

SCRIPT

Reunion

A Play by
Thomas F. Rogers



Newport, Maine

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Reunion

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REUNION

CAST [in order of their appearance]

Wayne Robison -- a school teacher, did not serve a mission, still doubts

Mildred Robison -- the Matriarch

Billy Robison -- 19 year old son, soon to be missionary

Arthur Robison -- the Patriarch

Chris Robison -- Stewardess,

Jerold Robison -- successful Broker and 'staunch' member

Brother McManus --

Phil Spencer --

Scene -- The play is set in the Robisons' living room in Salt Lake City. The present.

Act One

Scene 1. A Saturday morning. An hour and twenty minutes before the first session of General Conference.

Scene 2. Early afternoon of the same day. A half hour before the second session of General Conference.

Act Two

Later the same afternoon. During and immediately after the second session of General Conference.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

"Psychoanalysis has made us familiar with the intimate connection between the father complex and belief in God..." [Owen Clark, "Freud as Friend of the Gospel", Dialogue, Autumn, 1978, p.26.] The Lord understands the evil and the good; why should we not likewise understand them? We should. Why? To know how to choose the good and refuse the evil; which we cannot do, unless we understand the evil as well as the good. I do not wish to convey the idea that it is necessary to commit evil in order to obtain this knowledge. Upon the stage of a theatre can be represented in characters evil and its consequences, good and its happy results and rewards, the weakness and the follies of man, the magnanimity of virtue and the greatness of truth. The stage can be made to aid the pulpit in impressing upon the minds of a community an enlightened sense of a virtuous life, also a proper horror of the enormity of sin and a just dread of its consequences. The path of sin with its thorns and pitfalls, its gins and snares can be revealed, and how to shun it. The Lord knows all things; man should know all things pertaining to this life, and to obtain this knowledge it is right that he should use every feasible means; and I do not hesitate to say that the stage can, and in a great degree, be made to subserve this end [Brigham Young, JOURNAL OF DISCOURSES, 9:243].

After writing two fairly prominent plays about historical Mormons who, their membership was posthumously reinstated, had been excommunicated as well as executed—John D. Lee and Helmuth Huebener—I sensed that I had fallen into a sort of narrative 'rut.' The recognition that an even higher truth and loyalty transcend both dissidence and unquestioning authority led me to describe such a trajectory in the lives of the Robison family—from a thesis and its opposing antithesis to a more lofty synthesis, however tentative.

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The three oldest children, now living away from home, have come together to celebrate the missionary farewell of their youngest brother Billy. They are also concerned about their father Arthur who, they discover, is dying of cancer. Despite their desire for an agreeable reunion, the older children's misfortunes, grievances and mutual antagonisms soon rise to the surface: Chris, an airline stewardess, maintains a clandestine liaison with her pretended fiancé, a married man. Wayne, a school teacher, who did not complete his mission, is sour about people in the Church and ready to abandon his career and family. Jerold, a prosperous broker and active churchman, resents the others' "liberality" but has alienated his own teenage son, who recently left home. While fretting over the many surface manifestations that all is not right in their children's lives, Arthur's wife Mildred tries to put a pleasant face on things. In turn, Arthur maintains a stoic and tolerant facade. Wayne and Jerold finally square off with a classic debate that touches upon practically every area of controversy that was ever argued between Mormons. This triggers Arthur's reminiscence about his earlier days as a seminary teacher, an oil stock fraud, his brother Fred's consequent suicide, and even his first son Larry's death in Vietnam--all somehow related. Disillusioned by the cumulative spirit of contention and incrimination, Billy shocks the others, in the presence of the home teachers by threatening not to go on his mission. The family's feelings of alienation and despair reach a turning point only after Arthur breaks down at the announcement that the man he has all along blamed for his own misfortune is a newly appointed General Authority. As Arthur admits that he is vulnerable because he is unforgiving and that he has all along tried to manipulate his children, they feel freer to recognize their shortcomings and to become reconciled. Arthur's remorse prompts Billy to forget his own bitterness and to console his father. Arthur then asks his sons to bless him, and, as they do so, Mildred and Chris looking on, all are reunited. None of their problems is fully resolved. Billy is still unsure if he will embark on a mission. But the atmosphere is one of peace and mutual compassion, of budding faith. And there is hope.

for Merriam,
who, more than anyone, holds us together.

REUNION

Act One

Scene 1 -- A dowdy lower middle-class living room. A stairway leads to bedrooms upstairs. A console TV-record player faces upstage. At Rise: Wayne, in his late thirties, narrow-shouldered and serious, slouches in an overstuffed chair reading a thick book and occasionally swinging his legs and arms to the beat of a Mozart symphony that plays from the console. Mildred, in her prim sixties, dressed in hat and coat, enters from the kitchen.

MILDRED: Well, the roast's on. Should be ready by one o'clock....Seems just like old times having all of you here again--Jerold and you and Christine. The Lord's already begun to bless us for sending Billy on a mission--just like when you went on yours, and Jerold on his....Is she sleeping in?

WAYNE: Who, Mom?

MILDRED: Christine, of course.

WAYNE: I think so.

MILDRED: She got in so late again. The hours they make those poor girls keep. I do hope she'll get tired of that stewardess job before another year goes by. All the crashes you read about--and meeting so many footloose strangers....

[going to the console]

That's too loud.

[Turning down the volume]

Mustn't wake her...

[noticing a withered house plant]

There goes another African violet. Maybe I forgot to water it this week. I can't seem to keep anything in this house alive for very long.

[Going to the stairs and calling in a mock whisper]

Dad It's time... The Tabernacle Choir will be on in twenty more minutes, Wayne. It's a special program for the hour before Conference. We'll try to listen to it in the car. You listen too, darling.

[She starts to turn off the record.]

WAYNE: Mother!

MILDRED: Yes, dear?

WAYNE: Let me hear my music--at least until the Choir comes on.

MILDRED: All right. But don't forget the Choir. It will put you in a good mood for Conference.

WAYNE: *[half to himself]* Break down my sales resistance, you mean.

MILDRED: Your what?

WAYNE: Sorry. I shouldn't have said that.

MILDRED: *[with forced affection]* There you go again. Trying to kid your mother. But I saw through you this time, didn't I?

WAYNE: No.

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MILDRED: No...?

[indulgently]

You always were the doubting one. But I've finally learned not to take you so seriously--much as you may want me to. But do watch what you say, Wayne--today and tomorrow especially. And particularly when Jerold comes. I want you to be nice to each other--the way brothers ought to be. I don't want anything negative rubbing off on Billy.

WAYNE: I'll try.

MILDRED: Promise?

WAYNE: I honestly want to, Mom.

MILDRED: You can restrain yourself if you want to. And I'm counting on it. So please don't forget.

WAYNE: I'll do my best.

MILDRED: Just think of it--all my men will have served missions. Grandfather Riggs would be so proud of them. And I expect you'll all be bishops some day too--though probably not as long as he was. Twenty-one years. And what a bishop he was.

WAYNE: You can't count my mission, Mom.

MILDRED: I can too, Wayne. It was an honorable mission--as long as it lasted. And Billy mustn't ever think otherwise. Is that understood?

WAYNE: But Dad wasn't a missionary either.

MILDRED: That's because he didn't join the Church until he was too old--till he met me. It was already time for him to marry and settle down. But he made up for it as a seminary teacher.

WAYNE: How about Larry?

MILDRED: Larry's was a special mission. In Vietnam. And he'd have certainly gone like the rest of you if the Lord hadn't seen fit to take him first. He gave his all-- more than any of the rest of you.

WAYNE: I know he did.

MILDRED: Like Joseph Smith. And the Savior...Goodness, the time. Do you think your father heard me....?

[calling again up the stairs] Dad! Billy! We're going to be late!

BILLY'S VOICE: *[from upstairs]* We're coming

MILDRED: I hope he can take us right away.

WAYNE: The Savior?

MILDRED: Of course not!

WAYNE: Not Joseph Smith?

MILDRED: Of course not Joseph Smith. Doc Adams!

WAYNE: Mom, you never give us your antecedents.

MILDRED: My what?

WAYNE: Never mind.

MILDRED: *[ignoring him]* We've also got to find a suit for Billy.

WAYNE: How's Dad doing?

MILDRED: Your dad's been real good for a long time now. Real comfortable. A remission, Doc says. It may not even come back. It may go away for good. They do sometimes...don't they?

WAYNE: I'm not sure.

MILDRED: Well, with all our faith and prayers, Dad's will....How are you enjoying your teaching, dear?

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WAYNE: Same as ever.

MILDRED: It must be a great satisfaction, working with so many young people...helping them mature and become good citizens.

WAYNE: I suppose.

MILDRED: Well, I know it must be. Because you *are* a good teacher. Or you wouldn't have received that special award from the PTA....

WAYNE: Who told you?

MILDRED: Beverly did. She wrote me all about it. When was it? Over a year ago, when you directed that Shakespeare play, and then that patriotic one.

WAYNE: "Valley Forge"?

MILDRED: They really liked that one, didn't they?

WAYNE: They seemed to.

MILDRED: If you just didn't live so far away. We don't see you very often--you and Beverly.

WAYNE: We can't afford to travel so far--except for special occasions like this one.

MILDRED: I know. And we understand. We've never held it against you that--

WAYNE: I'm only a school teacher?

MILDRED: Why, dear. I never said that, now, did I?

WAYNE: Well. I'm three years older than Jerold, and if I'd been as hard working, I ought to be doing even better than he by now, hadn't I? But we can't all be 80,000 dollar-a-year men, like Jerold, can we?

MILDRED: Of course not, dear.

WAYNE: But it would still be nice if we could all earn 80,000 a year, wouldn't it?

MILDRED: Well, of course it would. If Arthur could have only earned a little more we wouldn't always be making payments to somebody out of the food money. We could have done so much more for our family. And so could you for yours.

WAYNE: That's what Beverly's mother says.

MILDRED: Well, don't let what that woman says--

WAYNE: I don't. I ignore what either of you ever intimate about my social position. And that goes for Beverly too....

MILDRED: [*pretending not to have heard him*] Dear me, what's the matter with those two? [*calling*] Billy! We're going to be late!

BILLY: [*nineteen, exuberant, descending the stairs*] Dad can't find his tie clip.

MILDRED: His tie clip? Mercy!

[*storming up the stairs*]

You'd think he was indecent if he couldn't wear that old tie clip!

WAYNE: So how's the new elder? Feel any different?

