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NOWHERE, NO PLACE, LIKE HOME

I am trying to understand U-turns. My first morning living in Salt Lake City, I stand at a crosswalk terrified to step into the wide street, watching as car after car accelerates into the intersection only to spin around like a remote-controlled toy. Brigham Young designed 132-foot-wide streets for precisely that purpose: so oxen teams could turn around with ease. Except he had an ulterior motive: He wanted drivers to turn without *resorting to profanity*. It was not freedom; it was social control. Or freedom as social control.

In 2000, my husband and I stopped to rest in Salt Lake City during a self-imposed exile from Iowa to Oregon. The mountains made me feel trapped, walled-in, watched: Wasatch and Oquirrh ranges to the east and west, and in the south, the Traverse Mountains securing the valley like a gate. I could not believe those mountains were natural. Atmospheric perspective flattened them into theatrical backdrops, as phony and one-dimensional as cardboard props. The nearest ridges loomed like cobalt shadows; faraway ones dissolved into the same pale hue as the sky, obliterating the boundary between heaven and earth.

I vowed I would never return.

Now, watching the cars spin, I wonder if the grid makes drivers do it, if the city by its very design provokes just this: the desire to return from where you came.

In the foothills overlooking downtown, Utah's state capitol dome appears to lord over the Salt Lake Temple, but do not let the juxtaposition fool you. In 1847, Brigham Young hiked 1,080 feet to the summit of Ensign Peak and confirmed: *This is the place*. He meant the place the murdered Joseph Smith revealed to him in a divine vision. Due south from that gumdrop-shaped hill, he laid the cornerstone for the temple, and it became meridian zero, the center from which all of Zion radiated. The capitol is not high above the city because of its power; it is there because the temple forced it into the hills.

Salt Lake City makes me a pilgrim against my will. Street addresses never let me forget how far I have strayed from Temple Square, the holy heart of the City of Zion, meridian zero. Every downtown address is expressed in latitude and longitude, placing me inside the crosshairs of Temple Square:

200 S 700 E

or

100 E 700 S

"200 S 700 E" translates to two blocks south and seven blocks east of the square. If I reverse direction and walk seven blocks west and two blocks north, I transform into a pilgrim again.

I linger at street corners long after the walk signal has changed, studying street signs and attempting to locate myself inside the grid. If I do this long enough, I imagine, the novelty

of Salt Lake City will fade, and coordinates will transform into addresses. Instead, I confuse the first and second cardinal directions. *Am I seven blocks south or seven blocks east?* There is no way to escape the reference point of Temple Square. Now, a pilgrim in the City of Zion, I am forced to cultivate an inner compass or use the one Zion gives me.

In the basement of the Salt Lake Temple, Mormons baptize the dead. Living people stand in as proxies for the deceased, hoping to summon lost spirits by getting dunked on their behalf in a 500-gallon elliptical tub. The tub balances on the backs of twelve life-sized oxen statues sculpted of cast iron and arranged in a circle, horns outward, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. The ritual takes place in the basement to symbolize a tomb; the proxies reach out grave to grave.

The Apostle Paul set the precedent in 1 Corinthians 15:29 when he asked, “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?” Mormons also base the practice, in part, on 1 Peter 3:19, in which Jesus “preached unto the spirits in prison.” If Jesus ministered to spirits, it follows spirits can still benefit from the gospel, that even the dead can continue to develop moral character, maybe even convert.

The only obstacle standing in the way of salvation: no physical body for a proper baptism; hence, the proxies. Proxy baptisms also drive the Mormon obsession with genealogy: the church needs addresses, as it were, for those spirit telegraphs.

More than once, I have walked past the temple and wondered if anyone was down inside the baptistry, submerged under the water in the giant tub. I have wondered what it would be like to do that for someone—to *believe* you could do that for someone. I wished I believed in it—not the religious doctrine, just the part about transmitting a telegram to the heavens, showing a lost loved one

he is wanted back. If I could convert to just that one idea, I might. I might even convert *for* it: the ultimate second chance.

