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Terrified!

Treatment
by
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Act One:

A swirl of Los Angeles traffic, bumper to bumper, thousands of cars inching along in the baking sun, chrome and glare. Gabe Reynold's eyes, wide and horrified, look one way, then the other. Cars, cars, and nowhere to go. Dull, dead-eyed commuters talk on cell phones, or stare off into space in the solitude of quiet misery.

Wait! Suddenly, there's an open side street. Gabe swerves out of the traffic, and onto the clear side street. He gives it some gas and finally starts to move. He glances down at the clock and sees that it's already after five.

"Ah, shit, I'm late! I need to call Anna."

Gabe glances up and sees a little girl running into the street chasing a red ball. Gabe's foot moves slowly off the accelerator like he's wearing a lead shoe, and toward the brake pedal, which seems to be a long way away. The little girl disappears from view under the front of his car, only her small hand remaining in sight, then it too drops under his car. Gabe starts to scream . . .

Gabe bolts awake in the passenger seat of his car. He looks utterly horrified, a sheen of sweat covering his forehead, his breathing rapid and shallow. His wife, Anna, who is driving the car, reaches out and grasps Gabe's sweaty hand.

"You were dreaming."

"I sure was." He rubs his eyes.

"We're almost there."

"Good."

Gabe looks at Anna for a long moment, then looks away, a slightly perplexed expression on his face. Anna glances back at Gabe, then returns to driving, and she has a concerned expression on her face.

Anna and Gabe's red SUV pulls into the parking lot of Ramsay Realty, which is a small wooden building with one other car in the parking lot. Gabe and Anna head into the office. When they get to the door, Anna stops Gabe, straightens his hair, kisses him, and they go inside.

Anna and Gabe ride in a car with the Realtor, a middle-aged woman named Clare.

"Oh, you'll just love this neighborhood. It was all gold mining camps around

here, and there are long ditches dug through the mountains, mostly by Chinese laborers, to bring water to the various mining sites. The ditches are all at a one percent grade and run for miles. This area was hopping in 1850, let me tell you. Now, though, there's a real sense of community. And if it's seclusion you're looking for, well, the driveway of this property is a mile long. It's one hundred and fourteen acres in total, and bakes up against hundreds of wooded acres of land owned by the Bureau of Land Management around it that will never be developed."

Clare turns on the nearly-hidden driveway entrance, goes a few hundred feet and stops at a locked metal gate. She gets out, unlocks the gate and opens it.

As they drive along the narrow gravel driveway, which gets slightly precarious at several points, Gabe's eyes dart all around, trying to see everything, down to the bottom of each drop, behind every tree. Anna glances at him frequently, concerned. Clare, of course, sees everything between the two prospective buyers.

Somewhere along the thin snaking driveway, Gabe's interest is piqued. He sits up and peers closely into the woods. There's nothing there, other than an old rusty piece of fence. Nevertheless, Gabe seems fascinated.

Anna asks, "What is it?"

Gabe shakes his head in confusion. "I don't know. I feel like something's back there."

Clare nods, "Lots of deer."

They finally arrive at the house and it's quite beautiful, built into the side of a hill, with a Jacuzzi, and a guest house. Anna and Gabe clearly like what they're seeing.

Anna says, "And all of this is listed for a hundred thousand less than we got for our house in LA."

"Why did you leave LA," asks Clare.

Anna shrugs, "Oh, you know, we'd just had enough of the city. The congestion, the traffic." Anna and Gabe exchange a look.

Clare nods, "Oh, yes. I used to live in Oakland, I know just what you're talking about. You could never find a parking place. Here, on the other hand, well, there's always parking."

But Gabe isn't listening, he's looking back down the driveway, toward something's that obviously caught his attention, but he doesn't know what.

Gabe suddenly turns to the two women and says, "Let's take it."

Clare looks a little shocked, but pleased. "You haven't even seen the guest house yet."

Gabe looks at Anna, who now feels cornered. She smiles, "Let's talk about it."

Gabe nods his head enthusiastically. "Right. Let's talk about it. I'm starving, anyway. Let's go get some lunch and talk about it."

Anna looks at Clare and shrugs helplessly. "We're going to talk about it."

Clare smiles, "Good."

The cute and historic little town of Jacksonville, Oregon, population 2,200. All of the buildings in the little downtown area are brick, and still have the faded advertisements from the 1930s, for things like chewing tobacco. It's now mostly antique shops and restaurants.

Gabe and Anna sit outside eating lunch at The Mustard Seed Café. It's a beautiful day.

Anna sips her ice tea. "It's a cute little town."

Gabe nods, "Yes, it is."

Anna looks at him seriously. "And you want to live here? Really?"

"What's the matter? Don't you like it?"

"It's pretty secluded. It's a long way from anything."

Gabe looks around. "Fourteen miles to here. And there's that store and little strip-mall about halfway in between."

Anna nods, "Once you get down the driveway."

"Yeah. That'll be a good walk everyday."

"Yeah, a whole mile, and it's all uphill on the way back."

Gabe smiles. "We'll get in shape."

"But why are you suddenly so enthusiastic about this place? You barely paid any attention to the other places we looked at."

Gabe shrugs. "They didn't interest me. This one does."

Anna persists, "But why?"

He shrugs again. "It just does."

Anna nods, "Okay. I guess that's as good a reason as any. Let's take it."

"Great, lets do it," says Gabe, taking Anna's hands in his.

They both smile happily, although they both have their own slightly strange expressions underneath the smiles.

A moving truck pulls up to the metal gate, which is open. The burly male driver looks at the other burly moving man, puts the truck in low-gear and gives it the gas. The engine growls as they climb the twisting hill.

The driver leans forward for a clearer view. "Holy crap! They gotta be kiddin'!"

The truck weaves its way carefully along the driveway. As they come around the sixth hairpin curve with no sign of a house, the driver mutters, "This is ridiculous." They come around yet another curve and come up on a lynched body hanging from a tree limb swaying in the breeze.

