

“Those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:  
And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these  
we bestow more abundant honor . . .” —I CORINTHIANS 12:22–23

## “ANYTHING WILL HELP”

### CITIZENS, STREET PEOPLE, AND THE FAITHFUL

By P. D. Mallamo

**H** E'S HUNCHED OVER A CIGARETTE, SWEARING A blue streak into thin air. His fingers are nicotine-yellow. Citizens avoid him. On his suitcase this sign: “Insured Roman Catholic Smoker. Receiver of Checks. Rights. I’m from U.S. Montana. U.S. Government agent. I’m Insured. Senior. Bad vision. Disabled. Roman Catholic.”

From my Salt Lake City office window, I see them struggle along with their bundles and bags, their shabby bedrolls and old thick coats which I can see are filthy even from this altitude. During a morning walk a week ago, I watched a man spread bread and cheese on the southeast steps of Gallivan Plaza, next to the Marriott Hotel. Had he been a Yale M.F.A. with a good publicist, I would likely have considered his installation quite a piece of social commentary, an edible Christo if you will. I happened upon another of his lunchable creations on another set of steps a block away and wondered who was caring for this man, making sure he did not hurt himself and was eating properly and taking his medications. Who had decided that today they’d turn him loose to spread bread and cheese all over Salt Lake City? Who would see to it that he returned safely from his labors and was protected from weather and the perils of darkness?

Who are they? And who are we who can give our last dollar and actually weep for them or do the fanciest little two-step you ever saw to avoid their pleading eyes and the lies that make liars of ourselves:

“Can you spare a dollar for an old veteran?”

“Sorry buddy, I don’t have a dime.”

For two weeks, I talked with the Street People of Salt Lake and tried to bypass the filter of deceit that often characterizes face-to-face communication between widely disparate classes—in this case, the largely mentally ill and the largely mentally healthy. I asked them to tell me the story of their

lives. Of course, there was no way for me to ascertain if their stories were truthful. It doesn’t really matter, I suppose, since their words reflected, if not their lives, then their ideas of one. A lie holds its own truth—which is the reason behind the lie. For us, as we face them on the sidewalk, our lies reflect our unwillingness to admit that we don’t want to give our money to someone who doesn’t deserve it, or our unwillingness to admit that we don’t want them on our streets and in our city, or that we wish they’d go someplace else and die. Lying about the loose change we carry in our pockets can be painful; it makes me curious about the awful truths they carry that cause them to tell much bigger ones, lies so enormous that they obscure the very essence of their lives: home, family, youth, God, dreams. “Judge not,” we are commanded, yet judge we do, daily, as a matter of sanity and, sometimes, survival. Opening oneself to Chaos is dangerous, which is a reason, I think, that so many of us look the other way. I felt that dark side, too, even from where I stood, feet planted firmly on the workaday sidewalks of Salt Lake City, with only a toe or two temporarily in their murky worlds.

#### A SMALL BEGINNING

*Saturday, 8 April 2006, 1:45 p.m., Main Street, in front of Sam Weller’s Zion Bookstore.* I am approached by a young man with a pale beard and the long, mournful face of an Orthodox saint. He is shabby and dirty and takes small, hesitant steps in my direction. Softly and apologetically he asks for a dollar, and I agree if he’ll talk with me for a few minutes. We sit at a sidewalk table, and he immediately says, “Some of us are just hungry, that’s all. We’re not scammers; we’re not trying to get over. We’re just hungry.” He thinks for a minute then says, “All I need is a pair of work boots, and I can go back to work.”

He tells me that he gets enough Social Security to pay rent, gas, and electric, but there’s nothing left after that. I ask how he got to Salt Lake City. “My parents live here.” Why don’t you live with them? “I smoke.” Are they Mormon? “They’re

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Jehovah's Witnesses." He adds, "They're good people."

I ask if he can meet me here again at 4:30 when I will have more time to talk. He tells me "Sure" and drifts away, moving uncertainly in his small steps among small crowds on the sidewalk. I imagine him almost invisible among the busy businessmen and leggy blondes of Main Street and would bet that his understated approach takes a lot of people by surprise. I will call him "Shane."

I return at 4 p.m., and by 4:15 I know he'll not show. I make up a conversation while I wait: What will you do with the money? (*"Spend it on food."*) Where? (*"Smith's."*) Any bad habits? (*What do you mean?*) Drugs, alcohol? (*No.*) No bad habits at all? (*A few maybe.*) Like what? (*I take medicine because my knees hurt.*) What kind of medicine? (*Pills.*) Where do you get them? (*Different places.*) It's about the kind of scenario you'd expect from someone (me) who also expects a Street Person to keep an appointment.

4:30 p.m., Main Street across the tracks from the Gallivan Center. I see a man I observed yesterday assisting a Gallivan security guard. They had been talking with a grizzled drifter who looked to be elderly but undoubtedly was not. He had a soiled piece of thick material slung over his shoulder, and once in a while this man reached out and touched the drifter's shoulder. Today he is helping another homeless man. He puts him on TRAX to somewhere and sits down on a landing bench. I approach him and tell him I'm writing a story about street people. He is well-groomed, cleanly dressed in new clothes, and tells me two things: He's just out of detox himself, and he helps when he can. He says there's a shelter in Midvale at 70th and Third, a warehouse, and I assume that's where he sends the homeless on the plaza. I ask about drugs in Salt Lake City, and for a few moments he doesn't say anything. When he turns his eyes upon me, they are black and deep, and I feel a kind of darkness I have never felt before, a momentary descent into another kind of life. He says there is *chiva* in Salt Lake City and the kids are into it. *Chiva?* Heroin—sometimes heroin with methamphetamine or cocaine. He shakes his head. "Bad stuff."

I move north, to Temple Square, and as I emerge onto North Temple I see a young, blonde woman standing silently, holding a cardboard sign as people who appear to have just completed a session in the temple flow around her. Her eyes are so impassive that I wonder if she sees anything. I ask her if we can find a place to sit and talk, but she says she's waiting for her husband and better not go anywhere. I motion to a planter a few feet away and offer to sit there. I tell her I'll give her a dollar if she talks with me, and she agrees. I sense that "husband" does not exist but do not challenge her on this. She tells me, rather proudly, that she's from Dayton, Ohio, and that she did not arrive in Salt Lake on purpose. She's been here for two weeks, which would seem, in a life driven by expediency and emergency, to be a relatively stable period. Where do you stay at night? "On the streets, in a motel." Hard life? "I just move along. I've been a janitor, a cook, some trades." How do you do this? (I motion to her cardboard sign.) "You swallow a lot of pride, lots of patience. Some people are real helpful." Drugs &

Alcohol? She gives me a sly glance and drops her eyes but denies everything. I think I see meth in her skin and eyes but do not challenge her. What will you tell me about your life? "I'm just a plain, simple person, you know, and sometimes I don't understand why there is so much greed and hatred. There's a lot of kind hearts out there, though." I ask if she is ever mistaken for a prostitute? She is briefly taken aback, but then says, "No, not really."