Salt Lake City street tags:

oxen oxen oxen
lamb of god + metric
capitalism is a ponzi scheme
we are not canaries in the coalmine fck cars
will you be my valentine? - oxen
while you're asleep, we're exploring rooftops
while you're at work, we're staying true to our desires

I used to take heart in these signs. I thought they came straight from the Salt Lake City underground, secret code for “You are not alone.” *While you sleep, we wage an invisible insurrection. While you sleep, we are turning Zion into Salt Lake City.* New signs appear every morning within a one- or two-block perimeter of my home, but in the daylight hours, in Zion’s omniscient sun, the vandals disband, hide. Very few of their messages survive the city’s roving paint crews. *A city clean and in order*, Brigham Young decreed. *Nothing happened here.*

When *oxen oxen oxen* appeared, I took it as a salvo against the push and pull of this grid, the stranglehold of the Latter Day Saints on this city: *You are their oxen, their beasts of burden.* Now, I believe the vandal is an *agent provocateur*. He has been pointing me to the twelve oxen in the temple basement all along, like a Mad Libs parable in which I have to fill in the blanks between tags on crosswalk poles.

I begin to circumnavigate Temple Square from a one-block radius, sometimes for hours, just close enough to feel its gravity, to feel my resistance. Just close enough to make it feel me resist.

When I first saw Salt Lake City’s stark, stern grid, I knew it could quell any rebellion. I blame it on

the 132-foot-wide streets and the 660-foot-long blocks. There is no way for protesters to fill them, no way to shut them down. And then there is that tractor beam, the tug-of-ropes with Temple Square. The grid, like a tautology, is impervious to logic: *You are a pilgrim or not. You believe or do not. You are with us or against us.*

In Portland, Oregon, where I lived for nine years, the short, 200-foot blocks and narrow streets leave the city vulnerable to skirmishes and insurrections. Sometimes I think the grid *provokes* them. Anarchists and protesters clog downtown arteries, shutting down traffic and public transportation for as long as they can hold out against police.

It could not happen like that in Zion. Protests are relatively rare and polite. Nobody dares shut down a street. Here, cars rule the city, pushing pedestrians to the fringes. Many downtown streets are so hostile the crosswalk poles offer hazard flags for pedestrians to wave as they cross, like bullfighters marching into a ring. I call them Orange Flags of Surrender, and I refuse to carry them.

I never learned to drive because of my epilepsy, so I have no choice but to submit to this grid, to play on this game board, to let it test me. Sometimes, I wonder if the ghost of Brigham Young is watching from the other side of the traffic cameras, logging my coordinates, subtracting merit points, readying the Destroying Angels, his secret police, waiting to see if I will pick up a flag, surrender.

My first sign I live in the city of children: a toddler popping out of the elevator like a spirit baby stowaway on the cosmic dumbwaiter, sneaking down to Earth before he got assigned a family. He shackles my shins with his chubby arms and cries, “Mommy!”

The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles issue proclamations, warning every married couple to heed God’s commandment

to Adam and Eve: *Be fruitful, multiply.* Church elders admonish college students: *Do not wait,* for babies are shields against Satan’s attack on the family.

God wants—God commands—you to have babies.

Families are God’s plan.

Families teach you how to get into heaven.

In the land of the highest birth rate in the nation, I cannot escape the babies: strollers parked next to weight stacks in the gym; gangs of toddlers, tethered by ropes to their daycare teachers, puddling at my feet at the crosswalk; kickball games in the apartment corridor.

I am childless in the city of children.

In every city I have ever lived, a river divides the downtown, and I cannot understand a city without one—a city like Zion. I miss bridges. I miss the sense of expanding possibility, of ambiguity, of risk. When President George W. Bush declared war on Iraq in 2003, Portland protesters marched onto the Burnside Bridge, sat down, and declared the bridge liberated territory. They named this new country *Burnside FreeState*. Political geography had been obliterated. The *passage* between had become the *territory* between.

Here, the nearest river lies beyond the interstate, outside any strategic protest zone. Sometimes, I think Brigham Young must have known the power of river bridges, because according to his design, the Zion grid stopped at the bank of the Jordan River, the only boundary of the city that wasn’t political—except that it was.

Where in Zion can I liberate a space when every pocket is locked in the crosshairs of Temple Square?

When LDS missionaries Andrew Propst and Travis Tuttle were kidnapped and held for \$300,000 ransom in Russia in 1998, their captors taped their eyes and mouths closed, handcuffed

them so tight one suffered nerve damage, locked them together in a cramped room, and slid an unloaded gun into their hands like a threat printed in Braille: *Touch the trigger. Know how your execution will feel.* They wanted to force the missionaries to hold their own helplessness in their hands.