Both men scream. The driver slams on the brakes and the big truck skids to the edge of the driveway and a fifty foot drop. Both men peer over the edge, sigh, then glance up, and there's no hanged bodies anywhere in sight. They both look all around, but there's nothing. They look at each other, then continue slowly up the driveway without a word.

As the truck drives away, we see that the skid marks in the gravel happen to be right beside the piece of rusty fence Gabe was looking at.

Having emptied the truck, one guy slams the the back door while the other starts the engine. Anna steps out of the house, beside a pile of boxes, her wallet in one hand, several twenty dollar bills in the other hand, and says, "Here's a tip-"

The truck is slammed into gear and drives hastily away. Anna stands there with the money in her hand looking baffled, watching the truck speed away.

Anna shrugs, "Huh."

She turns and comes face to face with Gabe, and they both become startled. Anna gasps. Gabe sees his car run Anna over. He grabs his head, grimaces, falls to the ground whimpering and crying.

Anna stands there looking astonished and befuddled, not knowing which way to turn. Finally, she sits down beside Gabe and comforts him.

"It's okay, honey. Everything's all right.

Gabe whispers, "Sorry, I don't know what got into me."

Anna holds him tightly. "It all under control, and it's all going to work out and be just fine now."

Gabe holds on for dear life. His eyes are wide and frightened.

Gabe and Anna sit on the deck of their new house, drinking cans of soda, and watching a spectacular sunset occur behind wooded hills and a snow-capped peak. The sky is streaked with purple and pink.

Anna sighs, "Great view."

Gabe nods, "Yeah. That's about as pretty as they get." His view strays off the sunset and down to the driveway. He squints, trying to see even farther.

"What are you looking at?" asks Anna

He shakes his head. "I don't know. Nothing. Something."

They toast with their cans of soda in the last golden rays of sunlight.

"To our new life."

Anna and Gabe are up early the next morning and head out to walk their driveway. As they pass their SUV, Anna says, "I guess we'd better get a second car."

Gabe walks ahead. "I don't think I want to drive yet."

"It's been six months."

He turns on her, his eyes wide. "Yeah?" So what? What's six months? Nothing."

Anna puts up her hands. "Okay, all right. Jesus."

They start down the driveway.

Going down the driveway is fun and easy because it's all downhill. They jog along, breathing in the fresh, wood-scented air.

They come around a curve and there's the piece of rusty fence. Gabe stops

abruptly. He slowly steps over and inspects it.

Anna gets a ways ahead. "Hey! What's up?"

Gabe follows along after her. "Nothing."

They arrive at the bottom, at the metal gate. They turn around and start back up. Before they've gone very far at all it's getting steep and difficult, and Anna becomes winded. She stops to take a breath, but Gabe keeps right on going. Anna watches him in confusion, finally calling, "Hey! Wait for me!" But Gabe just keeps going until he's lost from her sight around a bend. Anna stomps her foot, "Shit! What's with him?" She presses on.

Anna trudges around one curve, then another, then finally there stands Gabe with his back to her, staring down at something. As she gets closer she sees he's staring at the piece of rusty fence.

"Gabe?"

He doesn't seem to hear her.

"Gabe?"

Gabe finally turns around and he's got a weird expression on his face, like he can't even see her. Anna becomes concerned.

"What's wrong?"

He shakes his head and his eyes clear. "Nothing."

"Why did you leave me behind?"

"I just had to keep going. Momentum."

Anna frowns, "Well, just don't do shit like that, okay? I don't like it."

Gabe nods, "Okay. Jeez."

They continue up their driveway. Gabe glances back over his shoulder.

It's the middle of the night and Anna is in bed asleep, although the place beside her is empty.

Gabe sits out on the deck bathed in bright moonlight gazing at the three-quarter moon, puffing on a cigar. Wisps of smoke rise up into the sky and float away. Gabe furtively glances down, then tip-toes into the house. He goes from box to box reading the description of the contents on the flaps. He finally finds the one he was looking for, and very quietly cuts the packing tape opening it. He removes a big wad of bubble-wrap, below which lurks the entire contents of a home bar -- ice bucket, glasses, swizzle sticks, and one full bottle of every kind of liquor. Gabe checks through the stock: gin, tequila, Bourbon, scotch, vodka, rum, brandy, peppermint schnapps, apricot brandy, Bailey's Irish cream, many other apéritifs. Gabe takes out a bottle of Johnny Walker black and sits back down out on the deck. He takes a big snort from the bottle, opens his mouth and makes like he's screaming, but no sound comes out. He takes a warm deep breath, puffs on his cigar, smiles and sighs.

Smoke floats in front of the moon.

"This is my new life. It all begins now. That was the bad period, and it

ended. Now is the good period that's just beginning."

Gabe nods and takes a big slug of scotch.

Gabe drunkenly tip-toes down the stairs to the bedroom. He glances in at his sleeping wife, then goes into the bathroom and shuts the door.

Anna's eyes open. She looks at the bathroom door and can hear him gargling.

The bathroom door opens and Gabe steps out. Anna closes her eyes. Gabe makes it to the bed, climbs in and closes his eyes. Anna opens her eyes, sits up and looks at him.

"Who do you think your kidding, Gabe? You stink like alcohol."

Gabe opens his eyes. "It's the mouthwash."

"No, it's the whiskey you just drank. And you also smoked a cigar, not that I care, but I can smell it, too. Gabe, you know you're not supposed to drink with all of the medication you're taking."

Gabe snorts. "Or what? I'll get too drunk to operate heavy machinery?"

"But the doctor said so."

"Oh, fuck the doctor. I like to drink."

"Then stop taking the medication."

"Maybe I will."

"But you need it."

"Do I?"

"I don't know, do you?"

"What is this, a word game? I'm just drunk enough to win."

"Go to sleep."

"Okay, I'll do that."

Gabe shuts his eyes. Anna stares down at him.

At breakfast the next morning neither Anna nor Gabe says a word. They both read magazines while they eat. Gabe has a touch of a hangover, and winces occasionally.