BILLY: Not very. Am I supposed to?

WAYNE: I kind of think you are. Better work on it.

BILLY: I will....Did you? Feel different when they made you an Elder?

WAYNE: No....

BILLY: Oh....Whatcha reading?

WAYNE: A Russian novel. Tolstoy.

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BILLY: I wanted to go there on my mission.

WAYNE: Russia?

BILLY: Yeah. But we still don't have a mission there.

WAYNE: Well, you should enjoy Mexico. You'll probably have lots of baptisms.

BILLY: You think so?

WAYNE: Yes....

[He returns to his book.]

BILLY: Wayne?

WAYNE: Uh huh...?

BILLY: What was your mission like? I've never heard you talk about it.

WAYNE: It was all right....

BILLY: Just "all right"?

WAYNE: It was okay.

BILLY: What does that mean?

WAYNE: Some days were all right. Some were a waste.

BILLY: Was that because you didn't always have the Spirit with you?

WAYNE: Maybe. I don't know.

BILLY: I won't let that happen.

WAYNE: I hope you won't, Billy. In fact, I hope that when you come home you can say that your mission was the single most inspiring time of your entire life.

BILLY: Can't you say that--about your mission?

WAYNE: Not if I don't want to lie to you....

[Billy tries to say something but is too perplexed.]

But some people can. Ask Jerold when he comes. That's exactly how he'll put it. Some RM's say "the best" or "the most wonderful" but Jerry--Jerold always says, "It was the single most inspiring time of my entire life." Not just "the most inspiring time." But "the *single* most inspiring time of my entire life!

BILLY: Will he use those exact same words?

WAYNE: Wait and see....Still want to be a doctor some day, Billy?

BILLY: I sure do.

WAYNE: Why?

BILLY: Well, we'll always need doctors, won't we?

WAYNE: I suppose we will.

BILLY: You can do a lot of good for people.

WAYNE: Especially for yourself. It's a pretty good life--I'm sure you've noticed.

BILLY: Doctors work long hours, Wayne. They're always on call. And look at Doc Adams-- he helps a lot of people out and never sends them a bill. Dad for one.

WAYNE: And wins everyone's respect and devotion--without ever really straining himself he can still afford his Cadillac, his weekends in Palm Springs, his membership in the country club. And it's all good P.R.--like a charitable tax write-off.

BILLY: I don't follow you, Wayne. Doc Adams earns everything he gets.

WAYNE: Maybe so, Billy. But there's a vast difference between those who do good 'to be seen of men' and

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those rare souls--wherever you find them--they're this world's true Saints--who totally invest themselves in others' lives. Take Albert Schweitzer, for example. Or that woman from Albania.

BILLY: Albania?

WAYNE: That Catholic nun who somehow had the vision thirty or so years ago to leave the slums of Skopje and go where life was even worse.

BILLY: Where was that?

WAYNE: India. But not just anywhere in India. To its very cesspool. The 'black hole'.

BILLY: Where's that?

WAYNE: Calcutta. To give dying people a little comfort and a shred of dignity as they leave this life....

BILLY: I remember now. She was in the papers a while back, wasn't she?

WAYNE: She got the Nobel Peace Prize. But you can bet she didn't expect to when she went to India.

BILLY: So what's the point?

WAYNE: The point? Well, you're one of God's elect, aren't you? One of his chosen servants?

BILLY: I...I guess.

WAYNE: You guess?

BILLY: I mean, sure I am.

WAYNE: Then you should be as saintly as that nun, shouldn't you? She doesn't even call herself a Saint, but you do....

BILLY: I'll be glad to go on a health mission for the Church some day--after I become a doctor.

WAYNE: That so?

BILLY: Sure....

WAYNE: *[disappointed]* I see.

[Meanwhile, Mildred and Arthur have descended the stairs. Arthur, in his late sixties, looks thin and wan.]

MILDRED: We finally found it.

WAYNE: What?

MILDRED: Dad's tie clip.

WAYNE: Where was it?

ARTHUR: On that old striped tie she told me not to wear anymore. It's lucky she hadn't thrown it out yet.

MILDRED: Now which of you opened the window again in the upstairs bathroom? Billy?

BILLY: What?

MILDRED: Did you open that bathroom window?

BILLY: I didn't.

MILDRED: Arthur?

ARTHUR: Of course not.

MILDRED: Wayne?

WAYNE: No.

MILDRED: I found it like that early this morning. Wide open. It's still too cold for that sort of thing. If the rest of you had to keep the books and pay the heat bills like I do.... We'd better be going. Billy, do you remember your suit size?

BILLY: Thirty-eight.

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[Mildred, Arthur, and Billy start for the front door.]

MILDRED: *[suddenly stopping]* Goodness, I meant to put the potatoes on. I've been so distracted by that silly tie clip.

[rushing into the kitchen]

Now we'll be later than ever.

ARTHUR: *[calling after her]* Don't get your blood pressure up, dear. At Doc's there are always ten people ahead of you, even when you're there on time.

BILLY: I'll be in the car.

[He leaves.]

WAYNE: Mom worries as much as ever, doesn't she? Still have her migraines?

ARTHUR: Yes.

WAYNE: And nag you?

ARTHUR: There's no changing that. Besides, she indulged me plenty in her younger years. She stood up for me when I left the seminary--in public, anyway. And if she feels deprived, if there's been any resentment, she's always tried to smother it.

WAYNE: That's why she picks on you, Dad.

ARTHUR: I know. But I brought it on. I deserve it.

WAYNE: And why she's always so proud of what any of her children have done--in the Church.

ARTHUR: She's just getting even, and she has every right to....It's funny though--call it woman's intuition if you like--but when your mother gets upset there's always a reason. Not the reason she gives maybe. Still she's a pretty good barometer if you know how to read her.

WAYNE: You've been good to her, Dad. Always indulged her.

ARTHUR: Why shouldn't I? She's my wife....

[sitting opposite Wayne]

How's it going on your end?

WAYNE: Well enough.

ARTHUR: Your family?

WAYNE: They're fine.

ARTHUR: You're sure?

WAYNE: No complaints....

ARTHUR: That's the main thing, isn't it?....You feel so helpless when you reach my age. You've lived and seen a lot. You ought to be wiser than ever. But you can't give advice anymore. No one wants to hear it. Least of all your family. Besides, if you're honest, you're less sure than ever what you ought to tell them.

WAYNE: That's what I've always liked about you, Dad.

ARTHUR: What's that?

WAYNE: Your honesty.

ARTHUR: That so? Do you think it's made any difference--with you or anyone else?

WAYNE: That's hard to say. But if it hasn't, it's not your fault.

ARTHUR: Funny thing but, except for Billy--I can't be sure of him, he's still got to prove himself--the one who worries me the most is Jerold. Not you or Chris. But Jerold. Does that surprise you?

WAYNE: Not really.

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ARTHUR: And Jerold's the one who's "made it." In every way. Been in a bishopric, and now on a high council. Has a devoted wife--and a new kid every year...

[chuckling]

or every other year. Earns real well--vice president in his firm....But I still worry about him. Why is that?

WAYNE: I don't know. Maybe you've got the wrong values.

ARTHUR: I had a funny dream just the other night. Guess I was thinking of this reunion. You were all here in the living room. You were all transacting some kind of family business. There were letters and envelopes everywhere. In every envelope there was a check or currency--a ten or twenty dollar bill. And you couldn't open them fast enough. The faster you opened them the more there were. And I--well, I had died.

WAYNE: Dad!

ARTHUR: But I'd come back somehow. I came up to the front door. I said hello. But no one even bothered to look up. You knew I was there but it was like I was still in my coffin. You were all too busy. You couldn't be bothered. And then I had a terrible thought: It seemed to me that all a home is--all it really is--is some kind of artificial refuge that holds a group of people together for a period of time and restrains them from becoming savages. But that's all.

WAYNE: That doesn't sound like you.

ARTHUR: I know. But just the same, I wonder where He is.

WAYNE: Where who is, Dad? You're beginning to sound like Mom.

ARTHUR: The Holy Ghost. That Comforter, that Constant Companion we were promised with our baptism....Maybe I do have the wrong values. Maybe I'm prejudiced. Or even jealous. But in some ways Jerold reminds me of my brother Fred.

WAYNE: No wonder he makes you so gun shy....

[Arthur gives Wayne a hurt look.]

WAYNE: I'm sorry, Dad.

ARTHUR: That's all right. That's how it was. Why should we pretend otherwise? Why put it from our minds? There's a lesson in it for all of us.

MILDRED: *[returning from the kitchen]* Well, I think I'm finally ready. The potatoes are all scrubbed. Beautiful bakers. At least we've always been able to afford good potatoes. My bishop father, bless his memory, who made his money....

ARTHUR: raising Idaho spuds--

MILDRED: Arthur, how dare you sass me!

ARTHUR: I'm not sassing you, Mother!

MILDRED: You *are*!

ARTHUR: *[humoring her]* All right, I'm sassing you....I'm sorry....

MILDRED: My father would have at least been pleased that, on occasions like this, we've always had half-way decent potatoes.

ARTHUR: That he would.

MILDRED: It was even worse those first years...in the depression. Good potatoes were a luxury back then, weren't they?

ARTHUR: That they were.

MILDRED: *[with a hard look at Arthur]* It helps to remember....Tell Christine to put them in the oven in

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exactly one hour from now.

WAYNE: Okay.

MILDRED: *[heading for the door]* I so wanted to get everything done downtown and be back in time.

ARTHUR: For what, dear?

MILDRED: *[exasperated]* For Conference, Arthur. We'll never make it now.

ARTHUR: Then I guess we won't.

MILDRED: *[dirty-looking Arthur]* Go start the car, Arthur.

ARTHUR: All right, dear.

[He exits.]

MILDRED: Wayne.

WAYNE: Yes.

MILDRED: While they're both out of the house--I don't want to upset your father....

WAYNE: What is it?

MILDRED: Well, if his condition is really serious--I don't know what I'd ever do if he went first.

WAYNE: Mom. You're the one who runs this house. You always have.

MILDRED: It's not the house, Wayne.

WAYNE: And Dad gets on your nerves a lot, doesn't he? Now that he's so forgetful?

MILDRED: But I'd still miss him. His mind was always somewhere else. He's always been impractical. I'm so used to that and to looking after him....What would I do?

WAYNE: Don't borrow trouble. Don't worry needlessly.

MILDRED: I'll try.

WAYNE: Promise?