When the kidnappers took back the gun, the transfer of power was complete, just not in the direction they believed: The missionaries handed them helplessness, and they accepted. The captors were helpless now, in the face of surrender. What power could they possibly wield against willing captives?

They set the captives free after five days, and fifteen years later, the missionaries delivered this moral via the local news: *Once we submitted our will to the Lord's, it really brightened our day.*

First time inside Temple Square:

I walk with my arms crossed, shielding myself against missionaries, but they never appear. The whole square radiates recent abandonment, as though I have stumbled into a game of hide-and-seek.

Up close, the temple seems so compact, so vertical, like an icicle dripping down from a cloud or a rocket ready for launch. The battlements make it look like a plastic game piece, light enough to lift by the cornerstone to have a peek at the secret rituals inside.

Its quartz monzonite masonry radiates white, so bright I have to squint to look up at it: Emerald City in white. But the longer I stare, the less white it seems. It reminds me of Malevich's *White on White*, how if I stare at the white square in that painting long enough, hundreds of shades of ivory begin to flicker beneath the surface, and the square presses against its edges, suggesting infinity.

At first, I do not even realize that I am walking toward it; it is as though I am hypnotized. I stop when I reach the carving of Ursa Major on the west central tower. I do not realize I am

playing right into the temple's hands: The saints carved this constellation for lost souls. It has me exactly where it wants me.

The relentless city grid disappears.

I find relief standing on the zero meridian: nowhere, no place.

Outside the fifteen-foot walls, I am a ward. Inside, I escape surveillance by placing myself right under the nose of the watchtower.

I escape the tractor beam by submitting to its will of my own free accord.

I surrender.

But freedom is fleeting, a word on the tip of my tongue. True meridian zero lies behind the temple doors, and without a temple recommend, I am forbidden entry. As long as I live in Zion, the only way to escape the grid is to convert.

The temple is a time machine. Beginning on the fifth buttress of the north temple wall, a clockwise lunar sequence charts one year of phases: birth, life, death, and resurrection. One lap around the temple, and a whole year unfolds, the moon in time-lapse. Forty laps, forty years: the time between Brigham Young laying the cornerstone on April 6, 1853, to President Wilford Woodruff dedicating the temple on April 6, 1893.

Inside, temple ordinances erase time. Bride and groom kneel at the altar, and they do not say "till death do us part," because that vow—the one I took with my husband—starts the *tick, tick, tick* of the stopwatch. Temple marriage is not marriage at all, but a *sealing*, a cosmic envelope mailed straight to the dead-letter office in the sky, never for fingers to slit open.

Children are sealed to parents.

Siblings to siblings.

Living to dead.

Families stay together forever. Families are timeless.

By the time I moved to Salt Lake City, I had not seen my mother in seven years, my sister

in ten, and my father in fifteen. Before my oldest brother, Greg, died, eighteen years had passed since I last laid eyes on his red hair.

We are timeless, too.

I begin to visit the temple almost daily, circumnavigating it in the wrong direction, counterclockwise, winding the clock backward: death to life to birth. The temple is a time machine. Inside, it takes time away. Out here, it gives it back.

What I am saying is: Can a city by its very design make you long for family?

My brother Jimmy is buried beneath the Town & Country Shopping Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in a fully operational underground bowling alley. When the alley closed in 1997, the owners sealed over the stairwell hole with concrete, like a tomb, abandoning every last piece of equipment: pinsetters, ball returns, rental shoes, vending machines fully loaded with potato chips and candy, the soda fountains with the ice chips that always melted too fast. Everything is perfectly preserved like some kind of Midwestern Pompeii, even the sticky handprints on the daycare window overlooking the lanes like a watchtower. You can break in through the service entrance, flip a switch, and the machines will whirl back to life.

At least, that is the urban legend I choose to believe. If archaeologists dig up that bowling alley one hundred years from now, the only clues they might find to its previous incarnation are the scraps of wallpaper left behind from closing night, when patrons stripped souvenirs straight off the walls. As for the rest, the owner gutted it.

To me, though, the alley will always be sacred ground, the place where I met Jimmy for the first and last time: one handshake, the sum total of all our time as siblings. I did not yet know he was my brother, not until I caught my father clipping his obituary a few days later. "That's your brother, Jimmy," he said. And it was the last time he ever uttered his name.

Jimmy Higgins, my brother, self-inflicted gunshot wound to the chest.

Sometimes, I picture him down there, pressing his face to the glass of the daycare window, guarding the empty lanes.

