesome,” Leah said. “Right down the street, come on, let’s each get one. I’ll buy.”



“What, at the place just down there?” Abbey asked, pointing down Center Street. The girl was at least a few years younger than Leah, maybe more. She was probably still in school.

“Yeah, Reidel’s, the place a few blocks down,” Leah said.

“Yeah, fine, okay,” Abbey said.

The girl got in the Chevy and Leah drove them three blocks to Reidel’s Creamery, parked the truck, and took Abbey by the hand to the counter.

“I mean, it’s not the fanciest place but, seriously, tell me this shake isn’t the best,” Leah said.

She ordered ice cream for both of them and, after the drinks came out, Leah asked Abbey if she was okay if they walked while they ate.

“It’s a big thing they always did in Italy, getting ice cream and taking a walk while you eat,” Leah explained. “I mean, they usually do it later in the day and not at, like, noon. We couldn’t be out that late when I was over there but we’d get ice cream whenever we could.”

“You were in Rome for your mission, right?” Abbey asked. “You said that at the funeral. What was that like?”

“It was kind of hot and dirty,” Leah said. “But it was also so amazing just to see all the architecture and the sights. Honestly, everyone was pretty committed to Catholicism, though.”

“Yeah,” Abbey said. “I bet.”

“Telling everyone that they’d have to give up wine and coffee was usually a fairly quick deal-breaker for most people, too,” Leah said, then paused.

“What?” Abbey asked.

“You know, your cousin ended her mission early but she actually converted half a dozen people in that time,” Leah said. “I didn’t convert anybody. So, don’t worry, you’re probably pretty safe if I couldn’t even convert anybody when I was actually trying for eighteen months.”

“I don’t know, maybe I could just convert long enough to spend a couple years in Europe on vacation and then convert back,” Abbey said.

Leah smiled and asked the girl where she would go if she could go anywhere in Europe.

“I don’t know, probably Paris, I guess. Anywhere but here,” Abbey said.

“Well, hey, the shuttle out of town is pretty cheap right?” Leah said, pointing to the sign on top of the Honey Bee bus depot across the street. “What is it, like not even fifty bucks to get to Vegas?”

“I don’t know,” Abbey said. “I don’t know, maybe I’d like to see the Riviera, the Mediterranean. Not like that’s ever gonna happen.”

“Oh, don’t say that!” Leah said. “How old are you, seventeen?”

“Sixteen,” Abbey said. “Seventeen in October.”

Leah smiled, maternally.

“So, what, you’re just visiting your family for the Summer?”

“I guess. I mean, I don’t know,” Abbey said. “Things aren’t that awesome back home in Vegas.”

“Do you like it out here, in the country?” Leah asked.

“Nah, not really,” the girl said. “My mom just didn’t want me around, once school was out, and Jennifer’s supposed to be, like, the successful, positive influence on me or something. As if when I started to drink I didn’t get the bottles from Mom’s liquor cabinet.”

“You know, when I was eighteen, when I was just getting out of school, I was a mess,” Leah said. “I mean, I’d cry all the time and I didn’t like myself. And I didn’t have contact lenses and my mom still cut my hair, it was a mess.”

The dry summer wind blew down Center Street as Leah and Abbey drank their shakes.

“I was a mess when I was way older than you,” Leah said, finishing off her shake and throwing the cup in a trash can. “But when I went on my mission a lot of that changed because it had to change. I had to be responsible for myself. I think I’m the only person who ever spent eighteen months in Italy and lost weight.”

Abbey looked interested, or at least more interested than she had when Leah had first parked her dad’s truck.

“Really, I feel a lot better about myself now,” Leah said. “Everybody seems to be really happy for me, too. But, you know, I lost like forty pounds because I didn’t eat. I mean, I’m not the tallest girl in the world so when I say forty pounds, I mean forty whole pounds.”

“How’d you do it?” Abbey asked.

“Mostly sardines on crackers,” Leah said. “You have no idea how many sardines and crackers I ate. It wasn’t good, I just basically starved myself. It was actually really bad for me, mentally and physically. It might have been why I got gallstones.”

The streets were mostly empty but Leah still looked behind her to see if anyone was behind them.