MILDRED: All right....

[going to the console, switching from the record to TV and bringing up the volume on "Gently Raise the Sacred Strain," sung by the Tabernacle Choir]

Enjoy it for the rest of us, dear.

WAYNE: Okay.

[Mildred exits. Wayne sits down with his book but cannot concentrate. Finally, he gets up and walks to the console, switching it back to the record, then sprawls on the sofa and becomes immersed in his book. After a couple of beats, the telephone, which is placed on a low table near the sofa, begins to ring. It rings several times before Wayne appears to take notice. Suddenly coming alive, he springs into a sitting position and reaches for the receiver.]

WAYNE: Robisons....Who?...Long distance?....Just a minute, operator. She's here all right. I'm not sure she's dressed though...to come down to the phone, I mean. You see, we're a very formal family....Oh, sure, operator, I understand. Because this is person-to-person, it's costing Ma Bell until I put her on the line, and Ma's dividends are down a couple billion this year, is that it?...Hang on, operator. I promise, operator, not another [intentionally mispronouncing] superfluous word. [calling upstairs] Chris....! Chris, you up...?

CHRIS'S VOICE: *[nonchalantly]* What is it?

WAYNE: Long distance!

CHRIS'S VOICE: *[suddenly urgent]* I'll be right there!

WAYNE: From Chicago!

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CHRIS'S VOICE: I'm coming!

[Chris, in her mid-twenties, rushes down the stairs, wearing a diaphanous low-cut negligee. In her hands are a hairbrush and a makeup kit.]

CHRIS: 'Scuse me, Wayne. This is all I could find to put on....Chicago, did you say?

WAYNE: Chicago.

CHRIS: *[looking toward the kitchen with her finger to her lips]* Shh.... *[into the telephone]* Yes, operator?
[Wayne goes to the console, turns off the record, and returns to the sofa, again immersing himself in his book.]

Yes, this is Christine Robison....

[As she talks she brushes her hair and, with the aid of a mirror on the wall above the phone, makes up her face.]

Thank you, operator....Hello , Bob?

[a quick nervous glance at Wayne, who appears not to be listening]

Is anything wrong...? You're what? You're flying here tomorrow...? You want to see what it's like? A Mormon Conference....?

[spontaneously giggling, then checking herself and looking first toward the kitchen and then at Wayne]

That's a laugh...No, Bobbie, sweetie. Honestly. I don't think you should. There are too many complications. Besides, are you sure you can get away?

[eyeing Wayne again]

She's visiting her mother...? And taking the kids...? Till Monday...? You're sure now...? Well, I don't know. It's all so awkwardI know. I miss you, too. I love you too, hon....Look. I need a little time to think about it. Call again later this afternoon. And make sure the operator says it's just a call from Chicago.

[another furtive look at Wayne, who seems not to be listening....in hushed tones]

In case someone else answers....But I do love you. Believe me. And I want to see you too. If we can work it out....Bye, sweetie...

[she hangs up the receiver, then paces around the room....under her breath]

Damn!

[then to Wayne]

Mother didn't sneak in here while I was talking, did she?

WAYNE: Course not.

CHRIS: She didn't eavesdrop?

WAYNE: No. She's not even home. Why? What difference would it make? Your boy friend can call you up if he wants, can't he?

CHRIS: I just don't want the folks to know he's coming. If they do, they'll expect to meet him.

WAYNE: So...?

CHRIS: So they might not like him. He smokes. Cigars, in fact.

WAYNE: Come off it, Chris. They're not that prissy--not even Mom.

CHRIS: What about the preacher?

WAYNE: The preacher?

CHRIS: Jerold.

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WAYNE: You can handle Jerold--when he comes. He hasn't shown up yet.

CHRIS: That's a relief.

WAYNE: And the others went into town.

CHRIS: What for?

WAYNE: Dad had an appointment with Doc Adams. And Billy needs a suit for his mission.

CHRIS: Dear, sweet Billy. He's the best of the bunch. I hope it won't be too hard on him.

WAYNE: Hard on him?

CHRIS: The way yours was for you...

WAYNE: I'm glad you could be here, Chris. Don't you usually fly on weekends?

CHRIS: That's right. I had to trade shifts with three other girls. But it will be worth it to see Billy up there at that pulpit tomorrow.

WAYNE: I don't believe that.

CHRIS: Why?

WAYNE: The Church doesn't mean that much to you. Not any more.

CHRIS: How do you know?

WAYNE: Actions speak louder, you know.

CHRIS: Well, maybe it doesn't. But Billy does. He means a lot to me. I'd do anything to cheer him on....Is Dad sick again?

WAYNE: Just a routine exam, Mom said.

CHRIS: That's a relief....

[still pacing]

Even so, damn it!

WAYNE: What?

CHRIS: "Damn it" I said. "Damn it" Is that all right?

WAYNE: Sure.

CHRIS: I can do better than that.

WAYNE: Yeah?

CHRIS: What you don't have to listen to just working in the bay or up in the cockpit, or, worst of all, from some fresh passenger who's trying to make out and can't hold his liquor. There's at least one on every flight.

WAYNE: That's what you get for calling them "the friendly skies."

CHRIS: Anyway, I'm in good practice. Wanna hear me?

WAYNE: No.

CHRIS: Okay, I won't defile the dear nest....

WAYNE: What's eating you, Chris? You've gotten pretty hard since you left home.

CHRIS: Look who's talking.

WAYNE: Yeah, I know.

CHRIS: You ever going back to Beverly?

WAYNE: I'm not sure. She'll have to be satisfied with what I earn, which will never be much....If that mother of hers would just keep her nose out of it and quit giving her ideas. Always lambasting me about Bev's wardrobe or getting a more "respectable" car. Or the fact that I'm not a High Priest and didn't complete my mission.

Reunion by Thomas F. Rogers

CHRIS: How about Julie?

WAYNE: What about her?

CHRIS: How old is she now?

WAYNE: Almost seven.

CHRIS: She loves you, Wayne. She needs you.

WAYNE: I've been half tempted to quit teaching. Just get lost somewhere and start writing. You know how I've always wanted to.

CHRIS: But you might not make much. Beverly wouldn't accept that.

WAYNE: Would that be so awful....? You ought to understand better than anyone else--free spirit that you are. You should know as well as I how much the Church cramps a person's style and limits his possibilities. It's stifled my whole creative impulse. And it never gave you a fighting chance for the right man in your life.

CHRIS: Am I complaining?

WAYNE: Not in so many words.

CHRIS: Well, then?

WAYNE: I thought we were kindred spirits.

CHRIS: We still are. but I'm not going to chime in and encourage you to turn your back on Julie--or on Beverly for that matter. Maybe I can appreciate what a good thing you've got there more than you can because it's something I've never had--and may never get.

WAYNE: You can have it, Chris--you especially if you want it.

CHRIS: So can you, Wayne....

WAYNE: Well, don't forget--you're the only one who knows we've separated.

CHRIS: I know better than to upset mom or spoil Billy's farewell. Give me that much credit.

WAYNE: Of course you do. And so do I: At all costs, maintain a pleasant facade. In fact, coming here on the plane this time, I made a vow.

CHRIS: A vow?

WAYNE: Not to say one thing out of turn to Jerry. Not even once.

CHRIS: That's good. It can't hurt. It can only help.

WAYNE: Help me keep that vow, will you?

CHRIS: I'll try....Whatcha reading ?

WAYNE: *Anna Karenina*.

CHRIS: "Anna" who?

WAYNE: *Karenina*. Tolstoy's finest work--the great European novel.

CHRIS: Oh, yes....It's awful thick. Do you make your students read it?

WAYNE: I wish I could. I'm lucky if I can get them to watch it on TV.

CHRIS: What makes it so special?

WAYNE: The question it poses, I guess.

CHRIS: Question?

WAYNE: About why people behave the way they do--why some make those terribly fateful choices, like Anna's, that lead to their destruction, while others like Levin--

CHRIS: Who?

WAYNE: He's another character in the novel. Why the Levins finally reconcile themselves to God and life.

Reunion by Thomas F. Rogers

CHRIS: Like Mormons?

WAYNE: Like *some* Mormons. Listen to this. It's the novel's very first sentence: "All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." How does that grab you?

CHRIS: I don't know. When I look at people that are really unhappy--whole families, I mean--

WAYNE: Like ours?

CHRIS: No. We're basically happy, aren't we?

WAYNE: We pretend to be.

CHRIS: I mean marriages where a man and a woman are so at odds that they haven't spoken to each other or been intimate for months or years--

WAYNE: How would you know about such marriages?

CHRIS: Well, I do. And from what I can tell, the way people like that are unhappy is so much the same from one marriage to the next, so predictable, so unrelieved--it bores me to think about.

WAYNE: I see. The banality of evil.

CHRIS: Something like that. But you tell me, how does Tolstoy answer his own big question? Since you've read the book, and I haven't. Why the man ends up all right, and the woman doesn't?

WAYNE: Tolstoy doesn't tell us. He keeps the whole thing open. That makes it all the more lifelike. Don't you agree? [He returns to his book.]

CHRIS: Wayne?

WAYNE: Huh?

CHRIS: What kept you from being more like Jerold? With the same parents and all?

WAYNE: I can't tell you, Chris. That's another one of those mysteries. Except--remember the Stovers who used to live next door? About the time I became a deacon? You couldn't have been more than seven or eight.

CHRIS: That family from Pennsylvania?

WAYNE: Yes.

CHRIS: They were non-members, weren't they?

WAYNE: Yes. And they had a son named Randy.

CHRIS: Oh, I remember him. He was real cute. I had a crush on him.

WAYNE: He and I were best friends--for a while.

CHRIS: I remember. What happened?

WAYNE: Well, I'd just been made a deacon. And we'd had a lesson about going on a mission. I really got fired up, and I decided that Randy should be a deacon too and I was the one to convert him. His parents were awfully nice to me--took me along on camping trips and whenever they went anywhere special. To keep him company. We slept over a lot too. Well, one night when I was staying at his house I decided to tell him the Joseph Smith story and bear my testimony.

CHRIS: That's interesting.

WAYNE: What?

CHRIS: You had a testimony then?

WAYNE: Why, yes. I guess I did.

CHRIS: Was it a lie?

WAYNE: A lie?

Reunion by Thomas F. Rogers

CHRIS: Were you right then, or are you right now?

WAYNE: We become wiser with age, don't we...?

CHRIS: Well, and then what happened?