When murderer Ronnie Lee Gardner faced his firing squad at the Utah State Prison in 2010, his executioners strapped him to a metal chair, stuck a target on his heart, and blinded him with a black hood. Five marksmen counted down, aimed their .30-caliber Winchester rifles through the gun port in a brick wall, and fired.

To outsiders, the execution proved what they already believed: Utah is an archaic, barbaric outpost of the Wild West. Never mind Utah outlawed firing squads for capital cases after 2004, or that Gardner's case got grandfathered, or that Utah is not the Wild West. Here in Zion, the question was not retribution; it was redemption.

Even though the modern-day LDS would rather forget the bloody justice once wielded by Brigham Young's ruthless Danites—aka the Destroying Angels—Gardner's execution raised its historical specter, resurrecting a debate about an old, officially disavowed Mormon doctrine still alive and well in the Beehive State: blood atonement, the belief that some offenses fall so far outside the pale, even Jesus' crucifixion cannot wipe your slate clean. Your only way back into the Heavenly Father's good graces, your only way back into the fold, is a blood sacrifice. You have to become your own savior, your own Jesus.

Hanging will not atone.

Lethal injection will not atone

The electric chair will not atone.

Only a bullet piercing the unholy chambers of your heart.

In less than a minute: heart death.

Quicker and less painful than lethal injection.

You who stay the execution, who declare

firing squads inhumane, who label bullets brutal, are the only ones cruel enough to cast stones. Zion condemns for one short minute; you condemn for eternity. That is why when you undergo *voir dire* for a capital case in Utah, the ghost of Brigham Young will ask: *Will you love that man or woman well enough to shed his blood?*

The Great Salt Lake is a terminal basin, meaning once water flows in, it never flows out. Evaporation is the only escape. Water has to change state from liquid to gas; it has to stop being water at all. That is what makes the lake so salty: When water vanishes, it leaves salt crystals behind, like fossils.

Sometimes I wonder if Zion is my terminal city. The mountains are a blackout curtain across my horizon; I have not seen the vanishing point in years. And anyway, in which direction would I vanish—east or west, Iowa or Oregon? When I left Iowa twelve years ago, I swore I would never return, but, now, I am not so sure.

What if, like the water in the lake, I am undergoing a fundamental state change? What if the vanishing point is me?

If you cannot navigate your way by the North Star, the temple will navigate for you. Ursa Major carved onto the west center tower points the way to true north, a proxy constellation for people who cannot find the real one, for lost souls. In this way, the temple is a missionary, except instead of coming to you, you come to it. At night, the temple lights up, so you have no choice: The night sky disappears, and the proxy Ursa Major is all you have. You have to hitch your wagon to a phony star.

Inside the front cover of every *Book of Mormon*, eleven eyewitness testimonies appear like a holy appraisal certificate: *I saw the golden plates with my own eyes*—meaning the ones from which Joseph

Smith translated the scriptures. Three witnesses received a divine visit from the Angel Moroni, who laid the plates before them; eight others—all from the Whitmer or Smith clans—claim Joseph Smith showed them the golden Bible and let them touch it. Perhaps because the *Book of Mormon* is so recent, skeptics expect more than eyewitnesses; they expect archaeological evidence. They expect forensics as clear and conclusive as fingerprints in the margins. Smith, however, surrendered the plates to the Angel Moroni, and they never surfaced again.

In 2006, the Museum of Church History and Art succeeded where archaeology failed: It manufactured the missing artifact. Historians and volunteers worked like forensic artists, transforming testimonies into hard evidence. They dipped copper plates in acid-resistant paint, scratched Egyptian characters into the surface, and soaked them in acid solution to dissolve the exposed metal of the letters. Then, they stripped all evidence of the paint with a kerosene bath, washed off the kerosene, electroplated the plates with silver-and-gold alloy, and bound them with oversized D-shaped rings. The end result: a holy three-ring binder.

The museum chose electroplated copper not because it was cheaper, but because it could withstand scientific scrutiny: Gold would have weighed two hundred pounds, far more than the weight described by witnesses. The golden binder was not evidence; it was hypothesis, and that was enough: The fake meant the real one was possible.