“Anyway, I remember, like, eight months into my mission I had this big meal over at an investigator’s house and it was a really big deal that I actually ate everything,” Leah said. “Things were kind of getting better around that point. I didn’t know what I was doing but, I mean, I kept going. And when my mom made cakes and stuff for Danny, back home, and he’d send me these really brief, formal thank-you cards I knew that I had to be positive. Because he

was back here, finishing up school and going into the Air Force. I knew I couldn't bother him with my pathetic little problems. I mean, I didn't want him to accidentally drop a bomb or start a war or something."

"Danny's like six years older than you, right?" Abbey asked.

Leah said that yes, he was.

"What, when you got back you guys just started dating?" Abbey asked. "I mean, how did you ever get that guy? I don't mean it like..."

"I know what you mean, it's fine," Leah said. "Our families were close for forever, since before any of them were baptized, and we knew each other growing up. It's not like we hung out or anything—he was graduating high school when I was barely in middle school. He was always studying or working or doing stuff for the Church and never actually dated much. A lot of it changed when I got back from my mission. I'd changed a lot, I guess."

"You mean you were skinny, now," Abbey said.

"Well, it wasn't just that," Leah said. "I knew what I wanted. I just acted like his wife, right from the beginning. I turned into his sidekick and I'd just do whatever I knew needed to be done. Plus his mom was Italian and I'd just gotten back from Italy so that was my hook, too. I just brought him food and I cleaned up his place and I took his mother to the doctor and before long he just proposed to me."

"Wow," Abbey said, absent-mindedly.

"I never waited for him to ask me to do anything," Leah said. "He wouldn't have asked me anyway, he's too sweet. I was just real nonchalant and never acted like anything was a big deal. Just, like, 'oh, hey, I've gotta get over to the DMV today but here's some pork chops I made last night. Let me know if your mom needs help with choir on Sunday, okay? See ya later.' I just did it for a while and I think it came off as really confident to him. Even though I was just doing it because I felt like I hadn't made anything happen in my life up to that point. Like, I really needed to start making some progress."

"I don't know, that seems kind of dangerous to me," Abbey said.

"More dangerous than stealing your mom's alcohol and getting drunk?" Leah asked.

Abbey didn't say anything.

"Abbey, see, the whole reason why I wanted to marry Danny was because he wasn't the kind of guy who was going to be an idiot over me," Leah said. "He was a convert—he found the Church, searched out God, converted his whole family. He wasn't going to throw that away over a girl. That's what I respected about him."

“It just doesn’t seem like it would work,” Abbey said.

“Yeah, but it did,” Leah said, reminding herself not to get frustrated. “It did work. When you ask for what God wants, your prayers do get answered.”

“You never catch him looking at other girls?” Abbey asked.

“I never catch him lying to me,” Leah said. “Honestly, it’s the other girls who are more of a problem.”

“Like my cousin Jennifer?” Abbey asked.

Leah sighed.

“Jennifer is not making things very easy for me right now,” she said to the girl. “It bothers me, deeply, that she acts the way she does. You know, on my mission, a lot of people tried to use my faith against me. So, wanting to be a better daughter of God, even if you’re not always better that day, becomes something you really have to hold onto and protect and just keep nestled in your hands like a bee that landed on your palm but might sting you.”

“I know you try to be nice but you don’t like my cousin very much, do you?” Abbey asked.

“Jennifer doesn’t seem to care that her actions reflect on all of us. It hurts me, badly, that in order to be an honest person, I have to take your side over hers,” Leah said. “She made covenants, and you didn’t. She’s twenty-three, you’re sixteen. She and I know the bond that we share, as daughters of God, and you don’t know all of those things. And you robbed her at my grandfather’s funeral.”

Except for Leah and Abbey, the street was empty. As the woman watched her, the girl began to cry.

“I want to go home,” Abbey sobbed. “I’m so alone here.”

Leah’s expression didn’t change.

“The sign above the bus depot said shuttles to Las Vegas for thirty-nine dollars,” she said. “You took what you needed from your cousin’s purse to buy a ticket and you gave her the dollar that you didn’t need. That’s what happened, isn’t it?”

“You don’t know what it’s like!” the girl said.

“But that is what happened, Abbey. Isn’t it,” Leah said.

“You don’t know what it’s like,” the girl said, pausing. “When did you know I did it?”

“I got a feeling, a prompting, not long after it happened,” Leah said. “According to Jennifer, she suspected my grandfather and I, which was obviously ridiculous. Our friends from the ward aren’t perfect but I can’t see too many full tithe-payers stealing at a funeral service. At the very least, they live here and the damage wouldn’t be worth forty dollars. I mean, it could have happened, it could have been some little kid from the primary.”