WAYNE: Well, I only got half-way through when his mother came into the room. She made some excuse why I ought to go home. Randy wasn't feeling well, or something. I could tell it was a lie.

CHRIS: Your testimony?

WAYNE: No. What she said to me! She was nice enough, but tense. Real tense. So I got out of bed, got dressed, and came home. They never asked me over again....It's a wonder I ever went on a mission after that. I guess I still didn't know better.

CHRIS: What do you mean?

WAYNE: Nothing...

CHRIS: Wayne?

WAYNE: Yes...?

CHRIS: This Anna--what's her name?

WAYNE: Karenina.

CHRIS: What was her problem?

WAYNE: *[looking at her, hard]* She was an adulteress....

CHRIS: *[staring back, then finally turning away]* Oh...
[A long impatient ring from the doorbell]

Are they back already?

WAYNE: *[going to the door]* They wouldn't ring their own doorbell. It must be Jerold.

CHRIS: Damn it!! Hold the door till I'm out of sight.
[Another ring--even more impatient.]

WAYNE: That's Jerold all right.
[calling]

Coming!

[Wayne waits until Chris has disappeared up the stairs, then opens the door. Jerold, in his mid-thirties, large, overweight, self-important, wearing an expensive suit, walks into the room holding a stylish briefcase in one hand and a mod suitcase in the other.]

JEROLD: Wayne. It's good to see you.

WAYNE: It's been a long time. Let me help you with your bags...What's in them? All your ill-gotten gold?

JEROLD: *[coolly]* Very funny....Where is everybody?

WAYNE: They're downtown. Except Chris--she's upstairs.

JEROLD: I can't wait to see her....Well, how are you?

WAYNE: We're all just fine.

JEROLD: All?

WAYNE: Yes, all....And your family?

JEROLD: Fine as ever. How's teaching?

WAYNE: All right. Even though money's a little tight right now.

JEROLD: Keeping up with inflation?

WAYNE: It's a struggle.

Reunion by Thomas F. Rogers

JEROLD: Can I help you out? I'd be happy to--

WAYNE: Look, you already sent me plane fare. Did I thank you, by the way?

JEROLD: Yes. I got your note yesterday.

WAYNE: And after all the tuition you've helped me with over the years. Well, thanks, Jerry. But we can take care of ourselves.

JEROLD: Don't forget though--if you ever need help I'm just a phone call away. And don't be too proud.

WAYNE: I'm not. I just think it's better to be self-sufficient.

JEROLD: I agree. It's the way of the Church. Speaking of which--what have they got you doing these days?

WAYNE: Doing?

JEROLD: In the Church?

WAYNE: Oh...I'm...a home teacher. How about you? Still on the high council?

JEROLD: That's right.

WAYNE: That must be interesting.

JEROLD: It's very demanding--a big responsibility. But you don't mind because it blesses you in so many ways.

WAYNE: I see.

JEROLD: I only hope you can have that experience some time, Wayne--that you can serve in some high capacity.

WAYNE: I wouldn't aspire to it.

JEROLD: Why not?

WAYNE: It smacks too much of 'careerism'...

JEROLD: I don't follow you.

WAYNE: Aren't we told not to seek after positions?

JEROLD: Of course. Nor to decline them. But they come, they do come, believe me. The Lord showers his blessings on us--even material ones--when we live for the Lord first.

WAYNE: That's what bothered Larry.

JEROLD: What did?

WAYNE: The way so many people in the Church judge their righteousness by their worldly success, their social status. That's why he didn't go on a mission.

JEROLD: You just want to think that.

WAYNE: I know. He told me.

JEROLD: Is that why you didn't stay on your mission?

WAYNE: No. I just didn't seem to be accomplishing anything. That was it. Mostly.

JEROLD: You didn't try hard enough....

WAYNE: If you say so....

JEROLD: [*picking up his bags*] I guess we'll be rooming together--like always.

WAYNE: Yes, that's where Mom put us--in our old room.

CHRIS: [*coming down the stairs, in a day dress...with forced excitement*] Hi, Jerry!

JEROLD: Hello, Chris.

CHRIS: How are you two making out?

JEROLD: Just fine.

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[He puts down his bags.]

CHRIS: Hold it! Deja vu!

JEROLD: What?

CHRIS: Don't either of you move!

JEROLD: Why?

CHRIS: Seeing you both here where you're standing right now somehow reminds me of my baptism day. The three of you were down here waiting--both of you and Larry. I'd just come down the stairs--like now. And you were both standing where you are right now, I swear. Dad and Mom were still getting ready. Larry was supposed to baptize me. He'd just been made a priest. But you kept egging him on, Jerry--to hold me under.

JEROLD: I don't remember.

CHRIS: You did. And so he threatened that he would. You all egged him on.

WAYNE: We were only kidding.

CHRIS: I was still afraid he might. I was so frightened that I refused to let him baptize me. I made Dad do it instead.

WAYNE: I remember.

JEROLD: I don't remember having anything to do with it.

CHRIS: But you did, Jerry.....

JEROLD: Maybe I did. I was pretty young then.

CHRIS: How's Jerry Junior? Still winning those national math contests?

JEROLD: Uh....yes. Brilliant as ever. Takes after his Uncle Wayne, I guess.

CHRIS: Don't be so modest, Jerry.

JEROLD: No. Really. I never thought I'd produce an egghead. How are you, by the way? You're looking...healthy.

CHRIS: But I don't come across like your baby sister any more?

JEROLD: How's your fiancé? What's his name?

CHRIS: Siegel. Robert Siegel. Robert's doing just great.

JEROLD: When's the happy occasion?

CHRIS: It's still indefinite. Some time next year maybe.

JEROLD: What do you want for a wedding gift? You name it. You're my only sister.

CHRIS: A card--with your sincere congratulations.

JEROLD: All right. I'll have to surprise you then....What's Mr. Siegel's line of business, did you say?

CHRIS: He's in stocks.

JEROLD: Stocks? I'll have to look him up some time. What's his company?

CHRIS: It's slipped my mind.

JEROLD: Has he joined the Church yet?

CHRIS: He's kind of slow.

JEROLD: Well, keep at him, Chris. Don't give up. It means everything, you know.

CHRIS: I know, Jerry. I went to Sunday School once.

JEROLD: I hope you still do.

CHRIS: I fly a lot on Sundays.

JEROLD: Then I suppose you'll be quitting your job soon, now that you're about to be married.

Reunion by Thomas F. Rogers

CHRIS: I intend to stay with the airline after we're married....

JEROLD: You're sure you know what you're doing?

CHRIS: Quite sure....

JEROLD: [going upstairs] Well, I'd better unpack. See you both later....

WAYNE: Oh, I almost forgot. You were supposed to put the potatoes in the oven.

CHRIS: When?

WAYNE: In an hour.

CHRIS: From when?

WAYNE: From....well, how long have we been baiting one another?

CHRIS: Too long.

[Chris goes into the kitchen. Wayne looks in her direction, then picks up "Anna Karenina," finds his place, stares at it, and finally closes the book and looks blankly into the space in front of him. The lights dim.]

Scene 2 -- The lights slowly rise on the whole family returning from the dining room, Billy wearing his new suit.

JEROLD: So I told our stake president, "You need to send out dunning letters if you want more voluntary contributions from your high priests. The way a business does with customers who are behind in their payments."

WAYNE: *[to Chris]* Did he say "voluntary?"

JEROLD: Then I reminded him that the high priests had all been bishops--or better.

CHRIS: "Better?"

JEROLD: They know what it means to be totally committed.

BILLY: So what did your stake president say to that, Jerold?

JEROLD: He 's taking it under advisement. But I also reminded him how, after the Prophet came to our area, we got the Primary children to write him letters of appreciation.

CHRIS: "Spontaneous" appreciation?

JEROLD: Sure, they wrote their own letters.

MILDRED: Was that another one of your projects, dear?

JEROLD: Yes.

WAYNE: It must have put your stake on the General Authorities' map....

BILLY: How's Jerry Jr. these days, Jerold? Still at the top of his class?

ARTHUR: Yes. How is that grandson of mine? I hear he's another Einstein?

JEROLD: Jay's math score's are still pretty impressive--especially for a high school freshman.

MILDRED: I wish you'd brought him with you, Jerold, I'd love to hear him play the piano.

ARTHUR: Be sure to bring him next time.....

MILDRED: Well, that was a delicious meal, if I do say so myself.

BILLY: It was super, Mom!

JEROLD: It was great!

Reunion by Thomas F. Rogers

MILDRED: By the way, did anyone notice that funny smell in the upstairs bathroom? I went there just before we had dessert.

[eying the others]

And the window was wide open again....Still no confession? Well, that is a mystery. But I'll get to the bottom of it yet.

CHRIS: That's a sharp suit, Billy--just what I'd have picked out for you.

BILLY: Thanks, Chris.

MILDRED: Won't he make a handsome one.

WAYNE: Handsome what, Mom?

MILDRED: Missionary, of course.

JEROLD: If he keeps his hair short.

BILLY: Don't worry. I want to do everything just right.

JEROLD: That's the spirit. And you'll be a fine doctor some day too, Billy.

BILLY: I sure hope so.

JEROLD: Make us all proud of you. Why, some of my most important clients are doctors....

ARTHUR: How's your talk coming, son?

BILLY: It's coming.

ARTHUR: Have you chosen a topic?

MILDRED: Of course he has, Dad. He'd have to have a topic if he's already into it.

WAYNE: What is it, Billy--your topic?

BILLY: Family happiness.

CHRIS: Catch that, Wayne?

WAYNE: Why 'family happiness,' Billy?

BILLY: Well, It's one of the most important things people learn about when they join the Church. One of the things we try to bring them as missionaries.

MILDRED: Why, that's beautiful, Billy. And how appropriate. Here we are today, reunited-- just such a happy family....How pleased he'd be if he could see you all.

BILLY: Who, Mom?

MILDRED: Your grandfather Riggs. It would reward him for all those years he was a bishop.

BILLY: I thought you meant Larry.

MILDRED: Why, of course. Larry too. I'm sure they're both there together--both looking down so lovingly upon us--and so proud of you, Billy....Proud of your father too. A local boy who'd never joined the Church until he came to our home--

ARTHUR: And you and your father had your way with me.