When she speaks, I see that her teeth are crooked and in desperate need of hygiene. She won't keep them for long like this. I ask her, How will your life come together? She says, "I'm going to Welfare Square to see if I can make some connections. I'm just a simple person." What name would you like me to use in my story? She thinks for a few seconds and says, "Heather. I've always liked that name." She says it so sadly that I wonder about the family she left in Ohio, about the protections and tyrannies it offered that she could no longer endure. I give her the dollar I promised.

Sunday, 9 April 2006, 11:19 a.m., Main Street. Too cool in the shadows, too warm in the sun. I am again across the street from Sam Weller's, watching people on the large TRAX landing. In my bag, along with my laptop, cell phone, tablets, books, and food is the book *Charles Darwin and the Great Bird Continent—The Importance of Everything and Other Lessons from Darwin's Lost Notebooks* by Lyanda Lynn Haupt. She purports to illustrate how Darwin eventually trained himself to notice the tiniest details, how he learned that nothing was unimportant, how he crawled in the mud for half a day to observe a small bird. He approached his ornithological work with little formal training and few preconceptions, though at the beginning attempted to overlay what training he had on the things he saw.

I have to urinate badly and wonder where my subjects urinate. Automatically I think of something I need or want to buy that will provide a plausible pretext for using a men's room. What if I had no money, if I'd just drifted into town with a bulky pack, an empty stomach, and a full bladder or worse—where would I go?

I choose a Starbucks at 200 South & State. I've walked all over Salt Lake this morning, so I figure a bagel with cream cheese won't hurt me—a concern I imagine to be unimaginable to someone who does not eat regularly. The men's room, which adjoins the Marriott hotel, is luxurious.

I will see if "Heather" has resumed her post at North Temple & Main. I called a friend last night, a journalism professor at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, and I told him about this woman, dividing the well-dressed Saints like Moses at the Red Sea but with a little cardboard sign and a face that will soon look like an old boot. He asks, "What did the sign say?" Not having read it, I cannot answer. How could I have missed something so obvious? I want to find her today and read it. I want to ask where she stayed last night and what she's eaten since I talked with her. I will ask about her "husband" and, once again, where she's from, the family from which she has apparently fled, the tale entire of shipwreck and ruin.


**W**HAT IF I HAD NO MONEY, IF I'D just drifted into town with a bulky pack, an empty stomach, and a full bladder or worse—where would I go?
 



"LAZARUS AT THE RICH MAN'S HOUSE" BY GUSTAVE DORÉ

Being by nature somewhat casual of dress and, occasionally, hygiene (I have not shaved again today), I experience the same tactical sidewalk moves my homeless fellows do as they move among the Everyday. Can the Middle Class not tell, I wonder, that there is purpose in my step and a laptop in my bag? The fact that I am insecure among them baffles and amuses me. Why should I care? Sometimes when I am especially sensitive I hold a cell phone conspicuously as if to say, "See, I'm one of you!" I hide it when I pass the homeless because cell phones are conspicuous in another way also: as a fairly reliable indicator of disposable income. Thus, my cell phone habits are thoroughly disreputable and pitiable, and I resolve to keep the phone in the bag except for the rare call and rarer snapshot.

12:04 p.m., 50 South Main. A busker has set up shop in front of Key Bank. He has brought a variety of wooden flutes, a generator, microphone, amp, speakers, taped accompaniment. He plays songs lovely and sad from an area I guess to be Andean South America. Thirty feet away, near the entrance to Crossroads Plaza, a man sets his white hat on the ground and dances around it, gracelessly, unselfconsciously. I watch from the other side of Main, hearing also the soft whir of the generator. I count my dollars to see if I can give him one and maybe ask about his music, but he leaves everything, even his small pail of money, and walks into Crossroads.

"Shane" suddenly shuffles by, and I call out to him. He doesn't recognize me. Do you want to continue our conversation from yesterday? Now he remembers but says he doesn't really have a minute right now, maybe some other time.

The flutist returns, and I head north.

12:22 p.m., North Temple & Main. "Heather" is not there, but I see a woman obviously panhandling at the more westerly Temple Square entrance and walk over to see if it's her. It is not, but she asks me for money, and I say, Sure, if you'll talk with me for a moment. She eyes me suspiciously and says no, she won't talk; she doesn't want anyone to feel sorry for her. I tell her I won't use her name, I won't record her, but I need to write a few things down, would that be OK? She considers this for a moment, and then I make the mistake of asking her again. She walks quickly east, finds a spot on the Temple Square wall and presses her face to it, excluding me. Her hair, I have noticed, is clean and combed, and she's obviously well-fed, though her face is sunburned.

I enter Temple Square to find a place to sit and record what I have seen. Female missionaries from Sacramento and the Philippines approach me. I ask them about Street People and if they receive special training to deal with them. No special training, they say. The American checks out my shoes; it's obvious she's deciding if I'm on the street myself. I ask the sister from the Philippines if she's from Manila? "No." She pronounces the name of another city. I don't know where that is, I say, apparently giving the impression that I am personally familiar with the country. "Have you been to the Philippines?" No, but I have friends there. This is a terrible lie that I can't really explain.

I walk south through the Square, and when I emerge onto

South Temple I am directly confronted by a man dressed head-to-toe in black who asks if I can help with a dollar. I ask if he can help with an interview, and he readily consents, even to recording. He tells me he's 58 and from Hell's Kitchen. He came to Utah with Green Construction and worked eight years. A crane hit him in the back, and he sustained damage to both back and hip; he's had surgery. He is disabled and does not work. Not a veteran. He lives beneath a railroad bridge five or six blocks from here and prefers that to a shelter where they "control you." He has not worked in three years and will not work because that will screw up the Social Security for which he is applying. They turn you down three times, he says, but he will get it eventually.

How do you deal with the looks and pity out here, I ask. "Don't pay no attention to them."

Is it embarrassing for you to stand here and ask for money?

"No. If I don't ask, I'm going to starve to death." He mentions the Bishop's Storehouse and Brigham Center: "They help so many, but they can't help everybody."