The phone rings. They are both a touch startled.

"Who could that be?" asks Anna. "No one has our number yet."

Gabe answers it and it's his father, Larry.

"Hi, dad."

"Gabe. How's Anna?"

"Fine. She's sitting right here. How did you get the number?"

"Anna gave it to me."

Gabe looks at Anna. "You gave it to him."

Anna smiles, "I remember now."

Gabe's dad asks, "So, have you found a Mormon church to attend?"

"Dad, we got here the day before yesterday. Besides, I never went in LA, why

would I start going now?"

"I just thought maybe that was part of your new program. Get back to nature, get back to God."

Gabe nods, "Well, maybe it will be. I don't know yet."

His dad says, "That's good to hear, Gabe. Gotta go."

"To a Mormon thing?"

"Yep, to a Mormon thing. There's lots of them here in Salt Lake."

"Bye."

Gabe hangs up the phone and sits back down.

"Have we found a Mormon church yet? I don't even think I'm a Mormon anymore."

Anna looks at him. "What are you then?"

Gabe thinks for a second, "Uh, paranoid?"

"Of what?"

"Uh, life?"

Anna shakes her head sadly. "That silly, there's no reason to be paranoid of life."

The phone rings.

Gabe says, "It's probably my dad, he always calls a second time. You get it."

Anna answers the phone, says, "Hello?" then simply listens, her expression growing more and more distressed. She drops into a chair, nodding, saying, "Uh-huh. I understand. I get there as soon as I can. What hospital is she in?"

Gabe finds a pen and some paper and hands them to her. Anna writes down information. She finally hangs up and turns to Gabe.

"My mother has had a brain tumor. She's in the hospital. She has to have surgery right away. I've got to go there, there's no one else, and someone has to give permission for the surgery."

Gabe nods. "Right. Of course you do. Is she conscious?"

Anna shakes her head. "No. She collapsed at the pool. I don't even know how you get to Florida from here. Through San Francisco?"

"Or through Portland."

She nods numbly, "Right. I'll call the airport."

Gabe comes over and puts his arm on Anna's shoulders. She puts her face against his hand and cries. Gabe pulls his wife to him and hugs her and comforts her, although his eyes look off into the distance.

Gabe loads Anna's suitcases into the back of the SUV. Anna holds a handbag and looks confused.

"But what about you? You'll be stuck here all by yourself."

Gabe shrugs, "I'll be okay. We have lots of groceries."

Anna looks skeptical. "Why don't I leave you the car and I'll call a cab?"

Gabe shakes his head. "A cab ride from here to the airport will be at least a

hundred bucks. Then you've got to get back. And I told you, I'm not ready to start driving again."

"But maybe if the car was here you would."

He shakes his head. "No. I wouldn't. Not yet."

Anna says very seriously, "Gabe, it wasn't your fault. Was it?"

He looks shocked. "No. It wasn't. I got off, remember?"

Anna gets in the car. "I remember, do you?"

"What does that mean?"

"It means, if it wasn't your fault, then let yourself off the hook."

Gabe straightens up. "Apparently, I'll let myself off the hook when I'm good and ready."

"Apparently." She starts the car.

"Besides, I think I can use some time alone."

She looks straight at him. "Gabe, you've never been *this* alone before."

He shrugs. "I'll be all right."

"If you need something you can always call a cab to get into town."

"Right. I'll be fine. I love you."

"I love you, too. And remember, no alcohol."

"Right."

"And I have my cell phone so you can call me."

"I will." He kisses her through the window.

"Bye."

Anna drives down the driveway and Gabe watches her go. When he can't actually see the car anymore, he can still see the dust rising through the trees as the car snakes its way down long driveway.

Once she's gone, Gabe just stands there. All sorts of sounds come fading in like he couldn't hear them before: wind in the trees, birds chirping, geese honking in the distance, crickets, bees buzzing. Gabe smiles and heads down the driveway.

Gabe arrives at the piece of rusty fence. He studies it for a moment, then heads into the woods behind it. There is the remnant of an overgrown trail, which he follows, pushing his way through the foliage, breaking branches, getting poked by blackberry pickers.

The trail finally leads Gabe into a wall of very thick vegetation. He pushes his way in using a stick like a machete. Finally, it becomes so dense that Gabe tries to crawl underneath. He crawls along for a little ways, then gets stuck. He ends up having to crawl out backward. When he gets out, he stands and he's covered with dirt from head to foot, and bleeding in several spots.

Gabe gives up and heads home.

Gabe pours the last bit of scotch out of the bottle of Johnny Walker into his glass and takes a sip. He sits on the deck watching a spectacular sunset behind the mountains. Gabe sets the empty liquor bottle on the floor and it falls over. Also on the floor are a variety of pill bottles, with names like: Prozac, Wellbutrin, Paxil, Xanax, Mellaril, and Lithium. Gabe takes a few pills from each bottle, tosses them all in his mouth, and washes them down with scotch.

He imitates Elvis, "I don't want no trouble, mister. And we better record this here record in the next five or ten minutes, cause once those red and green ones kick in, we'll just have to wait until next Christmas."

Gabe takes a deep breath, then exhales long and slow. He actually looks somewhat relaxed. The tension in his face and neck is beginning to dissipate.

Gabe flashes back to driving in LA, only it's in a weird, eerie slo-mo blur with sound like it's coming from underwater. He's wearing a suit and tie, talking on a cell phone, and swerving in and out of traffic. Up ahead is a solid traffic jam. Gabe mumbles slowly, "Shit!" He turns off the main road onto a side street which is completely clear. Gabe grins, "Yeah." He gives it the gas, speeds up to 35-mph, glances down, then up and there's a little girl directly in front of his car disappearing under it, with just her small hand grasping at nothing, then also disappearing.

Gabe gasps and he's back on the deck watching the last rays of the sunset behind the mountains. Tears trickle out of his eyes and he takes another big drink. He toasts the setting sun. "It was an accident. The jury said I was innocent. So, Goddamnit, I'm innocent!"