MILDRED: And then taught seminary for fifteen years and even converted his brother Fred, who became a prominent physician and a devoted churchman, called like Jerold to a high council. Oh, he'd be proud of you all--especially his grandchildren, each an active member of the Church, who will each in turn have served a mission--in his or her way. Yes, I include Larry. And you too, Christine, with your fiance, Mr. Siegel.... Here we are: such a blessed and happy family. Just like my father's. How pleased he must be....You can look back on this weekend when you're out there preaching, Billy. You can think of us and know that what you're telling folks is really true. Can't you?

Reunion by Thomas F. Rogers

BILLY: That's right, Mom.

CHRIS: He'll make a fine missionary.

BILLY: Thanks, Chris. By the way, Jerold. I wanted to ask you some more about your mission.

JEROLD: And I'd love to discuss my mission with you, Billy. After all, it was the single most inspiring time of my entire life.....

[Billy looks at Wayne. Wayne winks back.]

MILDRED: I hope you can have a good long talk together--before the day's over. That will be good for Billy. And I'm so sorry we missed this morning's session of Conference, those of us who went to town. But we can all listen to the next one in just half an hour. How was it, Wayne?

WAYNE: What?

MILDRED: This morning's Conference....?

WAYNE: Fine, Mom.

MILDRED: Who spoke?

WAYNE: Who spoke? Uh...the General Authorities.

MILDRED: Which ones?

WAYNE: Uh...the President. And one or two new ones.

MILDRED: What did they talk about?

WAYNE: They talked about the gospel, Mom....By the way, Dad, how did your examination go? I don't believe anyone thought to ask.

ARTHUR: Fine. Just fine, as best we can tell. Doc wanted to run some lab work though. We're supposed to go back for the results this afternoon.

MILDRED: Dear me. I'd forgotten. That will keep Dad from hearing Conference the second time. And whoever goes with him.

CHRIS: I'd be glad to drive you this afternoon, Dad.

MILDRED: Are you sure, dear? I think you ought to stay home and listen.

CHRIS: You need a rest, Mother. Let me relieve you.

WAYNE: Let her spell you off, Mom.

MILDRED: Well, all right. It's nice to see one's family so eager to "do unto others."

JEROLD: Which reminds me, Mom. What do you need most these days?

MILDRED: Well, now you mention it, Jerold, the stove's been acting up lately. You noticed how uneven that roast was.

JEROLD: Say no more. You'll get another--with all the latest gadgets.

ARTHUR: That's very nice of you, Jerold. We appreciate it....

JEROLD: I'll even try to unload one from Phil Spencer--before I go back. He went into appliances, didn't he?

ARTHUR: That's right.

CHRIS: Is Phil still around?

MILDRED: Yes, he still lives here in the ward.

JEROLD: Still single?

MILDRED: Yes. But he's engaged to the Evans girl.

CHRIS: Carol?

MILDRED: That's right.

Reunion by Thomas F. Rogers

BILLY: And he's our home teacher.

JEROLD: Then he ought to give me a pretty good discount....You used to date him, didn't you Chris?

WAYNE: You know she did.

JEROLD: But he never went on a mission, did he?

CHRIS: No, he didn't.

MILDRED: He always worried me--what he'd make of himself. That's why I encouraged Chris to hold out for the Thornley boy instead.

JEROLD: Jim Thornley? How's he doing these days?

MILDRED: He's doing real well.

BILLY: He and his dad are developing the new mall outside of town.

MILDRED: Unfortunately, Jim married some girl from the 'Y' as soon as he came off his mission.

JEROLD: I see. Sorry to hear that, Chris....

[The others look at Jerold, annoyed.]

CHRIS: *[flustered]* I think I'll go freshen up. We'll need to be leaving soon, won't we, Dad?

ARTHUR: What?

MILDRED: For Doc Adams, Arthur. Have you forgotten already?

ARTHUR: Oh, yes. That's right.

[Chris goes upstairs.]

WAYNE: I always liked Phil Spencer.

ARTHUR: So did I.

WAYNE: It's too bad you interfered there, Mom.

MILDRED: Chris can do better than Phil Spencer.

WAYNE: She already has--she's got a stock broker, like Jerold.

MILDRED: You see!

WAYNE: Only he's not a Mormon.

MILDRED: Well, he will be some day. I'm sure he will. If Chris is patient and just sets him the right example.

JEROLD: Phil's brother. Arnie. Now he was something else. What's he into these days?

BILLY: He's in real estate.

MILDRED: Very prosperous. Doing real well.

JEROLD: You and he were best friends once, weren't you, Wayne?

WAYNE: That's right....I remember the last time we were out here though--Beverly, Julie and I. How long ago was that now?

MILDRED: Three years ago, at least.

WAYNE: I thought I'd look him up. We'd been such buddies back in high school. Made all those first discoveries together--Plato, Dostoevsky.

BILLY: Tolstoy?

WAYNE: Tolstoy too.

JEROLD: Freud, Marx, and Darwin. Don't forget them.

WAYNE: Them too.

JEROLD: Your holy trinity.

Reunion by Thomas F. Rogers

WAYNE: You still remember, do you?

JEROLD: I remember.

WAYNE: We stayed up whole nights discussing people's theories.

JEROLD: And concocting some of your own.

WAYNE: That's right. Those were exciting times. We were both intellectually on fire.

JEROLD: With fire and brimstone.

WAYNE: So three years ago I looked him up again. We had the whole afternoon together at Lagoon. We'd taken our families. The kids went on the rides. The women waited for them on a bench, getting caught up on the past. And Arnie and I drifted off together toward the midway. He was the only one I'd ever been able to share my mind with--completely. And I really wanted to tell him how I felt then about some things. Even about the Church.

JEROLD: To tear it down, I imagine.

MILDRED: Why, Jerold, what do you mean?

WAYNE: No. Just to share with him whatever concerns I had then. But you know--and this really surprised me--he was like some kid. He kept wanting to try his hand at all the games--pitching pennies or knocking down the lead bottles. Each time I started to draw him out he'd head for another game. Each time I'd start to say something serious.

JEROLD: Or controversial?

WAYNE: Yes, or a little controversial.

[Chris returns from upstairs.]

MILDRED: Arnold's changed since he got married, Wayne. And now he's a really hard worker. Active in one of the service clubs. You see his name every so often in the papers.

WAYNE: He struck me as ambitious all right. He won the first prize at every booth we went to. Even gave a big stuffed panda to Julie since I hadn't won any....He's certainly ambitious. And very orthodox.

MILDRED: He didn't go on a mission either, you know. And for a long time he was completely inactive. What that girl did for him--why it's a miracle.

WAYNE: Arnie and I hadn't stayed in touch after I went on my mission....But after all the hours we'd spent together exploring each other's minds--well, frankly, I was disappointed. It was as if he'd forgotten entirely about people or ideas. He was only interested in things--in the houses he was putting up, in those lead bottles, in the pennies he was pitching. And to top it all, I lent him a book I was reading just then--by Simone Weil. It was the only thing I'd mentioned that day that he seemed to pick up on. He said he'd mail it to me after he read it. But he never did. I guess even Simone Weil couldn't turn old Arnie on.

JEROLD: He was just trying to defend himself... against you.

WAYNE: What do you mean?

JEROLD: You see, Wayne, that's the problem with you so-called Church intellectuals. You never seem to realize that, while you get hung up demanding your theoretical 'rights'--the right to discuss this or that triviality--plainer folks, who might take you seriously, good people who are trying not to commit some grievous sin, might get so confused or so discouraged by all the doubt you sow that they might begin to believe you and fall away.

WAYNE: Fall away? Who's falling away?

JEROLD: And then there's the whole missionary program--there's that to consider.

Reunion by Thomas F. Rogers

WAYNE: Jerry, I don't follow you.

JEROLD: The Church has so many enemies, so many kooks out there who'd like to make it look silly. In spite of that, the Church tries so hard to make a favorable impression, but you and people like you, in your insistence on what you call 'truth'--splitting hairs, digging up the dirt wherever you can find it--when you study Church history, always looking for one more unhappy Polygamous wife--explaining away the mysteries--yes, people like you only expose the Church to its many detractors and help their cause, whether you mean to or not.

WAYNE: I always thought the truth was its own best defense and, because the Church is true, it could stand the light of day.

ARTHUR: Anybody is a lot stronger for facing up to the truth, wherever it might lead him.

WAYNE: Since you brought it up, Jerry, what in your view is an intellectual anyway---

JEROLD: A snob. Somebody with a big vocabulary and a proportionate lack of humility, who, just because he went to school a little longer and read a lot of books, thinks he knows more than anybody else.

WAYNE: "Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study..."

JEROLD: Only "the best books."

WAYNE: When was the last time you read one?

JEROLD: I don't read as much as you. I'm too busy with my work and my callings in the Church. And the time I give my family. But I do read the scriptures--at least fifteen minutes every day.

WAYNE: Then why don't you at least return the book I lent you five years ago?

JEROLD: What book was that?

WAYNE: The book by Albert Schweitzer.

JEROLD: By Albert Schweitzer?

WAYNE: You don't remember, do you?

JEROLD: No. I honestly don't.

WAYNE: That was a rare edition. It's out of print now. And it was autographed.

JEROLD: By Schweitzer himself, I suppose.

WAYNE: Yes!

JEROLD: Come on--when did you ever meet Schweitzer?

WAYNE: The people who gave me the book--very special friends of mine--had met him once.

JEROLD: And just happened to have his book along...?

WAYNE: Schweitzer was in New York, selling copies--to raise money for the Africans.

JEROLD: I still don't remember your ever giving me a book by Albert Schweitzer.

WAYNE: But I did. You even asked me for it. You happened to see it on my desk upstairs. It was Christmas five years ago when we both came home for a visit....

JEROLD: You know what I think?

WAYNE: No. What?

JEROLD: Remember what you just told us about Arnie Spencer--and the book you say he borrowed? Well, I think you like to set people up--with your books: you lend them, or at least claim to, and then let stretches of time go by so that later you can make them out to be as weak and unprincipled as you are in other ways.

WAYNE: What ways?

JEROLD: Well, you certainly can't call yourself a consecrated Mormon.

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WAYNE: Why can't I?

JEROLD: Listen, Wayne. If there's one thing I've learned in this life and believe in-- call it what you want: smug narrow-mindedness, bigotry--I know all your names for it--it's never to compromise what you believe in. The scriptures put it clear enough: "The Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance."

WAYNE: I'm as dedicated as you are.

JEROLD: To what? Your humanism?

WAYNE: To life.

JEROLD: How about the gospel?

WAYNE: To that too.