I ask him about drugs and alcohol, and he says no. I ask him about family, and he says he's the last.

Where do you see yourself in five or ten years?

"Hopefully somewhere retired, you know."

He says he sees a doctor twice a month for pain medication. He gets a little help from PCN, an insurance company that pays for meds and visits.

Living on the street?

"It's rough. No easy task. Mormons are helpful. There's good Mormons and bad. That's all I'm asking for—to survive. Some people don't care about themselves, but I do."

He was not obviously mentally ill. He spoke clearly, thoughtfully, and pointedly. I gave him a dollar.

I walk back inside Temple Square, through the iron gates which to Street People may as well lead to Kathmandu—a whole new world, amazingly, only a few feet away. A mature sister in pink sits in the visitor's booth while her husband in a dark business suit patrols nearby. I ask her about the beings across the fence with their hands out, and she tells me about professionals for whom begging is a choice or a lifestyle. I wonder at the divide that separates the godly from the discarded. What good things could they bring into each other's lives? To the Saints, perhaps a bit of humility and perspective, not to mention a dose of reality on the notions of choice and free will; to the homeless, examples of industry and material success and some idea of the attitudes required to negotiate the world—a kind of "Bring a Bum to Work" program, haves and have-nots, side-by-side in Zion.

I retrace my steps and walk north through the square. I emerge back onto North Temple at 1:25 p.m., and at the intersection with Main I see a large man and tiny decrepit woman sitting close together on the low wall of a flower bed. He has his arm around her and in front of them has placed a small metal bowl for donations; in front of that are three orange pharmacy bottles with white lids. His cardboard sign: *Homeless & Disabled, Need Medicine, God Bless.*

Regarding them a few feet away, a brown couple watches

and confers in whispers. The woman approaches them and drops a few coins into the bowl. I ask them why they have given money, and the man looks at me like I can't see daylight. He motions to them with his hand. "They need medicine!" I ask where he and his wife are from, and he says Peru. Are there street people in Peru? Yes, he says, many, especially in Lima.

I walk over to the man and woman with the sign, bottles, and bowl and ask if they will talk with me. The man refuses outright, his emphatic response precluding any possibility of negotiation. I deposit a few coins in the bowl and walk away. Not quite sure what I'm seeing, I circle around and walk by them again and hear the small woman declare in a loud voice, "I swearrrrrrr to the Lord Jeeesussss."

Again I retrace my steps, south through Temple Square (I'm surprised security does not question my rapid back and forth) and stop at South Temple & Main. A young man I've seen several times begging on the first block of Main crosses the street in front of me and turns west on South Temple. I consider chasing him for an interview but decide, for no good reason, against it. I watch him walk west on South Temple and stop a woman coming the other way. She reaches into her purse and gives him something, then continues in my direction. He disappears, walking steadily west along the tall gray wall of Temple Square.

As she approaches, I see she is weeping. She daubs her eyes with a balled-up tissue, and I ask what she gave him. (I nod my head in the young man's direction.) "I gave him twenty dollars," she says. "I'm already broke, so it doesn't matter. I have a husband and three beautiful daughters, and that's the greatest blessing there is."

She supposed it was better to give her money to the shelters, but she recalls her father, who seemed to have no compunction about giving it away on the street. When his children asked him about this, he told them that it was his responsibility to give, but it was up to the homeless how to spend it.

She wonders aloud if I am homeless, too—how could she know if I were not? She has come from the North Visitor's Center, where she's seen *The Testaments of One Fold and One Shepherd*. She admits that her feelings were already on the surface when she was approached by the young man. She says that she has a strong belief in Christ and hopes the money will mean something to him—she's only followed her heart.

We cross South Temple and walk south together, all the way to the Andean busker, who is back at his post and playing full volume. I'm going to give this guy a buck, I say. I've been listening to him all morning. She says, I don't have any more money. It's all right, I reply. I'll give him this for both of us.

She asks me to see *Testaments* in exchange for the interview she has granted, and I agree.

She crosses over to ZCMI Center and disappears. I do not feel well, something upper respiratory, but the day is so beautiful I can't stay inside. I have to spit something unpleasant coming up from my airway but resist zipping it into a flower bed because I saw people cultivating these a few days ago, hands in soil that I assume they assume is reasonably clean. I wait until I come upon a tree well and discreetly shoot it through the iron footgrates.

Choppers have been in the air for an hour or two now, and I wonder what's going on. At Main & Something, I look east and see an enormous crowd of brown people in white shirts waving American flags on State Street. The parade is moving north, and I can see neither its beginning nor its end. I meet them on State and march with them until North Temple, then run west and go north on Main. Just past the North Temple intersection, I come upon an image stenciled onto the sidewalk: the head of Lady Liberty with words beneath, *Worship Me Instead*.

I wait for the demonstrators on 300 North, after they have rounded the capitol and are heading back to State. A contingent of anti-illegal immigration demonstrators waits for them; a fairly heavy police presence separates the two sides. I note how vociferously, even joyously, these strong Hispanics from southern countries advocate for themselves, how they march, shout, cheer, act, work—and I realize that they are Americans indeed, far more similar to the anti-immigration protesters who want them back in Mexico, Peru, El Salvador, than to those other Americans who live on the streets and forage through trash cans and can barely negotiate TRAX without getting run over. Above and below chants and laughter, I hear them yell Spanish into cell phones, describing to someone, maybe family back home, the wonderful spectacle in Salt Lake City, of all places. They have jobs, homes, savings accounts, cell phones, cars, children in school. Their tenure on the street has been temporary. The real aliens are born right here.

I am exhausted and feeling even worse. I decide to head home and begin walking south on Main. An emaciated young man walks toward me, veers hard left and strides to the sidewalk ashtray in front of a law firm office, which he scours quickly for butts.