The phone rings.

"Oh, shit! It's gotta be her and she's gonna know I'm drunk. Fuck." The phone rings. "All right then, I just won't answer it." The phone rings again. But why wouldn't I answer it, where would I be at this time? Then I should answer it. No, I won't."

The machine picks it up and it's Gabe's dad. "Hello Gabe, this is your dad. I'm calling your new number at your new home. I hope you're liking it there, and everything's going well, and you're feeling okay. Give me a call." The machine beeps and goes off.

Gabe toasts the answering machine. "Thanks, dad. You forgot to say, mom sends her love."

The phone rings again. Gabe chuckles, "Ah-ha. No you didn't." He picks up the receiver and says, "Hello?"

"Gabe?" It's Anna.

Gabe looks stricken. "Anna. Hi. How are you?"

"I'm fine, have you been drinking?"

Gabe winces in distress and quietly sets his drink down on the counter. "No. Why do you ask?"

"Because you're slurring your words and you sound drunk."

"No, no, I was just taking a nap. I fell asleep on the deck watching the sunset. It's really beautiful."

Anna says, "That's nice. So, I got here to Florida fine, and I'll go see my mom tomorrow."

"Great."

"Gabe, are you all right?"

"I'm fine."

"You sure?"

"Sure I'm sure."

"Look, Gabe, I don't want to be your mother."

"Then don't be. I'll talk to you tomorrow, okay?"

"Okay. Bye."

"Bye."

Gabe hangs up, buries his face in his hand and moans, "Oh, man, that didn't go very well." He picks up his drink and downs it.

A light on the phone machine is flashing, so he pushes rewind. It rewinds and rewinds and rewinds.

"Doesn't anyone ever rewind this tape?"

Apparently not, because it just keeps rewinding. When it finally stops, it clicks and begins to play. It's his voice, only chipper and full of life.

"Hi, hon. I picked up the plane tickets for Hawaii, it's all set. It'll be great. Aloha, mahalo, and I love you." Beep.

Gabe looks down at the machine somewhat incredulous, rubbing his face. "This was before the accident. Back when I had a life."

Beep. "Oh, Christ, oh Jesus Christ, this can't be happening, please God let this not be happening . . ."

Gabe's eyes go wide with horror. "It's the accident. It's on tape."

Gabe flashes back to the accident, to turning onto the side street, giving it the gas, speeding up to 35-mph, glancing down -- only this time we see that he's glancing down to dial his cell phone. Gabe glances up and sees the little girl disappear under his car. The cell phone falls from his hand onto the passenger seat. Gabe gets out of the car to see what he's done. Meanwhile, we hear Gabe's voice on the answering machine come through the cell phone, "Hi, you've called the Reynolds, please leave a message." Beep. It's recording. We hear Gabe out in front of the car screaming, "Oh, Christ, oh Jesus Christ, this can't be happening, please God let this not be happening . . ."

Gabe punches the button on the phone machine to stop it, only it won't stop.

". . . Oh, God, please God help me . . ."

Gabe pokes more buttons, but it keeps playing. He grabs the machine and tears it out of the wall. "STOP IT!"

Gabe stands there holding the silenced phone machine, his eyes glaring. He pulls

the mini-cassette tape out of the machine.

"She knows. That fucking cunt knows and she never said anything. Goddamnit!

He tosses the phone machine on the floor, puts the tape in his pocket, goes over to the box with all the liquor and gets himself another bottle.

Act Two:

The sun rises over Gabe's house, casting soft warm rays of light on the mountains. Gabe sits on the deck drinking, just as he has all night long, only he finished the bottle of Johnny Walker and has moved on to a bottle of Jack Daniels, which he's halfway through. His eyes are severely bloodshot, and he's so drunk he's not drunk anymore. Gulping down his drink, Gabe bolts unsteadily to his feet.

"What am I doing? I've got work to do."

Gabe marches drunkenly up his driveway, wearing a loaded backpack, and carrying a hedge-trimmer and a Coleman lantern. There is a look of blind, angry, drunk determination on his face.

He arrives at the rusty broken fence and heads right into the woods. As he follows the overgrown path, any branch that gets in his way he chops off with the hedge-trimmer. When he gets to the thick foliage he got stuck in, he starts chopping like a wild man. Severed branches and vines fly in all directions.

As Gabe chops his way through all the vegetation he is becoming a sweaty, freaked-out, wild-eyed mess. He won't slow down to take a breath.

Gabe finally chops his way through foliage, and comes out in an overgrown clearing. In the center of the clearing is an old wooden cabin, long abandoned, overgrown with weeds and vines, but fully intact. It's an old miner's cabin from the 1850s. Gabe takes off his pack, sets down the lantern and circles the cabin. He finds both the front and back doors closed and locked. Oddly, there are no windows. He can't see anything inside through the cracks between the planks because it's too dark.

Gabe gets back to the front door. He goes to his pack and takes out the remainder of the bottle of Jack Daniels and drinks. He finishes the bottle and tosses it to the ground. He then steps up to the front door and kicks it in like a cop on a TV show. The old wood splinters and the door flies open.

Gabe lights the lantern, holds it up, and with it's hissing, throbbing white light out before him, enters the cabin.

The cabin is still full of furniture, bookshelves, tables, chairs -- a chair on its side -- books on the shelves, a single broken tea cup on the table. Gabe goes to take a book down from the shelf and it disintegrates into dust in his hand. He looks all around and says, "It looks like someone left in a hurry, then no one ever came in here again."

Meanwhile, back at the house, the phone is ringing. It just keeps ringing and ringing because the answering machine was ripped out of the wall, the torn cables dangling beside it.

Gabe's father, Larry Reynolds, a 55-year old man with gray hair and a perplexed expression, stands holding the telephone in the kitchen of his house. It rings and rings and rings.

"What happened to the answering machine?"