A dog walked by, panting in the road.

”But then one of the sisters told me you’d sung ‘Ave Maria’ when you were asked for a closing prayer,” Leah said. “That sounded strange, reciting Schubert. But, you see Abbey, I spent eighteen months in Italy. I know another prayer, a very common one in Catholicism, that a sister from Utah might not be familiar with. ‘Ave Maria, Gratia plena.’ Hail Mary, full of grace. You said a Hail Mary, asking for a prayer for the sinners.”

“I just wanted to go home,” Abbey said. “I kind of wish I didn’t get that ice cream now.”

For a moment there was quiet.

“Well, you called to God for help so you can’t be all bad,” Leah said, smiling slightly. “I’m just glad it was for a bus ticket home, at first I thought you needed drugs.”

“So, what are you going to do to me now?” the girl asked.

“Abbey, I don’t want to hurt you, I want to help you,” Leah said. “I’m not going to tell Jennifer. But I know what you chose to do. And if I know what you did then God definitely knows what you did. It was in his house, Abbey. I don’t want you to have to carry that sin when you’re so young.”

“Fine,” the girl said and threw a pair of wadded up bills to the ground. They were damp from her palm but fluttered in the light breeze.

“Let’s put it in an envelope and put it in Jennifer’s mailbox, okay?” Leah asked. “I know what this money meant to you. You can pick up the forty dollars, Abbey. I’ll buy you an envelope from the post office.”

Silently, the woman and the girl walked back in the direction of the truck. After getting an envelope from the post office they turned down the 200 South block and headed toward the Brandt house. After dropping the envelope in Jennifer’s mailbox, Abbey turned to Leah, who gestured that they keep walking.

“So, what happens next?” Abbey asked.

“It’s not my place to tell you what to do,” Leah said. “I’m not the bishop. I don’t know, maybe you should write another letter, Abbey. Maybe you should let the bishop know.”

“And then what?” the girl asked. “I’m not getting arrested over this.”

"I'm not positive but I'm pretty sure it'd be up to Jennifer to press charges or not. Regardless of my feelings about her, I can't imagine she'd try to have her sixteen-year-old cousin locked up for forty dollars, which she'd just had returned to her," Leah said.

"So, then, still, what happens next?" Abbey asked.

"I don't think you can really know what's gonna happen," Leah said. "But if you mail the bishop a letter instead of dropping it in his mailbox, it'll take a day or two to get over to 800 West. The Haskell's live on 800 West, just so you know. And there's a Honey Bee shuttle headed south each night."

Leah held out a fifty-dollar bill toward the girl. Abbey took the money.

"Were you going to tell Jennifer if I didn't give you the money?" she asked.

"No, of course not," Leah said. "But I didn't know if you were gonna freak out or not when I caught you, to be honest."

"So, why did you give me the money for a ticket?" Abbey asked.

"Because you're worth fifty dollars to me, Abbey," Leah said. "You're my sister, even if you don't know it. It's not that long ago that I was in a bad place, myself. And your soul's worth saving for fifty bucks. Come on."

Leah gestured back toward the truck, where it was parked on the side of the street. As Leah got in, she spoke to Abbey through the window.



“Having said all that, it’d be a real mistake to not let the bishop know what happened,” Leah said. “You’ve come this far and owned up to it, don’t harden your heart now. There’s no excuses, now that you’ve admitted you’re not actually a bad person. Remember Lot’s wife. Of course, you’re actually going towards Sodom, now, but I think the metaphor holds.”

“Wait, are you telling me that I shouldn’t send the letter?” Abbey asked.

“What?” Leah said.

“You said I’m going towards Sodom,” Abbey said. “Is this a trick or something?”

“Las Vegas. You’re going towards Las Vegas. It was a metaphor,” Leah said. “Definitely tell the bishop. I’m not doing reverse psychology on you.”

“Oh,” the girl said.

“Do you want to come over my place for lunch?” Leah asked.

“No, I—I think I’ll just go back to the bus station, okay?” Abbey said. “I mean, after I go to the post office. And after I get my bag from Jennifer’s place.”

“I think my grandfather would like to see you again before you leave,” Leah said.

“No, look, I’ll tell the bishop what I did but I, I can’t. I just can’t right now,” Abbey said.