*Trust is essential when empathy is impossible.* This line comes to me as I contemplate the reasons for homelessness. The default position among the Citizens of Salt Lake, especially the Faithful, is that this condition generally, though not exclusively, occurs as the result of poor choices. This is certainly correct, but it is only the end of the story, not its beginning. Everybody makes poor choices, but most of these do not put us on the street. We're talking about *really* poor choices here, the kind that, say, mentally ill people can make. But not all street people are mentally ill. Which leads me to the following musings:

SPECULATIONS ON THE CAUSES  
OF HOMELESSNESS

or

*A few conditions that result in the individual  
making very poor decisions:*

1. Inherited schizophrenia
2. Inherited personality disorders (antisocial or borderline personality disorders, for instance) that make conformity, respect for authority, and a reasonable work ethic impossible, while at the same time rendering the person immune to the embarrassment and onus of begging

3. Interuterine exposure to drugs and alcohol
4. Parental abuse or neglect so severe that it destroys a significant portion of the ego and makes sustained effort (school, work), not to mention consistently good decisions, impossible
5. Birth into a homeless family and adoption of family norms
6. Generational poverty
7. Drug and alcohol addiction
8. Low intelligence
9. Bad luck
10. No safety net
11. # 3 & 8
12. # 4 & 7
13. #2 & 10
14. All the above
15. Without purse or scrip

SPECULATIONS ON OTHER  
CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

or

*What to consider as you stroll down Main discussing  
Product with your officemates when a foul-smelling,  
mumbling man with spittle dried in his beard blocks  
your path and demands a dollar:*

1. If shutting down, instead of reforming, state asylums was a good decision
2. If believing that any kind of so-called “community-based” mental health system will serve the needs of chronically mentally ill people is a rational or even sane belief
3. If believing that any kind of drug for mental illness will be taken by the mentally ill consistently without close supervision is a rational or even sane belief
4. If believing that any kind of drug is a substitute for human touch is a rational or even sane belief
5. Why the new Salt Lake City Library on 4th South is a de facto homeless shelter first, library second

RANDOM SIGHTINGS

HERE IS SOMETHING so persistently American about a genius drinking or drugging himself to death that I sometimes wonder who I'm actually meeting on the streets of Salt Lake City—Jack Kerouac, John Coltrane, Jackson Pollock, Lost Zoroastrians, an Unknown Bringer of the Eschaton, or even one of the Three Nephites who has somehow gone astray. I try to keep an open mind.

*Wednesday, 12 April 2006, 12:07 p.m., 700 East & 400 South near Starbucks.* A small black man adjusts to my quick two-step and gets in my face: “Excuse me. Will you help me and my wife get something to eat for lunch?” It's an obvious lie, but I give him some change anyway, which he accepts without thanks.

Thursday, 13 April 2006, 1:45 p.m., Broadway & Main. A large white woman approaches me: "Can you give me a dollar for some lunch?" I don't have any money, sweetie. (A lie).

Friday, 14 April 2006, afternoon, South Temple in front of Borders Books. A man sits slumped on a planter with a sign that mentions coffee. He looks terrible, like he's fallen out of a car or lost a fight. I bring him a cup of coffee from Borders and he thanks me. I look at him later and try to ascertain if he's tasted the coffee. It does not look like he's touched it.

Easter Sunday, 16 April, noon. The man and woman with the begging bowl and bottles of pills are back at North Temple & Main. Today there are only two bottles of pills instead of three.

1 p.m., State Street & 200 South. A man disengages himself from a small group and asks me if I'll buy him a hamburger. There is a Starbucks on the corner, and I ask him if he'd like a cup of coffee. "No man, I'm hungry. A hamburger doesn't cost that much." Since there are no hamburgers around, I ask him if he'd like a bagel or something. "Sure, man—anything." I buy him a blueberry scone at Starbucks, which he accepts reluctantly but gratefully.

Monday, 17 April 2006, 10:16 a.m. A big man with a large, round, red face and oxygen tubes snaking to his nostrils from somewhere on his person asks, "Can you spare a few coins?" Sorry, buddy, I don't have any money. (A lie.) I continue walking and hear him say, "Have a nice day."

7:45 p.m., South Temple & 500 East. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalms 51:7). Spring snow and cold air have freshened the city, and I can't stay inside. I walk west on South Temple from my home on 700 East to Temple Square. I walk into the North Visitors Center to get Saturday screening times for *The Testaments*. Returning east on South Temple, I see a tall, thin Native American man staggering towards me near 500 East. His is the most amazingly succinct request I have ever received: "HURTS! USED TO PLAY FOOTBALL. YOU GOT SOME PAIN PILLS?" If I'd had more presence of mind, I would have congratulated him for so entirely cutting out the middle man (money, in this case) but instead patted him on the shoulder and told him I had to go.

Tuesday, 18 April 2006, 10:30 a.m. A man with no legs sits in a wheelchair at the intersection of Main & North Temple. I'm in my car checking out this popular venue and make a note to return later on foot. I can't see what his sign says.

1:26 p.m., 210 South & 700 East. A one-legged man on crutches with a small dog walks north. His sign hangs from his back by a string: *Disabled Vet & Family Need Help*.

3:40 p.m., 50 South Main. A young man with the craggy facial features one might see in pictures of Civil War soldiers, and

which I associate with an independent and forceful personality, stands with a sign in front of ZCMI Center. It is neatly lettered, and parts are underlined in orange: *Family Needs Help! Please; We may lose our home if too few read our plea for assistance*. Standing by him is a woman and an infant in a stroller. Another woman, who appears pregnant, is crouching by a planter. All are well-groomed and neatly dressed. They unabashedly face shoppers emerging from the doors.

4:00 p.m., Main & North Temple. The man and woman with bowl and pill bottles are calling it a day and pulling up stakes. They pack their things into a suitcase with wheels and proceed rapidly south through Temple Square. I wonder if the woman is mother, wife, sister, friend.

Later, on NPR, I hear that Utah's unemployment rate is just about as low as it's ever been. If you can walk, you can get a job.

Thursday, 20 April 2006, 10:54 a.m., the 100 block of Main. A young man in a leg brace, with blond hair bursting from beneath a blue baseball hat, shouts at me, "Spare a penny, sir?" I make a quick transaction at Key Bank and walk over to him. He tells me he's from St. Charles, Illinois. He reeks of strong drink. He says: "I want to make a permanent residence here because I'm a Christian. Not so much that I'm scared of the End Times, but Salt Lake's where I want to be." What kind of problems do you have? "Right now my main problem is poverty." Have you looked for work? "Yes."

"You can make good bucks doing this." He taps his sign. "People get their lives together like this; that's why the Lord allows it in Salt Lake City."

Do you have family? "Yes, but almost all gone. A dad, I guess, in St. Charles. He's got diabetes—so he believes." Then what's his real problem? "He's got an insecure problem."

His sign reads, *Spare Change God Bless Jesus Loves You*.

Drugs or alcohol? "No, no. I'm coming up on 40 myself, I use but I don't abuse." When is the last time you had a drink? "Four months ago." Where do you live? "Road Home, 235 South Rio Grande."