Larry hangs up, thinks for a second, then sits down at the kitchen table, puts on his glasses, and looks at his phone book. Under "Gabe and Anna Reynolds" there's an address in Los Angeles that's been crossed out, then an address in Jacksonville, Oregon has been added in. There is another addition in the margin, "Anna's cell 310-555-1212." Mr. Reynolds dials the phone.

Anna immediately answers from her mother's hospital room.

"Gabe?"

"No, it's his father."

"Larry. Have you heard from him?"

"No, that's why I'm calling you. I've left messages, and now it just rings and rings, like the machine's been turned off. Why isn't he answering?"

Anna sighs, looking down at her unconscious mother, attached to a beeping EKG, and an EEG, as well as a hissing respirator.

"I don't know. He's not doing all that well. Not since the accident."

"But that was over a year ago. Besides, the court found him not guilty."

"The court did, but I don't know about himself."

"What does that mean?"

"I think he thinks he's guilty, and it doesn't matter what the court says."

"So why isn't he answering the phone?"

Anna frowns. "Maybe he's drinking again."

Mr. Reynolds looks angry. "I thought he gave that up?"

"He did. For a while. And God knows how it's combining with all of the medication he's taking?"

Mr. Reynolds is aghast. "What medications?"

"Oh, the psychiatrist prescribed all kinds of anti-depressants and tranquilizers. And you're not supposed to drink with any of them."

Mr. Reynolds looks tortured. "I've got to go there."

"Do you mean flying or driving?"

Mr. Reynolds has a look of resolve. "I'll drive."

"It's a long way from Salt Lake City to Medford."

"I drove a truck in the army, I can handle it. If I leave now I can be there by midnight."

"Then I think you should do it."

He nods. "Okay then, I will."

Gabe inspects every square inch of the cabin's interior. He holds the hissing lantern out in front of him, it's throbbing white light between him and all the old items in the cabin. He takes a big slug from a bottle of gin and winces horribly.

"Juniper berries, Jesus Christ!"

He then takes another big slug.

"Okay, so what's so damn important? What?"

He keeps looking and drinking and looking and drinking, "Come out, come out, wherever you are . . ."

Mr. Reynolds is his little blue Chevy, and drives out of the center of Salt Lake City. He passes Brigham Young University and the Mormon Tabernacle on his way to the freeway. He gets onto I-80 and merges into the flow of traffic heading west.

Anna stands in her mother's hospital room listening to a middle-aged, male neurologist explain the situation.

"There's an embolism in your mother's brain, back here," he points at the back of his head. "We've got to remove it. We'll go in through the back of her skull. I'll schedule surgery as soon as possible. The sooner the better, actually."

Anna turns and looks at her unconscious mother. The respirator hisses and the EKG beeps intermittently.

Gabe is lying face down on the cabin floor, lit by the lantern, his eyes wide open, peering around, and crazy-looking.

"What is it? What? What?"

He inches along the floor, inspecting, staring, searching.

Then he see it. From beneath the center wall that divides the cabin into two rooms is a two-foot strip of light glowing underneath the edge of the curled wallpaper. Gabe furrows his brow and crawls over to the wall.

"Why would there be light coming out here? And just in this little strip? Hmmm?"

There's a bookshelf right there against the wall. As Gabe pushes it out of the way it falls to pieces, creating a cloud of dust, and causing the strip of light to become a beam of light shooting across the cabin.

Gabe wedges his fingertips under the curled edge of the wallpaper and tears upward. A big hunk of old wallpaper tears off revealing wood behind it. He tears off more wallpaper and reveals an old rusty hinge. Then another hinge. It's a door.

Gabe reaches over to a squat, bulbous bottle of brandy and takes a big drink. He blows out a long stream of hot air, says, "Mmm, good," and takes another.

He goes back to tearing off wallpaper and reveals an old bolt and a lock. He

gives the door a try and it is indeed locked. Gabe goes over to his backpack and takes out a crowbar. He wedges the crowbar in behind the lock, gives it a mighty yank and rips the lock right off.

Slowly opening the squeaky old door, Gabe find a small closet with a tiny window high up on the ceiling. A beam of light shines down on an old steamer trunk, the only thing in the closet. The trunk has a rusty old padlock. Printed on the lid is: "G. Smith, Nauvoo, Illinois."

Gabe arches his eyebrows. "Nauvoo? That's Mormons. What were Mormons doing in Oregon back then?"

Mr. Reynolds drives his little Chevy across the vast expanse of the great Salt Lake Desert. Mormon country. It's incredibly flat and hot. He looks very concerned and mumbles a prayer.

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be they name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, give us this day our daily bread . . ."

On his dashboard is a bottle-cap size portrait of the blue-eyed, blond-haired Jesus, looking upward and praying.

Anna sits in her mother's hospital room holding her cell phone, which just keeps ringing and ringing. She shrugs and finally hangs up.

"What happened to the phone machine?"

Her expression changes completely as she remembers something.

"The phone machine. I never took that tape out of there. Oh, shit!"

Just then the neurologist comes back into the room and Anna quickly stands up.

"Is there something I have to sign so you can operate?"

The doctor gives her a kindly look. "We can do it later."

Anna shakes her head. "Let's do it now, I have to leave."

The doctor looks shocked, "But you just got here."

"I know. But I have to go. I'll come back."

The doctor turns and leaves, "All right then. Right this way."

Anna follows along.

Her mother continues to lie there, machines beeping and hissing.

Gabe has the trunk pulled out to the center of the room. He has the crowbar jammed in behind the padlock and is pushing down as hard as he can, but it's not giving. He grumbles, "Well-made trunk," and keeps pushing, gritting his teeth. Finally, he stands up and puts his foot on the crowbar, leaning his weight on it, harder, harder, and suddenly the crowbar snaps back up and slams him in the crotch. The pain is blinding, and Gabe collapses to the floor. As he grabs his crotch and winces, he also chuckles.

"Wow, was that stupid."

He grabs the stubby bottle of brandy and gulps it down. He touches his balls and

gasps.

"Okay. New approach."