The only hard evidence I have of Jimmy's existence is a black-and-white studio portrait taken with my other two brothers sometime between 1968 and 1970. Jimmy sits to the right of the frame, the smallest of all three boys, maybe six or seven, a living ventriloquist doll with a stiff smile and oversized plaid jacket. On the border of the frame

just below him, *Jimmy Higgins* is written in ballpoint pen. By now, I know my father adopted Jimmy with a previous wife, but that doesn't make sense. Of all my brothers, I look the most like him.

Mark Hofmann's first noted Mormon forgery betrayed his ambition to toy with the church he had forsaken: He stole the identity of the prophet himself, penning a fake page of Egyptian characters supposedly transcribed straight from the golden plates. It was the Anthon Transcript, a document Smith created in 1828 so classic professor Charles Anthon could authenticate the Egyptian characters—hence, the name.

Hofmann dreamed up and executed his con within days after discovering that the transcript on file in the Reorganized LDS library did not match Professor Anthon's description: Anthon described vertical columns and a circular figure, but the RLDS copy featured horizontal lines and no circular figure. He surmised a source document must exist. *I probably can't be lucky enough to find it. So why can't I make it?*

He drew the Egyptian characters in homebrewed iron gallotannic ink on legit 1830ish paper razor-bladed out of a biblical history book in the Institute Library at Utah State, performing forensic analysis in reverse: adding flourishes to make it look like a predecessor to the RLDS copy—a trick he learned from reading studies tracing transcription errors in Shakespearean manuscripts. Then, he soaked the paper in hydrogen peroxide to age the ink and adhered the transcript to a Bible page with a mixture of charcoal, wheat paste, and drops of Elmer's glue—ordinary white glop from the kindergarten crafts bottle with the orange cap: anachronistic glue binding anachronistic documents.

It was his own kind of sealing ceremony, binding his lie to that Bible and to Mormon history forever. On the back of the transcript, he went so far as to declare it the fulfillment of the Isaiah 29:11

prophecy, in which the words of a book are delivered to a learned man, and he cannot read it, *for it is sealed*.

Hofmann's real magic, though, was not homebrewed ink aged by hydrogen peroxide, but the provenance he conjured from thin air. To make his lie unassailable, he duped two people into becoming unwitting alibis: First, he made sure his wife stood by his side when he discovered the sticky Bible page. Second, he took the Bible to Jeff Simmons, archivist at the Utah State University library, and asked for his help unsticking the glue. *We saw it stuck in that Bible with our own eyes*. It mimicked and mocked the very Mormon foundational story: Joseph Smith translating from golden plates that nobody except a few eyewitnesses could authenticate.

When Hofmann's "discovery" hit the headlines in the *Deseret News* in May 1980, he was photographed with church counselors, apostles, and President Spencer W. Kimball, who leaned over the Anthon Transcript with a magnifying glass, but even he, Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, could not divine the truth. Isaiah 29:11 had come true: Hofmann, too, had taken words to learned men, and their secret remained sealed.

In one of my few memories with my brother Greg, he was fumbling with the buttons on my pajamas and sliding his hands inside the fabric, even though I kept pushing them away. I was delirious with fever, in and out like a satellite signal in a storm. He had come to live with us between jobs, and when the doctor gave the order for an ice bath, he was the one who stripped off my pajamas and carried me naked to the bathtub.

I did not want him to see me. The truth is, I had a little-girl crush. Ever since he arrived at our front door, he seemed like a miracle: the brother I always wanted, someone who could appreciate my bicycle wheelies or the bug cemetery I dug under a bush on the front lawn. I went out of my way to harass and tease him, provoking him into

roughhousing me on the living room floor.

My feelings about the ice bath change depending on when the memory creeps up on me: In daytime, it takes on a sweet quality, my brother taking care of me in a vulnerable moment. At night, I wake up trying to wriggle out from under him.

Not long after the ice bath, my brother was banished from my life for good.

By the time he died in 2008, stricken down at the age of 51 by an unexpected heart attack, I had not seen him in 18 years, as many years as he was older than me. When the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* published his obituary, the author left my name off the list of surviving siblings; two days later, a corrected obituary wrote me back into the family line.

Am I Greg's sister forever or not?

Zion is not a city. It is an earthly docking station for the heavenly Zion when it descends at end-of-times. As a nonbeliever, I have no visual reference, so I imagine Zion hovering like the mother ship in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, a glittering, saucer-shaped city in the sky, skyscrapers sprouting out the top, twinkling lights arranged around a center iris, trumpeting to the Angel Moroni statue atop the temple's east central spire.