“Listen, I heard you talk at your grandmother’s funeral. I know how important religion is to you. And I do see it, okay? I see what you’re trying to do. I see that God’s watching me.”

“I’m glad, Abbey,” Leah said. “A broken heart and a contrite spirit, that’s all it takes to be forgiven.”

Abbey paused before asking the next question.

“Listen, do you know the missionaries in Las Vegas?” the girl said.

Leah’s face brightened.

“Look, I’m not saying that I want to be a Mormon,” Abbey said. “I just, I know it’s important to you and I know you’re a nice person. And I don’t know a lot of nice people. And I don’t want to fall back in with the people I used to know. I might have to go home but I don’t want to go backward, you know?”

“Yeah, I know. That’d be nice,” Leah said, as she went through her purse for a card with the city’s mission contact information on it.

“Thanks,” Abbey said, as Leah gave her the card. “Just don’t check up on me, okay?”

“Don’t worry,” Leah said. “It’s not gonna be any of us down here checking in on you. Take care of yourself, Abbey.”

Leah put the truck in first gear and did a u-turn to head back home. As she pulled up in front of the house, the station wagon was gone but Leah did see a Dodge in the driveway. After parking, she ran inside as quickly as she could, smiling.

Danny Turin and her grandfather were sitting at the kitchen table, catching up.

“You know, you picked a good one here,” Leah’s grandfather said after hugging her, pointing to Danny. “And you, Dan, you did okay, too.”

Leah hugged Danny as he got up to take some dishes to the sink.

“Get off of me!” he laughed and pretended to threaten her with a saucer until she let go.

As she sat down on the couch, next to her grandfather, the old man put his hand in hers.

“You know, you remind me a lot of your grandmother, when she was your age,” the old man said. “I’m glad they named you after her, Liahona.”

“Thanks Grandpa Ethan,” Leah said. “Is there anything else you need?”

“Actually, there is,” the old man said and winked. “A surprise. Ask your fiance about it.”

Upstairs, Danny led Leah to her grandfather’s room and opened the door.

On the floor, there was a large box wrapped in paper.

Leah paused.

“That’s the badger trap, isn’t it,” she said, finally.

“Yeah, but, that was just your grandpa’s surprise,” Danny said. “Mine’s better, everyone can keep all their fingers. So, how’d you like to move to Colorado?”

“What are you talking about?” Leah asked.

Danny told her that he’d been accepted to a Ph.D. Physics program in Boulder.

“Oh, my gosh! Honey," Leah said, jumping up and down. Whenever she was around Danny, her movements became exaggerated.

“One step closer,” Danny said, smiling. “One more line crossed off the list.”

“You’re going to be an old man by the time you get into space,” Leah said, wrapping her small arms around her large, solid fiancé and shaking him.

“Look, if six or seven or eight years down the road I’ve got my Ph.D. and I’m teaching, and we’ve got a bunch of kids running around, and our family’s strong...you know, it wouldn’t be the end of the world if NASA never looked at my file.”

“You’re not really giving up already, handsome, are you?” Leah asked.

“Look, let’s just get through this decade and see where we stand, okay?” Danny said.

“Yeah, sure. Hey, could you bring the Badger Trap downstairs so Grandpa can see me open it?” Leah said. “He’s a sweet old man and I don’t want to take a smile away from the guy.”

“Your grandpa’s a character,” Danny said.

“You haven’t even heard most of his stories,” Leah said. “Ask him about the time he saved Constancy from a man-eating mountain lion when he was this high.”

Leah held a hand up to her hip, imitating her grandfather.

Danny picked up the wrapped package and asked his fiancée to get the door for him.

“Just don’t trip down the stairs,” Leah said.

“I’m not going to trip down the stairs,” Danny said.

“Colorado, huh?” Leah asked.

“It’s only a ten-hour drive home if you go through Wyoming,” Danny said, carefully making his way to the first floor. “Or a ninety-minute flight. But we’re probably not going to be able to afford a flight for a few years at this rate.”

“There’s always the Honey Bee Line,” Lead said, thoughtfully.

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Bob Ciarrocchi is a husband, hopes to soon be a father, and currently holds the calling of Ward Mission Leader. Before he knew anything about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he ran a business engraving gold and silver plates but wasn’t as successful as any of the Nephites. Now he designs things on a computer and then builds them out of wood, metal, and plastic. He enjoys camping with his wife. [Read their conversion story here.](#)