Now he has the crowbar jammed into the back edge of the trunk, between the lid and the base, and as he leans on it he can hear the back hinges begin to crack and give way.

"Ha-ha! Motherfucker!"

Gabe pries the back hinges out of the wood, then opens the trunk backward.

It's full of clothes. Folded. A black frock coat. White shirts, with frayed cuffs and collars. Black wool socks, often mended. A King James Bible. An old Book of Mormon. And another little, leather-bound book that looks like yet another bible, but when Gabe opens it he finds that it's handwritten. The front page says, "My Westward Journal, by the Bishop Gabriel Smith, 1849."

Gabe shakes his head. "Cool! We're both named Gabriel."

He turns to page one and begins to read aloud . . .

"It has happened again, the wrath of the heathen is upon us. First we were driven from our homes in Palmyra, New York, then out of Kirtland, Illinois, then out of Independence, Missouri, and now we are being driven out of our homes in Nauvoo, Illinois, and we Mormons built the town of Nauvoo, which is now the largest city in Illinois. Mobs have killed both my uncles, the Prophet Joseph Smith, and his brother, Bishop Hyrum Smith. So now we are on the move again, and we know not where we go. May God preserve us, the end may be near . . ."

Gabe stops reading and looks at the little book in his hand. "Jesus, this is an important document." He keeps reading . . .

". . . I have seen a vision in the wilderness. God appeared to me and spoke of the coming apocalypse, the burning, fiery end of the world. He said that it was my duty to tell all the others. We must repent now. There's no time to be lost . . ."

Gabe takes the little leather-bound book and his pack and steps outside. The sun is just beginning to set, sending shimmering light through the treetops. Gabe sets himself down on the rickety porch, goes into the backpack, removes a bottle of tequila and takes a big slug. "Aye, carumba!" Gabe digs a cigar out of the pack and lights up. Smoke wafts through the beams of light. He keeps reading.

". . . The weeks turn to months as we trek west, through the wilderness, toward an unknown destination. But I know. We are moving inexorably to our doom. The world's doom. The apocalypse. As the Prophet Moroni said, 'Great judgment which were coming upon the earth, with desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence' and it shall be so because God spoke unto me and said it would be so . . ."

Gabe puffs on his cigar and keeps reading, ". . . Most of my brethren do not believe my words, nor do they believe that I have actually spoken to God. They think me touched, and treat me so. They follow brother Brigham Young, and believe that salvation lies ahead. Where? In the middle of this vast wasteland? I think not. We will all most certainly die, burning deaths of hell and brimstone . . ."

Taking a breath, Gabe looks up. "My God."

Gabe drinks some tequila, stands and begins to slowly walk around, circling the cabin in the last golden rays of sunlight, as he continues to read, ". . . We are to settle here, in the middle of a great salt lake where nothing will ever grow. It's insanity, the work of the devil. I tell everyone, I preach, endless words flow from my mouth, letting them all know that God has spoken to me of the coming apocalypse and the end is near. They scoff and ridicule me, laughing and poking fun. They believe my think to be unsound, but yet I am nevertheless harmless. They know nothing. But they'll see, they'll all see . . ."

". . . It's all become very clear tome, like a bright white light. I have decided to kill our leader, Brigham Young, this is the only way I'll ever get their attention, and get them to see what I'm saying is true. That way they will know that I alone speak the words of God . . ."

Gabe pours tequila on a pile of branches, then tosses on a lit match and it bursts into flames. He adds more sticks to the campfire, then goes inside and comes out on the porch with the Coleman lantern and lights it. It gives off throbbing white light and hisses. Gabe sits down on the edge of the porch, picks up the book and keeps reading.

". . . My attempt on Brigham Young's life has failed. I tried to shoot him with a pistol, but having no prior experience with such things, I missed and hit a woman beside him and I have killed her. So I have run away from the Mormons. I now travel with a group of settlers and gold miners heading for the gold fields of Oregon."

Mr. Reynolds' little blue Chevy crosses the border from California into Oregon on I-5, just north of Yreka. He is drinking a styrofoam cup of tea, with the dangling string, while also trying to check the map, and he sees he's just thirty-five miles from Jacksonville. He also spills tea all over his white pants.

"Aw, heck, and I just had these slacks cleaned.."

He then unwraps a candy bar and takes bite. Pieces of chocolate fall all over his pants. He tries to wipe them up with a napkin and they all smear.

"Aw, dang!"

A Horizon Airlines jet lands at the Rogue Valley/Medford International Airport. Anna comes into the little terminal looking ragged. She's been on a lot of flights lately.

Anna steps out of terminal with her suitcase and flags down the one and only taxi cab waiting at the curb. A thin tall male driver puts her bag in the trunk.

"Where to?"

"1235 Grouse Creek Road. Just off Sterling Creek Road. Outside-"

"I know where it is," grumbles the driver. It's a long way. It'll be expensive."

Anna gets in the car. "Well, I'm sorry to hear that. Could we please get going?"

"Sure. No problem."

He puts it in gear and drives away from the airport.

Gabe sits in front of the crackling campfire, flames illuminating his face from below, his severely bloodshot eyes gleaming. He takes a big drink from a bottle of bourbon.

"Ah!" He picks up the journal and keeps reading.

"This miner's town I've arrived in here in Oregon, called Jacksonville, is a corrupt cesspool of vice and sin. Liquor, loose women, gambling, opium, gold, gold, and more gold. The whole town is burning up with gold fever. A haircut here is five dollars! Think of it. This place is the living Sodom, just waiting for God's wrath to destroy it, and cleanse it. The end is closer than anyone here suspects or knows. I've been preaching in the miner's camps, and, thank God, I believe I'm getting through to some of these people. I know that a few have really and deeply heard me in their hearts, and understood me, and they knew that I truly spoke God's words. It's been very gratifying compared to how I was treated by the Mormons. Well, the truth will come to them, too, as it will come to all men."

Gabe lowers the book, looking up with crazy, flame-filled eyes.

"There's no escaping the truth."