But Joseph Smith designed the Zion Plat as an Earthly utopia, too, clenching every urban planning trick tight in the church's theocratic grip. Within the one square-mile plat, he divided the city into ten-acre blocks and within those blocks half-acre lots, all identical: one family per lot; a house of brick or stone; room for an orchard and garden. No two houses ever faced one another: privacy and community in one. No dark alleys for prostitution and crime, no inequalities, and no conflict: Smith understood *grid is destiny*.

Smith also envisioned an urban growth boundary long before anyone coined the term. When Zion's population expanded beyond 15,000-20,000, the grid would not budge

beyond a green belt. Instead, a new Zion would spring up in exactly the same form, spreading over the surface of the Earth like a circuit board, programming the world for its demise.

Brigham Young never built the original Zion Plat: He adapted it to suit Utah's topography and his own vision, altering blocks, and widening the streets. Zion might have survived minor alterations, though, were it not for rabid anti-Mormonism and the automobile. In 1887, the Edmunds-Tucker Act punished polygamy with prison sentences and authorized federal marshals to seize all church properties valued over \$50,000, unfurling the LDS fist-grip on urban development. Add to that the influx of non-Mormons via the railroad, and piece-by-piece, private interests laid siege to the holy city. Alleys ate through blocks like termites, and prostitutes lurked in the shadows. Later, Brigham Young's polite, U-turn-friendly streets proved all too seductive for automobiles. Suburbs spread, and the greenbelt disappeared.

Brigham Young, it turns out, was an *agent provocateur*, too.

For once the general detestation and hatred pervading the whole country against the Mormons is given legal countenance and direction, a crusade will start against Utah which will crush out this beast of heresy forever.

— San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin, Oct. 27, 1857

A black cloud of grasshoppers eclipses the sun. Exoskeletons *click click click*, stripping tree trunks of their bark like skin grafts in reverse. In Zion's streets: *pop, pop*, popping like popcorn kernels bursting open under the wagon wheels. Crops: nibbled to nothing. You pray for the flock of seagulls, the same miracle that saved the Mormon pioneers in 1848. But the birds never come. This time, God has forsaken you.

Brigham Young knows why the seagulls

do not come. Brigham Young knows miracles only swoop down when *they* are hungry, not you. Miracles, by their very nature, are predators. *If your neighbor wishes salvation, spill his blood.* Love him enough—love Zion enough—to let him atone. Let the sinners sacrifice their blood. Let the sinners who brought this plague be our saviors when Jesus refuses.

When emigrants roll into Mountain Meadows in 1857, you are still hungry for blood and miracles. Any Arkansas wagon team is as good as guilty for the murder of apostle Parley Pratt in Arkansas just a few weeks before: If these emigrants are not killers, let them be proxies for the killers. Let them pay for the murder of Joseph Smith at Carthage. Let them atone.

Surround the wagons.

Wave white flags of surrender.

Promise to lead them to safety.

Make the men walk single file.

Attack.

Club brains with the butt of your gun.

Aim bullets straight to mothers' foreheads.

No child over the age of seven survives.

Feed to the Gentiles the same bread they fed to you.

It is September 11, 1857. In four days President Young will forbid all armed forces from entering Utah. In four days you will be free. There is your miracle.

Any President of the United States who lifts his finger against these people shall die an untimely death and go to hell.

What would Brigham Young say now, as the great-great-grandson of Parley Pratt stands at the podium of the Republican National Convention, surrendering to the very nation that would send its army into the Promised Land?

During winter in Salt Lake City, heaven and earth turn upside down: air near the earth cools; air high above warms up. Meteorologists call it a surface temperature inversion, blaming it on

long winter nights, the sun sinking low on the horizon, and high-pressure fronts. Inversions settle in for days and weeks, warm air sealing the cold valley like a Tupperware lid.

The mountains conspire to trap the soupy air, too, like the rims of a giant bowl. Automobile exhaust builds up as if the city is a sealed garage. Sometimes, I mistake the blue air and the burning at the back of my throat for the aftermath of an insurrection: tear gas lingering after all the rebel forces have been rounded up. *A city clean and in order.*

Inversion air tastes like sucking on a filthy penny, and it leaves a film on my tongue and teeth, the oily texture of rainbows on puddles. My voice turns throaty. I am dizzy. Sleepy. Street and security lights glow like flying saucers. The mountains and sun disappear for days. Sometimes, even buildings across the street vanish. Cars and pedestrians glide out of the fog like ships on water. It feels like *Blade Runner*. It feels like end times. Sky, city, mountains: I accept they will never come back. During these times, I wonder if Zion has landed, if this is what happens when the holy grids no longer line up.