His T-shirt: *OTAKO Get your Freak On*

Did you eat breakfast? "No. I'm fasting. I will be fasting Saturday. I'll have a burrito today. I've gone nine days without food fourteen times. I won't fast during Easter because I'm afraid I'm going to get crucified by the Hell's Angels. People laugh at it, but it's a government thing. We had a guy where I'm from, fasted 28 days. I got family in the Mafia. The government and president kicked him down a million bucks."

I give him a dollar.

11:14 a.m. I walk up to Main & North Temple to see who's hanging out. The legless man in the wheelchair I'd seen two days earlier from my car. He's got an umbrella, a money can, and a sign that looks like it came from a printer: *I'm grateful for any contribution that you can help me with. I am able to get treatment for my liver and diabetes. In addition to that it pays for rent and food.*



# S HE WONDERS ALOUD IF I AM homeless too—How could she know if I were not?



JESUS HEALING THE MAN POSSESSED WITH THE DEVIL BY GUSTAVE DORÉ

A tall, lovely bride in flowing white stands nearby with people I take to be her parents. Looks like they will take or have already taken photographs on Temple Square. I give the legless man a dollar. I probably should have given her one, too.

*11:17 a.m.* I walk to the northwest gate of Temple Square. It is being worked by the same woman who refused to talk with me a few days before. She skulks back and forth in pink coat, blue sweat pants, backpack, but does not ask anything of me.

The day is beautifully sunny—a day for optimism and energy. It is hard for me to imagine the begging life on a day like this. I walk through Temple Square to the southwest gate, where I meet the man in black who lives under the railroad bridge. He recognizes me, and I ask him to tell me about the

last few days. “I just got out of the hospital,” he says, then takes a paper out of his coat pocket and waves it at me triumphantly. “It took me nine months to a year to get this—I just got approved for a colonoscopy!”

Why were you in the hospital? “I had a burr on my backbone hitting a nerve, making my leg spaz out. I was in there for three days. U of U.” (He has a pink hospital bracelet around his left wrist.) Are you still under the tracks? He nods and says, “All the motels in this area want \$45 a night.” What about a shelter? “They won’t put me in a shelter because of my condition. They don’t want the responsibility.” What is your condition? “It ain’t very good. Just got done with throat cancer; now I got colon cancer. Now I got this burr on my nerve. Sometimes I can walk; sometimes I can’t.”

His speech is a little slurred, something I did not notice during our first conversation. I give him a dollar.

I think: In two hours, any of us could be swan-diving off the 90th floor. In that light, nothing at all seems like a big deal.

## ON PATROL

*11:45 a.m., the 100 block of Main. Please Help Anything Will Do Jesus Loves You.* This sign is held by a gray-haired woman with what appears to be all her earthly belongings piled in a baby carriage, which seems a telling feminine touch. I think you’d be hard pressed to find a homeless man with a baby carriage. I want to speak with her but someone’s beat me to it.

*Noon.* “Excuse me sir, but would you be willing to help me with a dollar or two, please?” She is the large, baby-faced woman who hit me up a few days before near Main & Broadway. Nothing new is revealed in this encounter, and I don’t have the presence of mind to ask if she’ll speak with me. This is another person whose understated approach takes many by surprise. One is usually able to prepare for the Full Monte medical appliance/cardboard sign/refugee performance from half a block away, but she is upon you before you know what’s happening. I glance back as she proceeds south down Main and see a Citizen hand her something.

*12:04 p.m., South Temple near Borders.* The man I’d purchased coffee for earlier is sitting on the same planter. Same cardboard sign. His wounds are somewhat healed. I do not offer him more coffee.

12:10 p.m., *Temple Square, northwest gate*. The Woman Who Won't Talk With Me is back at her post. She, too, utilizes stealth and surprise as she stalks her quarry, posing as one who waits for an acquaintance at the gate. Her appeal features troubled eyes and vocal urgency. She does not recognize me, and I tell her that if she'll talk to me, I'll give her a buck. She refuses, and I tell her to let me know if she changes her mind. I wonder how much it will take to get her to talk.

12:12 p.m., *Temple Square, northeast gate*. Man in the wheelchair with no legs.

12:15 p.m., *Temple Square, southeast gate*. Man with the medicine bottles, except no bottles this time—and the sign is new. It mentions, *Need Medicine*, but also includes *Bus Short \$22*. He does not have the tiny woman with him but wears a heavy coat and has brought all his luggage.

12:19 p.m., *Main Street, in front of Meier & Frank*. Sign: *Student Trying to Better Self*. Female, anywhere from 30 to 50, impossible for me to tell. She agrees to talk. I ask her where she's going to school. "Eagle Gate College, three terms." What are you studying? "Medical Assistant." Where do you sleep? She motions around her, "I just find someplace warm."

She says her family disowned her because she won't talk to her mother. She won't talk to her mother because mother bad-mouthed her (presumably) ex-husband. What kind of reaction do you get out here? "Nothing, like they got blinders on, or they walk across the street to get out of my way." Claims she's LDS but does not receive help from the Church. Denies drug or alcohol use. Are you mistaken for a prostitute? "I hope not—nobody's asked, anyway." Life out here? "It's hard. I wish everybody could live a week on the street. They'd see how it is—I have looked up homeless on the Internet and seen how bad it is." Any medical problems? "I have a bad heart."

She claims she's made only \$8 in the last three weeks. I give her a dollar.

12:32 p.m., *200 South & Main*. I am escorting two music teacher conventioners from Memphis who have asked me to guide them to a Starbucks. We are approached for money by a small, manic woman with a large, yellow plastic flower tied into her hair. I tell her that I'll try to get back in a few minutes with a dollar, but after dropping the Ladies From Memphis off at the Starbucks, I proceed to my place of employment, making my promise a lie.

3:14 p.m., *at that same Starbucks*. The place is full of suits. Conversations overheard: "Psychiatrists. . . ." "He's got three of those market areas where he's got speakers coming in. . . ."

There is a man knitting by the window. He wears a heavy coat with the hood pulled over his head, a bag between his feet.

The suits closest to me: "Asset management and capital planning. . . ." "Forecast the slow period. . . ." I observe the variety of tasteful neckties.

I walk over to the knitting man and find a chair opposite

him. He is a she, a large black woman from Long Beach, California. She is lucid, friendly, serene, and when I ask if I can talk to her for a moment, she readily agrees. I tell her I'm a writer, and she guesses I'm doing a piece on the street. "Everything's a victory," she says. "What others take for granted, I struggle for: getting the laundry done, books back to the library on time." She says she had a terrible breakdown six years ago, a psychotic episode. She is knitting a blanket and drinking coffee because this provides a focus that is calming. Her work is spread over two plush Starbucks chairs. She has family here and there but will not impose, and asks me what I think of Salt Lake City since she's not able to get a fix on the place. I ask if she'd be offended if I give her a buck or two. She shakes her head: "I don't need money."