JEROLD: But not first and foremost?

WAYNE: First of all to life.

JEROLD: Let me ask you this, Wayne, because, in spite of all your idealism and all your fancy talk, this is where the real cutting edge is and why it's such an important guideline in the Church.

MILDRED: What is?

JEROLD: [*to Wayne*] Will you give me an honest answer? For the sake of argument, I mean?

WAYNE: Of course. But what's this guideline?

JEROLD: It's very simple. I can sum it up in a single word: Tithing.

CHRIS: Tithing?

JEROLD: It's a very reliable standard.

WAYNE: At least for those whose heart is where their money is.

JEROLD: Do you know how much tithing I paid last year--not to mention my other contributions?

ARTHUR: "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them."

JEROLD: Just for the sake of argument.

WAYNE: I guess I'm supposed to say, "How much tithing did you pay last year?"

JEROLD: With the extra commissions I made, nearly ten thousand dollars....

CHRIS: You don't say...?

JEROLD: Well, doesn't that tell you something? My tithing bought at least one good class room in some chapel or the spire on one of the new temples....Now my question to you. Ready?

CHRIS: You want to know how much Wayne earned last year?

JEROLD: Not really. Besides, I have a pretty good idea. I just want him to tell me-- for the sake of our argument, remember--if he paid a full tithe last year or not?

ARTHUR: That's privileged information, Jerold.

JEROLD: He promised me an honest answer.

WAYNE: Does it give you some kind of vicarious satisfaction, playing bishop?

JEROLD: So you won't answer me. Well, then. No answer is also an answer. And don't tell me just because you haven't the faith to part with a full ten percent that your heart's not in your pocketbook.

ARTHUR: If you think you can measure his faith, his testimony, what's in his heart by--

JEROLD: It's the Lord's standard, don't forget. Not mine....

WAYNE: As a matter of fact, I haven't paid a full tithe for the past several years.

MILDRED: Wayne, dear!

WAYNE: My wife has spent our money faster than I could earn it. That's why we've--

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CHRIS: Wayne!

JEROLD: [*suddenly very interested*] That's why you've what, Wayne?

WAYNE: Never mind. You've already proven you're more successful--more righteous than I.

JEROLD: That's not what I'm trying to prove.

WAYNE: Well, whatever it is, are you finally satisfied?

JEROLD: I am.

WAYNE: Look, Jerry, I'm not as spiritual as you. I can't remember that I ever was. And I don't know why.

Either you're just naturally better than I am, more God-fearing. Or God chose to impress you with the importance of some things more than me. Which is fine, if he favors you. but I can't help seeing things the way I do--with the light He's given me.

CHRIS: Jerry, aren't you going to take me on too?

JEROLD: Take you on? What does that mean?

WAYNE: Jerry?

JEROLD: What?

WAYNE: Maybe we should just agree now not to speak about anything important for the rest of our visit.

JEROLD: Just like all the other times you used to clam up on me?

WAYNE: To spare Mom--and Dad. And Billy.

JEROLD: If anything has disillusioned Billy--it's you.

CHRIS: Aw, Jerry, come off it!

ARTHUR: That's enough, boys.

JEROLD: All right. Maybe we should take a vow of silence. That might be the best thing under the circumstances...

WAYNE: Honest, Jerry, I didn't want this to happen. I swore to myself that this time, this once, I wouldn't say anything. Even if you started it, I wasn't going to provoke you. Even though I'm your older brother, and, by rights, you owe me just a little....well, no. Forget that. You don't really. I just used to feel that way sometimes.

JEROLD: As a matter of fact, quite a lot of the time.

WAYNE: But the point is, I thought by now we were both mature enough to--

MILDRED: Wayne, dear. Remember your promise.

WAYNE: Mom, I'm trying. I really am...

ARTHUR: The way you two go on reminds me to a 'T' of the arguments we used to have at the seminary.

After the kids went home, that is. Those arguments don't change much--from one generation to the next....

[in deep reverie]

Wayne, you sound just like old George Knox.

JEROLD: Here we go again!

CHRIS: [*half whispering*] Jerry.

ARTHUR: The very same words in fact: I remember him saying, how many times, "the truth is its own best defense" and then quoting the Bible when the others started in on him: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." That usually stopped them....Good old George. I never told you about George, did I, Billy?

BILLY: I don't remember, Dad.

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JEROLD: "Good old George"? Dad, how can you still say that? Why do you always like to remember the man who ruined your career and brought shame and disgrace on our entire family?

CHRIS: Jerry. Don't!

MILDRED: Jerry, dear. And Arthur. Let's not raise that again. It was so long ago. So far in the past. And that's where it belongs.

ARTHUR: It wasn't really George, Jerry. It would have been very unchristian to blame everything on George. But I'm glad I did trust him.

MILDRED: But, dear, how can you say that?

ARTHUR: Because George Knox was a good man. He had a big heart and he was spiritual, very spiritual. He strengthened my testimony and his students' testimonies.

JEROLD: Dad, how can you say that about a man who was so blatantly dishonest?

ARTHUR: He lied, it's true, But mostly to himself. So that when he told me about that stock, he actually believed it.

JEROLD: I know that old argument, Dad. Every murderer and every rapist is criminally insane. But it won't wash any more, not even with the law. And--speaking as one who knows, as a professional investor and officer in a firm with--

CHRIS: Four hundred million in assets. You told us that before--

JEROLD: Speaking as a successful investment broker, it's sure one asinine way to do business. Amateurs should never--

WAYNE: Shut up, Jerry! For hell's sake, shut up!

MILDRED: Oh, dear.

ARTHUR: George was not a murderer. He was not a rapist.

JEROLD: It he wasn't a murderer, then who murdered Uncle Fred?

MILDRED: Jerry, please.

ARTHUR: I did.

WAYNE: Oh, Dad!

MILDRED: Arthur, please.

ARTHUR: If you have to have a murderer, Jerold, then there's no question it was I who killed my brother-- with that same gullibility that made me believe George in the first place, that made me go to Fred and urge him to invest in that oil stock. I'd brought him into the Church. So he accepted what I told him.

JEROLD: But should he have? Should he have trusted you?

ARTHUR: No. As a matter of fact, he shouldn't have. Not on that occasion. But it was a rare instance.

JEROLD: Hell! What logic!

MILDRED: Jerold. Such language! I'm surprised at you. You're beginning to sound like Wayne.

JEROLD: I'm sorry, Mother.

ARTHUR: And so he interested his friends. Billy--It's time you knew about this--

MILDRED: Oh, dear.

ARTHUR: His friends, his colleagues at the clinic and the other men on his high council. And they invested-- generously. Oh, they could afford it. More easily than Fred, most of them. But when they learned it was a fraud, that George and his partners hadn't struck any oil after all...

WAYNE: That, with all their faith, their divining rods just didn't do the job, as I remember.

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JEROLD: That wasn't faith--that was stupid gullibility.

WAYNE: They were all members of the Church, all 'very spiritual' men.

ARTHUR: So were the investors. But when it fell through there was no forgiveness. Half of them refused to speak to Fred. The other half threatened to take him to court. He sold his nice home on the East Bench. Sold both his new cars and his share in the clinic. He made it up to them as best he could. And still--from so many-- there was no forgiveness.

MILDRED: Arthur, don't.

ARTHUR: Even his wife, even Esther couldn't hide her humiliation, so that on the day before Christmas--when his kids wouldn't be getting what they'd always been so used to getting at that time of year and his oldest daughter stayed out all night with a married man, a man who could buy her everything her father couldn't --Fred drove up the canyon that same Christmas eve, stumbled through the snowdrifts till he reached the man's cabin and pounded on the door, calling to his daughter and they wouldn't open the door but cursed him instead with their drunken laughter--

MILDRED: Please, Arthur. You needn't relive it.

ARTHUR: Then the gun he had on him that he was going to use to threaten that man and get his daughter back, when he finally took out that gun--standing there in the snow, half way between the man's cabin and his car, between that ice-cold mountain, his daughter dead to him with hateful laughter, and his humiliated wife, his resentful younger children, his former medical associates, his fellow priesthood holders who no longer spoke to him--when he put the barrel of that gun into his mouth, he must have thought he was all alone, totally forsaken. And I'm sure he didn't know what he was doing.

[He unconsciously fumbles with his tie pin.]

But, if anyone was really with him at that moment, it was his brother who'd never stopped thinking about what he'd done to him, what he'd put him through. So that if someone really pulled that trigger, it wasn't Fred, not in his confused state of mind. It could only have been me....

MILDRED: Gracious, such reasoning.

ARTHUR: This tie pin--this was Fred's. He had it on that night. Esther gave it to me... It sometimes makes me feel guilty that I ever introduced Fred to the Church. Sometimes I could almost wish things had worked out some other way, or that that saintly spud farmer had stayed in Idaho after his retirement instead of moving to the city. Then I'd never have met his daughter.

CHRIS: Daddy!

ARTHUR: Or the Church! Because the gospel, the gospel, as I see it, requires us to trust each other. If we can't trust each other, if we can't tolerate one another's mistakes and bear one another's burdens, then what's the point of it? What's it all for?

JEROLD: If you had just not stood up for George Knox after that. You were one of his victims too. But, no, you had to take his part.

ARTHUR: I believed he was innocent.

JEROLD: The Church didn't. He had to leave the seminary.

ARTHUR: I believed he had good intentions and had been deceived by those men from Texas, just as I'd been.

CHRIS: Dad, if George Knox wasn't to blame, then how were you to blame for what happened to Uncle Fred?

ARTHUR: That's what I told myself. For the longest time. That's how I managed to keep my sanity that first year. And that's also why I stood up for George. It didn't help that Arch Collins, our director and senior

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teacher, also served on my brother Fred's high council.

JEROLD: You never liked Brother Collins, did you, Dad?

ARTHUR: I liked Arch just fine. He was always very good to me--for as long as we taught together. And he was an excellent teacher--inspired a lot of kids.

JEROLD: Including Larry.

ARTHUR: Yes....including Larry.

MILDRED: That's why Larry volunteered to fight in Vietnam, wasn't it, Dad? Because Brother Collins told him it was his patriotic duty?

ARTHUR: I...I've forgotten.

MILDRED: Of course it was. You know it was. But in those days we all thought it was the thing to do.

ARTHUR: I didn't.

MILDRED: That's true.

ARTHUR: But Larry didn't ask me. His father was no longer teaching seminary. His father's opinion didn't count!

MILDRED: Now, Dad...!