The nearly-full moon is shining down brightly as Mr. Reynolds drives slowly up a rural country road, a piece of paper in his hand, straining to read the addresses in the country dark. He finally spots the tinniest little sign on a stick, possibly four inches tall, and eight inches wide, with the address, "5577."

"Sheesh! Could they make it any smaller?"

Mr. Reynolds turns the car up the driveway and goes through the open gate.

Gabe looks up. What's that? He thinks he hears something. He stands up and looks around, his eyebrows raised.

"What the hell is that?"

He hears something coming up the driveway.

"They're coming. I've got to get ready."

He turns around, grabs the lantern, and heads back inside the cabin.

Gabe keeps going through the clothes in the trunk. At the very bottom, beneath the shoes, are several old daguerreotype photographs of this man, Gabriel Smith.

He's the exact double of Gabe, but dressed in a frock coat, wearing a tall hat, with bushy side-whiskers. In photo after photo, it's Gabe.

Gabe gasps, "He's me. I'm him."

Gabe looks down at all of the clothes strewn about. He begins putting on Gabriel's clothes. Gabe finishes buttoning the frock coat, straightens the thin black ribbon tie, then steps over to the dirty looking-glass on the wall. He reaches out and

wipes away the dust and dirt on the mirror, revealing his own reflection-and incredibly, Gabe now has the big side whiskers and *he has become Gabriel Smith!*

Act Three:

The room around Gabriel is brand new, and everything in it is new. It's now full of furniture with lamps burning, and warm golden light illuminating the cabin. Gabriel struts around the room tugging on his whiskers and thinking out loud.

"I've finally gotten to a place where they not only hear me, they understand me. They know that God has spoken to me, and works through me, and that I will bring them through the coming darkness to salvation."

He gets down on his knees, puts his hands together, and prays.

"Dear Father, even though I know you must bring the world to a fiery end very soon, I thank you for sending me here, to the gold country of Oregon, where fresh minds and clear thinking rule the day, and they appreciate men like me."

Outside the voices of people can be heard speaking.

Gabriel looks up and smiles. "They're coming. My people are coming unto me."

Voices begin calling to him.

"Gabriel Smith! Preacher-man! Come on out. We wanna hear some preachin'!"

Gabriel looks up beatifically, "My people. Calling for me. I must go to them." He picks up his bible and heads outside.

"I'm coming."

Outside the cabin, which looks brand-new, there is in fact a crowd of about twenty people, mostly bearded miners, four Chinamen with pigtails, and three whores. They are all looking intently at the cabin's front door.

Gabriel opens the door and steps out on the porch.

"Blessings on you, my children. I've come to lead you all to God's righteousness."

A bearded sourdough says, "Yeah, and we've come to lead you to righteousness, too, ain't that right?"

Everyone cheers. They whistle, hoot and holler.

Gabriel steps forward and takes his holiest stance, hands folded in prayer with the bible clasped between. "Then we shall all march onward to the promised land together."

A grizzly miner holds up a coil of rope which ends in a noose, "No, you'll go first!"

The crowd screams and moves forward as a mob. Gabriel is terrified!

"But, but-"

The mob grabs him, puts the noose around his neck, then begins dragging him away.

A miner says, "We'll string him up back at the camp, so's everyone can see."

Many holler "Yeah" and Gabriel is dragged away kicking and screaming, the mob swarming around him like angry ants.

The mob drags Gabriel down a well-worn path, past a series of hand-painted wooden signs with arrows reading, "Miners Camp," "Likker," "Whores," "Chink Town." As the mob passes other miners and whores and Chinamen, many join into the parade.

They drag Gabriel into the center of the miner's camp, which is nothing more than a series tents, crude shacks, and lean-tos, with several horses and wagons tied up. Gabriel looks bewildered and horrified as he watches several men hastily construct a scaffold, with a stack of boxes piled up beneath a tree. Someone takes the noose from around his neck, tosses it over a tree limb, and it comes swinging down over the boxes.

A sourdough steps forward, "We don't appreciate your heathen Mormon ways around these parts, preacherman. We's good Christians, and we won't stand for no blaspheming."

Gabriel is placed on top of the boxes and the noose is put back around his neck. A miner pulls the rope taught, then ties it off at the trunk of the tree. Gabriel puts his hands together in prayer.

"Don't you see, my brothers and sisters, the apocalypse begins when the righteous are persecuted for their beliefs, just like our lord and savior, Jesus Christ, as well as the latter-day saint, the Prophet Joseph Smith. And now look what you're doing to me. Just like the Romans did to Jesus, and the Illinois militiamen did to Prophet Smith."

One of the whores steps forward with her hands on her hips looking outraged. "You just quit puttin' your heathen Mormons in the same league as Jesus, y'hear me! There was only one savior, and only a heathen blasphemer would compare themself to him."

The crowd begins getting restless, yelling "Hang him!" and "String 'im up!" and "Get on with it!" Suddenly, the hubbub grows loud as they begin discussing who should actually do this thing.

Gabriel sees his moment. He jumps off the boxes, pulls his head out of the noose, and takes off running across the camp. He grabs a two-bladed ax along the way and if anyone gets near him he swings it.

Gabriel turns off the well-worn path and runs into the woods.

The mob hollers, "He's getting' away," and "Let's get 'im," as they grab torches and shovels and rifles and go after him.

Gabriel runs hell-bent through the night forest, the two-bladed ax held in front of him like a cross. Branches smack him in the face, and thorns tear at his skin. He

prays as he runs.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me, for thou art with me . . ."

Gabe runs out into a clearing where two horse-drawn wagons sit. Two hooded figures sit on one wagon, one hooded figure sits on the other wagon. All three hooded figures climb down from the wagons, step up to Gabriel and encircle him.

"Who are you?" asks Gabriel.

"We're angels," says on hooded figure.

Gabriel looks hopeful. "Angels? Really? Did God send you?"

"Yes, God sent us."

"And you're really angels?"

They all nod, then pull back their hoods revealing they all have skeleton heads. They all speak in unison.