When I walk back across the floor to my bag, I see that I've left my two cell phones out on the table. I could tell the woman that the good Citizens of Salt Lake City are honest. At any rate, they don't steal cell phones. But I don't.

The suits are gone—no one wasting time in a coffee shop with a stupid laptop. I, too, go back to work.

#### PATROL #2

Nothing going on at the office, so I leave early and run my route again.

4:49 p.m., *Temple Square, northeast gate*. Our man with the pill bottles is back on station with all his luggage but no little woman. A man in a suit passes him and stares aggressively. Passersby look long and hard or give barely a glance. Behind him, jubilant tulips erupt into April.

I wonder at the dilemma he must pose for the Saints, anxious to extend their Christian love yet acutely aware, if they pass this way regularly, that this is the life he has chosen—or had chosen for him by forces they, and likely he, are now entirely unable to influence—a lifetime of trauma, self-inflicted and otherwise, coming every day with his signs, luggage, bowl, pill bottles, and sometimes his woman, to beg on Temple Square. He is pleading for medicine, a bus ticket, or food, and he sits there day after day, unsightly, in jarring juxtaposition with the comely modern female swathed in snug-knit dress and the handsome modern male in well-tailored suit. He is anachronistic even in an anachronistic city, for all the world like a beggar in Jerusalem two thousand years ago, and, I imagine, scarcely more welcome here.

Yes, the sheer unsightliness of it, which is rather the point, isn't it?—to shock us into doing something that goes against all our instincts, giving money for nothing?

4:55 p.m., *Temple Square, northwest gate*. Heather! At last! Do you remember me, I ask? She looks at me for a moment and says, "The Writer." She has a new sign—perkier, she says. It concludes with the plea, *Anythang Will Help*. I ask where she's been staying. "Motels." Before she saw me, I had watched her sad face, her bad teeth, holding the little sign before her. She begs with dignity, stoic and quietly determined, like the men

in black suits with faces like masks who walk across Temple Square like little machines, making the world go round. I tell her I'll get her a dollar or two if I can remember. I have a meeting with an old friend in Borders Books on South Temple. But I forget the money. When I remember, I ask myself, Shall I hike back down to the bank and withdraw what I'm not sure I want to give, not having an idea in the world what she'll do with it? No, not tonight. It is so easy.

5:30 p.m., the 300 block of South Main. A woman stands on the TRAX platform hawking an ugly red necktie in a narrow little box. She continues her pitch even when there's nobody around, turning this way and that as if to multitudes. A hobbling old man and his wife, who has false eyelashes and purple mascara and is charming, pass by; the wife gives her a few coins, and we cross the street together. They live, they say, in a condominium almost above us, and have watched this woman for twenty years. The man says it's up to us to give, not to judge how they spend it—something I heard almost verbatim a few days earlier. I tell him about the woman in Starbucks who would take no money, and he said she's probably DEA. Go on with your work, he says as they walk away.

#### RANDOM NOTES AND SIGHTINGS

**I**N HIS BOOK *Class—A Guide Through the American Status System*, Paul Fussell observes the similarities between the top of the Upper Class and the bottom of the Lower, a kind of proof, he believes, of the Principle That Extremes Meet—very nearly a brotherhood of pauper and king. For instance, neither is happy to have their name in the paper; neither earns their money through actual work; both carry very little cash on their persons; both are largely invisible. In Salt Lake, this odd couple is joined by the presence of Religious Elites, whose behavior in many ways mimics that of the Upper Class—and so the dynamic persists as durably in Salt Lake as in Manhattan or Chicago.

The truth of the street is revealed by its comings and goings, not by anything we say or they say. If anything, words are camouflage. I have more difficulty approaching well-dressed Citizens for interviews than I do Street People, and in conversation with Citizens, I find myself constantly editorializing, commenting on what creates and sustains life on the street. I spoke with a cop near the bike station on Main near South Temple and asked him about begging. He told me the police intervene only for aggression or potential for self-harm; the rest is protected by the First Amendment.

*Saturday, 22 April 2006.* A gorgeous spring day, gentle breeze, yellow sun. I walk from my parking spot on Broadway to Main and turn north. Main Street is almost empty, which I find a bit surprising. I cut through Gallivan Plaza, walk by Mark Strand's poetry cut in rock on a path by windows: *Visions of the end may secretly seduce our thoughts like water sinking into water, air drifting into air . . .* I find a bench near 200 South where white blossoms are falling from trees, drifting like snow on the dark

stone. A security guard saunters over and gets around to telling me that he's allergic to the blossoms; also, that he's going to buy a fishing license now and tell his wife about it later. She gets upset when he spends \$26 on nothing. I tell him to remind her of that the next time she gets her hair cut.

My tablet is eyed suspiciously by Citizen and Street Person alike; they wonder, I suppose, if I'm another mad Whitman or a troublemaker of the journalistic stripe.

12:57 p.m., in front of the ZCMI Center doors. A man I've not seen before is sitting on his bundles with a sign lettered in red and blue: *Homeless Vet Disabled Please Help God Bless You*, plus three of four characters in imitation Chinese. His expression I've seen only on newborns fresh from the ordeal of the birth canal. The Andean busker plays a hundred feet away, his deep melodies resonating around us and far along the sunlit urban canyon.

I cross the street to the Key Bank ATM. A woman I spoke with yesterday, the one who identified herself as a medical assistant student at Eagle Gate College, is camped on the sidewalk outside with her sign. I expect she'll hit me up when I return with cash in hand, but she has turned her back and lets me pass unmolested.

1:05 p.m. I look across the street and see the man who wouldn't fast on Easter because he was afraid he'd be crucified by the Hell's Angels. He's still wearing the same T-shirt and still, undoubtedly, getting his Freak on. He walks stiffly in his leg brace and stops in front of the busker. He reaches into his pocket and brings out a handful of change, which he sorts carefully, then tosses into the busker's can. It is a sweet gesture, made all the more poignant by the sad music and the ethereal spring day. I gave this man a dollar yesterday. He crosses Main to my side of the road and proceeds south. I watch him until he disappears from my view.

1:15 p.m., near Main & South Temple. A man sits on a planter, drawing. Passersby have dropped coins into the tin box that holds his colored pencils. I ask him if he'd like to go around the corner to Borders Books for a cup of coffee, and he assents.