ARTHUR: It's so unnatural.

MILDRED: What is, dear?

ARTHUR: That a man should outlive one of his children. I'd have gladly taken Larry's place. My life was already finished, professionally. I'd had my family. Larry should have had the same privilege.

MILDRED: That's not for you to say, dear.

JEROLD: That's judging God.

ARTHUR: God had nothing to do with Larry's going to Vietnam and getting killed there. Or if He did--

JEROLD: Yes? What then...?

ARTHUR: Nothing....As for George Knox--after they released George and myself I realized that we'd both given them cause--I by contesting his release. If he deserved to be censured for his "bad judgment," then so did I. So I left teaching. I was too old to retrain, so I had to keep working and ended up selling shoes. But I didn't mind. I felt it was right--a kind of penance--and that I'd gotten off pretty light, particularly, as you remind me, Jerold, in view of what I, his murderer, had done to my brother Fred.

CHRIS: Dad, don't say that!

MILDRED: Goodness, no, Arthur. How the people in this family love to exaggerate. Why, if you want to blame someone, you might as well blame me. I encouraged you to look into George's investments. I wanted that extra income even more than you. I'd thought that after the hard times were over, when after the war everyone else became so prosperous--well, never mind....Though what's hurt me most is the way you've been overlooked since then--

ARTHUR: Mother, I don't want you talking about that.

MILDRED: You would have made a fine bishop, Arthur.

ARTHUR: Mildred, that's not for you to judge.

WAYNE: You would, Dad.

MILDRED: Yes, you would!

ARTHUR: [*with sudden, bitter anger*] Mildred! Shut up about that! Please, Mildred!... Please stick to reality!...

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[suddenly subdued]

I'm...sorry.....

MILDRED: Reality! What do any of you know about reality? Arthur, I've tried never to have an argument--at least after the children came.

ARTHUR: And you've done very well, dear. Very well.

MILDRED: But let me remind you that I'm the one who had to bear each one of them, and Larry too, while you stood by. I'm the one who's kept the bills all this time and worried every month if we'd make it or not, if the groceries would hold out. That's one reality I've tended to and, whenever I have, you've come back to three times a day. You men discuss so many fancy notions--what you, Dad, and Wayne read about. How others make you feel, old friends. And whether you should have joined the Church or married this or that woman. But I've always been too busy worrying about your reality, keeping you in one piece, keeping your bodies and souls together.

ARTHUR: I know, Mother.

MILDRED: So don't tell me what I should or shouldn't think about you, Arthur.

ARTHUR: All right, Mother.

MILDRED: Why, they even released you years back as a Sunday School teacher. Some folks thought you were too liberal.

JEROLD: And he was!

MILDRED: He's never taught a class since.

WAYNE: Dad, how long has it been?

ARTHUR: Twenty years.

WAYNE: Billy wasn't even born then.

MILDRED: I wish you hadn't gone into so much detail, Arthur, at least not in Billy's presence.

JEROLD: You might have spared him the shame of it all, the disgrace--particularly when he's about to start out on a mission and, who knows--

WAYNE: Launch his Church career?

JEROLD: Yes. If that story doesn't get resurrected too much more, it might die down in time to miss his circle of friends.

WAYNE: It hasn't yours?

JEROLD: Unfortunately.

WAYNE: Do you think that's why you've never been made a Bishop or stake president?

JEROLD: Maybe!

MILDRED: Oh, dear.

JEROLD: That's right, Mom. Billy can handle the truth as well as the Church can. Can't you, Billy....?

[Pause. Billy doesn't answer.]

WAYNE: Jerry, get off it, will you?

JEROLD: Why should I?

WAYNE: Look--you keep saying that your mission was "the single most inspiring time" of your "entire life."

JEROLD: Well, it was.

WAYNE: But you claim to have such a terrific family.

JEROLD: I do.

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WAYNE: Well, if that's true, why isn't your family enough of a challenge?

JEROLD: I don't follow you.

WAYNE: Then let me ask you a question or two. My turn now. Okay....?

MILDRED: Wayne, dear.

JEROLD: It's all right, Mother.

WAYNE: Will you answer me honestly?

JEROLD: Of course. I have nothing to hide.

WAYNE: All right--you don't smoke or drink, do you?

JEROLD: Of course not.

WAYNE: Why?

JEROLD: Because it's bad for my health. And my kids--it would set them a bad example.

WAYNE: That's what I thought. And, speaking of your kids, you go to Sunday School too, don't you?

JEROLD: Of course.

WAYNE: To encourage them to go, isn't that right?

JEROLD: That's right.

WAYNE: Do you know what kind of Mormon you are?

JEROLD: I believe I have as good an idea as you.

WAYNE: You really worship man instead of God, and that's why everything you do has a practical reason.

You keep the Word of Wisdom and go to Sunday School so your children will do the same and won't end up in the drug scene. You claim to love them but you really just don't want them to embarrass or inconvenience you. So you keep them busy in seminary and Young Adults--jumping all the hurdles. You get with them on Monday night for the same reason. Meanwhile they babble about all their silly awards, their good grades, etc., and your wife babbles all day about her domestic superfluties, her fascinating womanhood, because they all desperately want the personal recognition you never really give them. Because you put your career and the things you accumulate before other people. You're really only in love with yourself. Oh, sure, you preach love and harmony and obedience--you're very good at that--but you still default where it really counts: You saddle your wife with the real concern for your kids like any other pharisaical churchman. In the traditional Mormon manner you come across as extremely spiritual. But you're totally self-serving. Even in the Church you try to manipulate everyone else--from Primary kids to high priests. And that's a contradiction I find hard to reconcile.

JEROLD: Very interesting.

WAYNE: But deep down--and that's why you're always finding something wrong with everyone else--you're terribly miserable....

JEROLD: I see. By the way, dear brother, you don't seem so happy yourself. Was there ever a time you could say was the most inspiring in your entire life?

WAYNE: I don't use that kind of language, Jerry. I avoid sentimentality.

JEROLD: It certainly wasn't during your mission--the mission you came home from early--

MILDRED: Jerold!

CHRIS: Jerry, don't!

JEROLD: But it should have been. Anyone who doesn't return from a mission edified and fully converted--well, something's wrong with him. And I'll tell you what that means: it means he really doesn't have a

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testimony.

WAYNE: O, Father, forgive this Philistine, who knoweth not what he sayeth, and save us from many more.

JEROLD: So you can still pray. Whose church have you moved on to lately?

WAYNE: What?

JEROLD: In your cynical heart, I mean. That's where it really counts, you know.

WAYNE: If my heart is cynical, at least it's better than no heart at all. You know what your problem is, friend, and others like you? You're so afraid that someone else might know something you don't or might show up your carefully rationed out charity with unbounded love for all his fellow men--that worries you so that, in self-defense, you have to put down everyone who isn't in your exact same mold. And nothing could be more cynical than that.

JEROLD: [*Shouting*] What about that half-completed mission? And your half-baked testimony?

WAYNE: [*Shouting back*] Leave my testimony out of this! Will you quit badgering me about that? All of you?....What right have you to say I haven't still got a testimony--even if I'm not always sure myself these days?....You were more fortunate as a missionary than I was.

JEROLD: Luck has nothing to do with it.

WAYNE: I'm not so sure.

JEROLD: I am.

WAYNE: Well then--did any of your companions ever try to take his own life?

MILDRED: Oh, dear.

JEROLD: No. I got along well with all my companions.

WAYNE: So did I.

JEROLD: I never drove them to anything like that.

WAYNE: Well, I did. Because at the time I was as insensitive as you are now.

MILDRED: Wayne, dear, think of Billy.

WAYNE: I am. I think Billy had better know what he's getting into. So he won't make the same mistake....What do you say, Dad?

ARTHUR: I think Billy needs to be forewarned. I've never believed in ignoring unpleasant truth.

JEROLD: But, Dad, Wayne's giving him a distorted picture.

WAYNE: No, I'm not. I'm just saying what could happen--what did happen once in fact, so that, at all costs, Billy will avoid it.

BILLY: What did happen, Wayne? You never told me.

WAYNE: My companion was a new junior and zealous, like most new missionaries. Well, we came to this one older man who seemed so receptive to what we had to say. It was my companion's first attempt to give a full discussion in German, so he put it on pretty heavy. And I encouraged him. Then, when we were through, the man looked us both in the eye and told us what he'd been through during the War. He'd been a believer--belonged to a fundamentalist sect--and was persecuted. Sent to a camp. It had crippled him, ruined his health. He knew the entire Bible by heart. He'd kept on preaching and reciting the scriptures. And he testified of them in our presence. Then he asked my companion if he really knew that the things we'd been telling him were true. And I guess my companion didn't. At least he didn't have the conviction this man had in the scriptures. It was obvious this man had made the scriptures more a part of his life than we had--that they really meant a lot more to him--that he was a better Christian. And, with that look in his

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eye, he seemed to be saying that--without feeling it more deeply--we were, with the message we'd brought, putting him on. I was ashamed, and my companion was devastated. He never got over it.

JEROLD: But you had the truth--even so you had the truth

WAYNE: We didn't have it as fully as he did.

BILLY: What did happen to your companion....?

WAYNE: That same night he went to take a bath and slit his wrists....Luckily, I guess, I got to him in time....But it made me realize, ever after, that, whatever the state of a person's belief, there is something in each of us--whether an investigator, like that old man, or a green young missionary--that is sacred and needs to be respected.

MILDRED: Like what, dear?

WAYNE: Like what he really believes at the time--whether or not you agree with him.

JEROLD: Even if it's not the truth?

WAYNE: Yes, even then. What's so wrong with letting someone else be mistaken? It's no reflection on anyone else. And besides, "Where is truth?" Doesn't someone ask that question somewhere in the scriptures?

JEROLD: Yes. But Christ knew the answer. He was the Truth.

WAYNE: All I know is what it says in that particular scripture--what they taught us once in Sunday School.

JEROLD: There you go again--making everything relative: one thing as good as the next.

WAYNE: I don't believe in judging others. That is something else I remember from Sunday School.

JEROLD: No wonder you didn't have better results.

ARTHUR: Maybe that's something else we should leave to the Lord's judgment.

JEROLD: You call it judgment. I call it discernment. And that's a gift the Lord gives his obedient missionaries and those who are sufficiently faithful. Then they know what is true and what all else in this world isn't true, and they have no trouble telling the difference.

ARTHUR: If only it were that easy.