"Yes, we're Angels of Death. Gabriel, your time to pay up has come. You took a life, and now you must pay with your own life."

Gabriel looks confused. "What life? I'm innocent. I've taken no lives."

The Angels of Death circle Gabriel. "Haven't you? Didn't you kill someone by mistake?"

"But that was an accident. I didn't mean to."

"That doesn't matter," intone the angels. "You took a life, and now you must pay."

"But I didn't mean it," pleads Gabriel.

"That doesn't matter," say the angels as they each pull a scythe out from beneath their robes. "Your time has come." They move in on Gabriel, their scythes upraised.

He sees them coming from all directions, not knowing which way to turn. Finally, Gabriel raises the two-bladed ax and begins swinging it all the way around him in a circle, holding the messengers of death off.

The angels say, "You can't hold us off forever, Gabriel. When your time has come, there's nothing you can do."

Gabriel keeps swinging the ax. "The jury exonerated me. I'm innocent."

The angels ask, "What jury?"

"The jury at the trial."

"What trial?"

Gabriel looks utterly confused. "Wait a minute, who am I?"

"It's not important that you know who you are, *we* know who you are."

The Angels of Death raise their scythes, ready to strike.

Gabriel attacks with the swinging ax. He chops one of the angel's skeleton heads right off. It flies through the air and hits the ground with a thump. The cloak of the headless angel wilts to the ground in a heap.

Gabriel fends off the other two angels, who continue to circle him. "When your time has come, there's nothing you can do."

Gabriel, meanwhile, keeps knocking their scythes out of the way with the ax. He finally swings the ax around and embeds it one of the angel's chests. Gabriel puts his foot against the angel's stomach, pulls out the ax, then swings the other blade right around into the next angel's chest.

Gabriel doesn't wait to see the results, or even pull out the ax, he just takes off running as fast as he can into the dark woods. He's now completely panicked, his eyes bugging out, running completely out of control.

He stops and listens. There are people all over the place, carrying torches and lanterns, obviously searching for him. Gabriel doesn't know which way to turn.

He sees a hole in the ground, beside a tree stump. Gabriel quickly runs around and collects an armload of branches and dead grass, then backs into the hole, covering it up after him. His wild crazy eyes can be seen within, peering out.

People pass this spot holding torches, then some more come by holding lanterns. They can't seem to find him. Gabriel begins to breathe more evenly, and shuts his eyes. It all gets quiet. They're gone. He sighs.

The branches are yanked away and there is the entire mob, all glaring at him with angry expressions. Several miners reach in and pull Gabriel out.

"Come on out, preacherman. There's no more runnin' away. Your time's come!"

This time they tie his hands and feet. The noose is put back around his neck and he's hoisted up onto a horse. The other end of the rope is tossed over a tree limb and tied off.

Gabriel pleads, "But I didn't do anything."

A miner steps forward and points in his face. "What about them three people you just killed with an ax? You took that woman's head off. What about them?"

Gabriel looks stunned. "But they were angels. Angels of Death come to take me away." He looks pleadingly into people's eyes.

The miner steps even closer. "They're angels now. But they was just three regular old people until you killed 'em with an ax. You're a murderer!"

Gabriel is stuck. "They were people? They had skulls for heads, and they carried scythes."

"No they didn't. You're crazy! And what about that little girl you run down? Was she an angel of death, too?"

Other people holler "Yeah" and "What about her?"

Gabriel shakes his head violently. "I got off. The jury said I was innocent."

"They were wrong!"

The crowd begins to sing "Shall We Gather at the River."

A grizzled old miner cuts a switch, then walks over to the rear of the horse. "You got any last words, preacherman?"

Gabriel sits on the twitchy horse with the noose around his neck, and an angry mob surrounding him.

He looks at everybody and says, "This isn't real. This is a dream."

A miner asks, "You sure?"

Gabriel shakes his head. "No, I'm not sure at all."

"Here, see if this helps." He swats the horse's rump with the switch and the horse immediately bolts, leaving Gabriel hanging by his neck. The mob cheers, looking highly satisfied.

Gabriel's eyes snap wide open, darting around in sheer terror. He is no longer Gabriel Smith with the long side-whiskers, he's back to being Gabe Reynolds in modern dress, although he still has the noose around his neck and it's choking him. He is in fact hanging from a rope tied to a tree branch beside his house.

A foot beneath his feet are the boxes he was once obviously standing on, but no longer because now he's hanging. Gabe reaches up and grabs the rope above his head, trying to take the weight with his arms and allow himself to breathe. It works for a second, then his arms can't hold because it's too awkward, and he begins to choke again.

As his eyes roll up the final time into his skull, he gets one more flashback of the little girl disappearing under his car. Just her little grasping hand remains in view, then it too disappears.

Gabe's eyes close, he shudders and dies.

On the driveway sits his Gabe's father's blue Chevy, with the door open, the lights on, and the radio playing a gospel station. There's a hand lying on the gravel, which belongs to Gabe's father, who lies inert on the driveway, dead, a two-bladed ax embedded in his chest.

Further down the driveway is a red and white Medford taxi cab with one of its doors open and its taxi radio squawking. Lying beside his cab is the thin tall taxi driver, also with an ax wound in his chest, lying in a pool of blood, gasping, with bubbles of blood coming out of his mouth.

Lying just beyond is yet another body, that of Gabe's wife, also dead, but we finally see that her head has been chopped off and lies beside her.

Our view continues down the driveway until we reach the hunk of rusty broken fence. We go into the woods and move along the overgrown path, through the thick wall of foliage Gabe cut back, past an empty brandy bottle, then a gin bottle, then a tequila bottle, the smoldering remains of a campfire, a backpack, a crowbar, all lying in the grass of a clearing -- no cabin -- and the grass and the trees sway in the breeze.

Deep in the grass is the burnt remains of an old daguerreotype photograph. We can finally see that it's a picture of Gabriel Smith lynched, hanging from a tree, with a crowd of proud miners all standing around posing for the picture.