We sit on the second floor of the bookshop by the north windows looking over Temple Square, and he shows me his art: small precise drawings of faces, flowers, a crucifix, eyes, demons, a rose wrapped in barbed wire—pencil and pen, in subtle colors or black and white. He tells me he's seven months from an associate degree in graphic arts at Eagle Gate College; that he's been clean and sober for a year; that he avoids shelters and The Regis (a flophouse where many Street People live) because of the availability and temptation of drugs (he'll always want drugs, he says, even thirty years from now); that he lives in a tent camp by the Jordan River; that he served seven years of a ten-year sentence for burglary in Arkansas ("Ninety-seven houses in three months to feed a crack habit," he says with a hint of pride); that he has a dead father who didn't want him and a son he wants to support. He has a mother, brother, and sister out of state he calls every week but tells none of them that he lives by a river.



**I** ASK THEM WHY THEY HAVE GIVEN money, and the man looks at me like I can't see daylight.



He has Hepatitis C and high cholesterol (he would not put cream in his coffee) and survived prison by making tattoos for other inmates. He did this with the surreptitious support of a guard captain whose back he tattooed with the image of a dream catcher. He describes his prison machine: a needle made from the sharpened spring of a Bic lighter; barrel from a Bic pen; tip from the lighter's fuel jet; electric motor from a cassette recorder; and six AA batteries. The guard brought him ink.

He wears a red, white, and blue bandanna with stars. He's LDS and still a believer. He says he's a priesthood holder and tells me about a bishop and bishop's wife in Arkansas who visited him every week for seven years in prison. He attends a ward in Salt Lake. He says there are so many services for the homeless here that it's almost a trap: medical, dental, and vision care (he got back surgery through the 4th Street Clinic); food stamps and soup kitchens; clothing, shelters, education (he tells me he's taken out a Stafford Loan and Pell Grant for his college program). Life, actually, is not bad. No incentive to get off the streets? He thinks maybe not, though he says he's embarrassed by his own situation.

Do you have a girlfriend? He laughs at me: "It's hard enough taking care of myself."

We walk out of Borders, past the book stands by the front door. Do you read, I ask? "I got my authors," he replies. "James Patterson, Dean Koontz, John Grisham, Tom Clancy." I recommend Scott Turow, and we part company.

2:05 *p.m.* I walk back through Temple Square to the North Visitor's Center and pick up another schedule for *The Testaments*. Maybe I'll see it tomorrow.

2:06 *p.m.* The Woman Who Will Not Talk With Me is back at her post, northwest gate. My ex-con friend told me to watch for her husband, who, he says, observes her labors from the other side of the street, in front of the Conference Center. I don't see anybody.

People emerging from Temple Square bump into one another in embarrassment as they negotiate their way past her to the crosswalk for the Conference Center. I see her hit up a family unit, speaking with the dad, a muscular man in a blue shirt. He demurs, and they cross the street. I also cross and climb the stairs by the waterfall, from which I watch her.

2:12 *p.m.* I begin counting the groups and individuals she ap-

proaches. Number 13, an older man in a white shirt and tie, engages her in conversation for about thirty seconds but gives her nothing. A few minutes later, Number 18 gives her some money, then nobody until Number 27, who is the man in the blue shirt with the family, now re-crossing back into Temple Square. I can only imagine his thought process in the intervening minutes but bet I come pretty close.

At 12:27 *p.m.*, I make a count: In fifteen minutes, she's approached thirty-two individuals or groups. Two have given her money, for a success rate of almost 6 percent. I'm thinking this woman should be training the sisters from Korea, Sweden, Japan, Germany, Ghana, Mexico, and the USA who labor on the Temple grounds and whose approaches are not nearly so effective. Her simple, intense belief in the goodness and generosity (not to mention gullibility) of mankind has brought her a rate of success that is as enviable as it is deplorable but certainly a model that could be successfully superimposed on more worthy endeavors.

#### ANOTHER BRIEF ASIDE

**M**Y PARENTS TAUGHT that you can't judge a book by its cover—but there are a lot of polished, artful covers out here today. To serve God or Mammon, one's shoes must shine and match one's trousers. Compared with them, I look pretty bad. I wear old shorts, a Jayhawk T-Shirt, a blue baseball cap (ragged around the edges), and black Nike runners with ankle socks. I tell the Citizens I'm from Lawrence, where the University of Kansas is located, and that I'm here working and doing a story on the homeless. Clearly, many do not believe me and stiffen as they wait for me to hit them up, too. Missionaries abruptly terminate conversations. Some stare, but I stare right back, angry that I'm still embarrassed by their condescension and ignorance.

I could mention to the Citizens that William Burroughs lived the last years of his life in Lawrence and wrote most of *The Western Lands* there, but I'm thinking this won't impress anybody in Salt Lake City.

2:33 *p.m.* A man I've not seen before is sitting against the corner of the wall around Temple Square, at the northeast gate. His sign is written on the blank side of a USPS 9x12 envelope: *Hungry Need Help With Bus Ticket To Sacramento CA So I Can Go Home To My Family God Will Bless You.*

I ask him if he'll talk with me, but he says he doesn't want to leave the shade. I say, If you sit right there with me—I point to a section of the sidewalk planter beneath a tree—I'll give you a buck. "How about \$20?" he asks. I motion to him again: Just five minutes. He asks: "\$5?" I walk away and ask, Sure you don't want to talk? He reiterates: "Not for a dollar. For \$20 I will."

2:42 *p.m.* There are brides and bridal parties all over Temple Square's warm, manicured grounds, a million blooms and the perfumes of earth—such a spectacle of culture and beauty, I think, that one might witness it only rarely on earth. This is my culture, too, and I must confess that I love it.

3:15 *p.m.* I surrender all of my loose change to a violin busker bravely scratching near the east crosswalk into Gallivan Plaza. Mine is the only money in the blue felt lining of his violin case.

3:17 *p.m.*, *Broadway & Main.* An older woman I've not seen before speaks so softly that I ask her to repeat: "Have change you can spare?" I do not and tell her so. She walks unsteadily away, then back and forth over the same little territory.

At the same time, I watch police and paramedics work with a wizened little man who is obviously so intoxicated he's a danger to himself. Two police cars and an ambulance. A gurney has been placed on the TRAX landing. Another police car arrives, then a fire truck. Quite a response for a tiny, very drunk, gray-colored white man who looks for all the world like walking death. A woman from the fire truck joins the fray, then (if my math is correct) two more paramedics (hard to keep count). City cops, transit cops, paramedics, firemen and firewomen. Two burly cops lead him away shouting and gently push him to the hood of a cruiser where they pat him down and handcuff him. I notice his footwear: white and brown saddle shoes. Maybe something you'd wear to a wedding.