JEROLD: It can be, Dad! It can be!!

CHRIS: *[Shaking her head]* This is crazy!

JEROLD: What's crazy?

CHRIS: Let's go, Dad. I need a....I need some fresh air.

MILDRED: Mercy, yes. You should have left long before now, Arthur. Those medical reports have been ready for some time.

[Arthur rises, walks to the coat rack, and puts on his overcoat.]

And Doc Adams is closing early today--for Conference. Goodness, it's almost time for that too. If you and Chris had only left sooner, you might have got back before it started.

ARTHUR: Before we go for those reports--call it superstition if you wish--I'd like to be administered to....

JEROLD: Dad, it's not a superstition.

MILDRED: Certainly not.

WAYNE: It can't change what's in those reports, Dad.

ARTHUR: I know it can't. That's not why I want a blessing.

[gesturing to Wayne]

And I want you to give it.

WAYNE: Me?

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ARTHUR: Yes, you.

JEROLD: Dad! Let me bless you. You need a blessing from someone who's orthodox. Who's worthy.

WAYNE: Who's not worthy??

JEROLD: You're not worthy!!

WAYNE: Why aren't I worthy???

JEROLD: Because, apart from the kind of missionary you were, you can't even keep your family together.

WAYNE: What??

MILDRED: Gracious!

JEROLD: I have associates in your town. I happen to know.

CHRIS: Jerry, for hell's sake!!

JEROLD: And speaking of all your "Hell's sakes!", Chris--it's one thing to hear language like that occasionally from a man--

WAYNE: Jerry, what are you trying to insinuate....?

JEROLD: Not to mention your hard looks, your tight fitting clothes, your loud make-up--

CHRIS: Look, boy, where do you get off--

JEROLD: We might as well get this in the open too. I still think it's mighty strange we've never met Mr.

Robert Siegel, or even seen his picture. And that, if he's such a successful broker, he'd allow his future wife to sling dishes on the friendly turbulent skies of--

CHRIS: Well, he would!

MILDRED: Are you certain, Christine?

JEROLD: Or why she would even want to!

CHRIS: And she does!

JEROLD: Are you sure?

CHRIS: I'm sure I'm doing what I want to--at least in terms of what still is or ever made itself available.

JEROLD: Is that right?

CHRIS: That's right!!

JEROLD: Because the way you're acting--with the style of life you lead--

MILDRED: Jerold, I really don't think you should--

JEROLD: You won't make points with any Elder, Seventy or High Priest who's worth his savor...

CHRIS: [a long pause, then in a restrained tone of voice] I never did. Let's go, Dad.

ARTHUR: Just a minute, Chris. I'd still like that blessing, Wayne.

JEROLD: But why Wayne??

ARTHUR: I have my reasons.

JEROLD: Dad, don't mock God. Unless, that is, your liberal faith is as shallow as his!

CHRIS: [*screaming*] All right! That's enough! Wayne's had it! And if he still hasn't, then I have. So watch out, Mr. Lillywhite, and start thinking fast because you've got something to answer to now, and by God--

MILDRED: Christine!

CHRIS: You're going to admit that you don't have anything on the rest of us.

JEROLD: Chris. Are you crazy?

CHRIS: I didn't want to bring this up, but you're not going to get off playing the high and mighty any more.

JEROLD: I don't follow you, Chris....

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CHRIS: All right. Ever hear of a stewardess named Stacey Reynolds?

JEROLD: Reynolds...?

CHRIS: That's right: Western Airlines. She's a neighbor of yours, isn't she?

JEROLD: Her family lives down the street from us. So what?

CHRIS: We get together occasionally. She's told me a thing or two.

JEROLD: Such as?

CHRIS: Where's Jay these days...?

JEROLD: Why?

CHRIS: Because I have reason to think he's not at home any more. Or else Stacey's uninformed...

JEROLD: I...that's right.

CHRIS: Where is he?

JEROLD: He...We don't know where Jay is right now.

ARTHUR: What do you mean?

JEROLD: He ran away from home--three weeks ago.

ARTHUR: What??

MILDRED: Not Jerry, Jr.? Not my grandson?-

JEROLD: Jay's never been like me. Not at all. He's been a great student and never given us any trouble--not until now. But I could never talk to him about anything. He was never interested in sports--or in business. Just math... and music.

ARTHUR: That's right. He's exceptional.

JEROLD: Maybe too exceptional. We just never spoke the same language. I've tried. But he wouldn't. He never tried to fit in...I doubt we'll ever see him again.

[He bows his head.]

MILDRED: Oh, we will, Jerold. Surely we will....

ARTHUR: Well, well. So each of us has his misery. We've each had a skeleton or two that's somehow been pulled out and put on display this morning. Haven't we? Even down to Mildred's shrinking African violet. That's all, bless her, she could talk about in the car. I wonder if there'll be any more before the day is over....

MILDRED: Any more?

ARTHUR: Skeletons....It's almost funny.

JEROLD: *[looking up]* What's funny?

ARTHUR: Here we all are, finding so much wrong with one another. But don't pity me or your mother because I feel a lot sorrier for each of you--for your entire generation. Either you won't marry and have a family, or if you do, you can't stay together.

[wrathful]

What's happened to that grand old institution--the family? Or is it a word, an idea, no one uses any more? Well, let me warn you. And this goes for my grandson too--if I could only tell him to his face. Just wait till you're my age: life will be so much lonelier, so much emptier then. And what will you have to show for it? When it's *your* time to die--

MILDRED: Dad!

ARTHUR: Where will the monuments be to your old age? To the life you've lived? What will you do? Where will the rest of you be when it's time to put one of you in the ground, like Fred or Larry? Or see someone

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off to a far away place, like Billy? Or care when one of your own flesh and blood gets in serious trouble or runs away, like Jerry, Jr.?....Well, let me tell you. There won't be anyone around who really cares because, believe me, aside from family, no one does care. You'll be all alone....But somehow that doesn't seem to matter any more, does it? I guess I'm too old fashioned.....

[The doorbell rings.]

MILDRED: Now who could that be...?

[Billy runs to the door and admits two conservatively dressed men.]

Why it's the home teachers....I guess you all remember Bro. McManus--and Phil Spencer.

JEROLD: We certainly do. How are you brethren?

McMANUS: Pleased we could catch you all in. We won't be long. Just wanted to drop off the ward paper before the next session of Conference. Congratulations, Billy, on being made an elder. How does it make you feel? Great, I'll bet....?

[Billy doesn't answer.]

PHIL: *[with deep nostalgia]* Hello, Chris.

CHRIS: *[with suppressed emotion]* Hello, Phil.

PHIL: How are you?

CHRIS: Just fine. How's Carol?

PHIL: Carol..? Oh, she's fine too....You're pretty as ever, Chris.

CHRIS: Thanks. I hear you've become quite a pillar of the community--and the Church.

PHIL: You wouldn't recognize me now....You must have seen a lot of places since you left here.

CHRIS: I've learned some things, whatever that's worth.

McMANUS: Your mother gives us a full report each month--on your fine families and all you're doing for the Lord in such distant places.

JEROLD: *[anxiously]* We do what we can.

McMANUS: Which reminds me of this month's message. It's just a brief one.

MILDRED: But important, I'm sure.

McMANUS: It's from the Book of Mormon, where Jacob chastises the Nephites. Would you read it to them please, Brother Spencer.

PHIL: "Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them...."

[Visibly affected, the men look at McManus. Phil continues to read; the others look at each other from time to time, then look away when their eyes meet.]

McMANUS: And then he compares them to the Lamanites. Brother Spencer?

PHIL: "Behold their husbands love their wives...and their wives love their husbands.... and their husbands and their wives love their children...."

McMANUS: We might think this doesn't apply to any of us. But Paul spoke of a similar condition in our own time: "This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud...

[WAYNE looks at Jerold.]

disobedient to parents....

[Chris stands and walks to another part of the room.]

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unthankful, unholy, without natural affection....ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth...."

[Billy has meanwhile studied each of the others' reactions.]

And so on. Well, that's quite a warning, isn't it? We wouldn't dare read this in some homes we go to--where the shoe fits a little too well, you might say. But we didn't hesitate reading this message to you folks.

MILDRED: Why, thank you, Brother McManus.

McMANUS: Isn't it fine you could all be together for Billy's farewell?

MILDRED: Yes, it's been a wonderful reunion. The last time we were all together was--it was for Larry's funeral.

McMANUS: Yes, I remember. Called home, you might say, for a special mission. And now Billy called for another. And each time everyone gathering around with his love and faith and solidarity.

MILDRED: That's how I see it too, Brother McManus.

McMANUS: Yes, it's wonderful. You do inspire us.

PHIL: Your name's on the program here in the paper, Billy. What are you going to preach on?

BILLY: I don't know.

MILDRED: Of course you do, Billy. You've been working on it all week. He's talking about family happiness. It's what he wants to bring to the Mexicans.

McMANUS: That's a fine subject, Billy. We'll enjoy hearing it.

BILLY: I don't know.

JEROLD: What don't you know, Billy?

BILLY: I don't know if I'll be speaking tomorrow.

[He rushes to the stairs in tears.]

I don't think I have anything to say--not on that subject--not to you or to the Mexicans either!

[He disappears up the stairs.]

PHIL: I guess we'd better be going....Looks like you were going somewhere too, Brother Robison.

ARTHUR: Yes. I have to see the doc.

McMANUS: Just routine, I hope, Arthur.

ARTHUR: We hope so, Ned.

PHIL: Can we give you a lift?

ARTHUR: Thank you. But Christine will take me.

PHIL: Does the Bishop know about Billy's change of mind? Would you like us to tell him-- so he can arrange another program?

JEROLD: No. No, please. Don't make anything of it. He's just a little high strung today. Nervous with all the waiting. I was the same way just before my mission...I'll talk to him. Don't worry. He'll come around.

PHIL: Goodbye, then.

McMANUS: Enjoy Conference.

JEROLD: *[escorting them to the door]* Thanks. And you too, brethren...By the way, Phil, if you can come back after Conference, I'd like to discuss something that will help your business.

PHIL: Sounds good. I'll see you later then. So long.

JEROLD: So long.

[McManus and Phil leave. Jerold rejoins the others. All are silent.]

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MILDRED: Dear me. My head is nearly bursting. What happened? All this tension. All this strain. The day began so beautifully. So peaceful and unruffled. And now every thing's falling apart. Why....?
[The lights dim.]

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13 more pages in act two