I am a covert missionary, a secret agent of the grid. I have to choose Zion. Many of the streets I walk every day have more than one name:

400 S/4th South/University Boulevard

500 S/5th South/Cesar E. Chavez

Boulevard

“4th South” obliterates the reference to Temple Square, but I resist the translation. In that sense, the city is not converting me; I am converting myself.

For his grandest Mormon forgery, Mark Hofmann came full circle: This time, instead of conjuring false eyewitnesses, he became one. Assuming the identity of Martin Harris, one of the witnesses in the *Book of Mormon's* holy appraisal certificate, he preyed on the worst fear of the LDS: that Joseph Smith was a money-digging, glass-looker con

artist out to make a quick buck helping victims track treasure with magic seeing stones. Evidence does suggest Smith faced trial for money digging, so Hofmann penned the Salamander Letter to make it official church history. He also exposed hypocrisy: To translate the plates, Smith relied on a seer stone and a set of silver spectacles with Biblical Urim and Thummim lenses. This magic, however, was sanctioned by heaven.

In the letter, a white salamander guards the golden plates, not the Angel Moroni; hence the name Salamander Letter. Perhaps to plant a clue to his deception, Hofmann lifted the idea from a classic anti-Mormon book, E.D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled*. As with the Anthon Transcript, he conjured up a shady provenance—a ruse that, to Hofmann, boosted the letter's authenticity. *Only lies come with a clean paper trail, an airtight alibi.*

When the church accepted the authenticity of the letter, it played right into Hofmann's hands: legitimizing anti-Mormon propaganda and undercutting the testimony printed inside its own holy book. However, as it had in the past when confronted with evidence to the contrary, the church never turned its back on its foundational myth. It also proved Hofmann right, for just as he later proclaimed in his confession, it did not matter if Joseph Smith had the first vision or received the plates from the Angel Moroni, *as long as people believe it.*

In the end, the forger and the faithful shared the same core conviction: Belief, real belief, requires no forensics, no provenance at all.

The truth is the most important thing.

James Dean Darrah: That was Jimmy's legal name the day he died. He was no longer my brother, at least not in name. Twenty-nine years after his death, I unearthed his obituary so I could finally, finally hold the proof in my hands, and now I am left with nothing.

Jimmy Higgins. Adoption rescinded before I was born. Not my brother. Never was.

But twenty-nine years ago, I saw the obituary, the one with his name in black-and-white:

Jimmy Higgins. Where is that obituary now, the one that made him my brother?

On the tallest spire of the temple, a golden Angel Moroni raises his trumpet, but he is not just an angel; he is a lightning rod, with cables connecting him to the temple's grounding system. The same angel that trumpets the end of the world channels wrath from the heavens straight into the holy epicenter, saving the proxy moons and stars from the real ones.

I write *Jimmy Higgins* and *Greg Higgins* on a slip of ordinary notebook paper, fold it in half, and carry it in my palm to Temple Square.

I keep my head down as I pass through the gate, my way of bringing myself under its jurisdiction, of confessing.

Under the fifth buttress of the north temple wall, where the lunar sequence begins, I commence my usual counterclockwise walk, backward through the lunar phases: lightness to dark, death to birth, and stop at the west facade, just below Ursa Major. This, right here, is the place. In the basement, on this side, is the baptistry. It makes sense: sending spirit telegraphs from a tomb beneath Ursa Major, the compass for lost souls.

I climb the steps to the wooden doors on the right. Nobody stops me. I am inches from the portal. I touch the beehive engraved on the doorknob, the symbol of industry, of doing God's work. In a semicircle atop the beehive, an engraving reads: *Holiness to the Lord*. The very act of turning this knob, opening this door, would be doing God's work, unless of course, you have no right to be here.

On the escutcheon: the seashell, symbol of water and baptism. This spot, right here, is as close as I will ever get. I kiss the slip of paper and, just for a second, consider sticking it through the keyhole. But I cannot force them into the temple. I have taken my request to the highest authority, and now it is up to the temple to telegraph my heretical plea. It is up to my brothers to accept it. This stairwell, this door, this meridian—nowhere, no place, like home.