*Sunday, 23 April 2006, 10:14 a.m.* I breathe the otherworldliness of Salt Lake City this morning and a beat so slow you could mistake it for Savannah or Charleston if not for the cool dry air and a sky so deeply blue it is oceanic. A pair of small birds with iridescent black feathers and yellow bills traverse the grass in front of me on Gallivan Plaza, probing the roots for morsels. White blossoms from yesterday have gathered beneath my bench, mixed with leaves and the small detritus of civilization. Birdsong from all over, soft hiss of traffic in no hurry at all. My friend the security guard is across the way speaking with an immense woman in stretch pants and stretch shirt. I am not able to identify her as homeless. A couple passes west on 200 South and seem to be trying to I.D. me as well. I intended to make the 10:30 showing of *Testaments* on Temple Square but got sidetracked at the Starbucks on State Street, then by a phone call from my wife in Lawrence. There is another showing at noon.

I got a haircut yesterday. This morning, after my shower, I tossed in a little mousse. I won't wear my raggedy hat until I'm done with the film, but I have not shaved—a last pathetic bit

of defiance toward a social order that has certainly done me no harm.

11:00 *a.m.* The man I'd seen yesterday with faux Chinese characters drawn into his sign reclines against a planter near Key Bank. I ask if I can talk with him, and he refuses: "Maybe some other time," he says, "I'm a writer, too, I'm just in one of those moods today, OK?" I give him my Starbucks change and move north to the Andean busker, who is just setting up. I notice for the first time that this purveyor of beauty has no fingers.

The man I've just attempted to talk with passes me on the sidewalk. He places his pack on a planter, and I notice, hanging from the back, a large blue crucifix.

THE PIMP

11:12 *a.m.* "Heather," with her new sign, is at the northeast gate. I ask her if she'll talk for a few minutes. She refuses, saying something about her husband (whom I believe to be nonexistent). I finally get a chance to copy her entire sign down.

HOMELESS  
PLEASE  
HELP

HUNGRY

GOD BLESS

ANYTHANG  
WILL HELP

There are also three smiley faces: one on either side of the word HELP with arrows pointing to the word, and one after the word HUNGRY. GOD BLESS has sunbeams around it. The sign is blue and black.

As I have noticed before, she makes no vocal appeal but lets her sign do the talking. I see for the first time that her upper front teeth are missing. I reflect that her life is hard enough without some nosey guy hanging around with a tablet pestering her for interviews. I stand off a respectful distance, then sit among the blazing flowerbeds of Main & North Temple, palming two bucks to hand her when I get up. A man appears and immediately engages her in conversation so intimate that I reach two conclusions: He's a former street guy who is able to communicate instinctively with her, exhorting her on the dangers of the street and pointing the way out (an idealistic notion, I admit); or he is the husband I do not believe exists—in essence, a pimp.

He leaves her and walks south through Temple Square. I approach her, hand over the \$2, and ask, Was that your husband? Yes, she says, he's going to get an ice cream cone. She does not say if the ice cream cone is for her.

I follow him through Temple Square, then west on South Temple to Crossroads Plaza. He's on the south side of the street, I'm on the north. He's large and light on his feet and swivels quickly left, through the first available door and downstairs out of sight. While I'm waiting for the light to change, the Hell's Angels/crucifixion guy with the OTAKO—*Get Your*

*Freak On* T-shirt draws up beside me. He's still limping, has his pack. So far as I can tell, this is the third day he's worn the same shirt. He looks good, skin color actually pink today, and he does not smell of alcohol. I greet him and compliment him on his lucid condition. He mentions, none too coherently, that his leg is certainly fractured and he should stay off of it, and other things that by this point in the project I am too exhausted to remember, then announces that he's off to The Bar. He invites me along. I regretfully decline. He does not ask for money.

I enter Crossroads and find the escalator. The bottom floor is dim and almost deserted; I can't imagine that ice cream is for sale there. I look behind myself twice, and after walking the better part of a hundred yards, see "Mr. Heather" at a tiny stand called The Kind. I find a bench about fifty feet away; when he walks by, I greet him, and he asks, "Are you doing an article on the homeless?" Yes. I motion to the bench, and he sits down, nervous.

He is clean-shaven, clear-skinned, large, powerful, intelligent—someone who is obviously able to take care of himself. If he'd been aggressive, I'd have had my hands full. "I'll tell you the truth," he says, "we make more money running that sign than we'd make working for seven dollars an hour." He decried the disparity between the incomes of the educated and uneducated; he said that even though the local shelters take in hundreds of thousands of dollars each year, they still feed the homeless rice and beans—it's a political thing, he thinks. They live in a camp; he won't live in a shelter. I tell him I'd half expected him to take a swing at me. He laughs and says he's not the violent type. *Those* guys live at the shelters.

I ask him where he sees himself in five years. He licks his cone and shakes his head. It's hard on her, I say, standing out there in the sun. He nods. I stupidly ask if he loves her, and he nods his head again. The ice cream is obviously not for her.

He shakes my hand and disappears on the up-escalator, his step again light and sure.

#### THE END

**I** WRITE MY notes and check the clock: 11:51 a.m. Just enough time to hurry to the noon showing of *Testaments*. I use the men's room, get lost, run up the down escalator, find a door to outside, and re-enter Temple Square.

*Noon*. There are three of us in the theatre. I've been guided there first by a sister from Austria then by one from Honduras. Both are quite attractive. The couple sitting behind me appear to be Japanese. More people enter, and two pass in the aisle behind me speaking a language I cannot identify. The sister from Honduras walks halfway down an aisle in front of us and introduces the film. The lights go down, and I unholster my tablet. These are the notes I scribbled in the dark:

- We adjust to the grim realities of a universe that giveth and taketh
- The constant renewal of religion—renewal or stagnation?

- Cinematically speaking, you know you're in trouble when Jesus looks like he's from Amsterdam
- This struggle between faith and faithlessness
- Be thou healed, says Jesus
- Korihor: To create the best society, my young friend, one must surround himself with the best of everything.
- And it's true: The heathen are much better dressed than the faithful
- The deeply subversive message of the Christ we worship and celebrate
- The Sun God!
- Ending this project by scribbling notes in the dark: a similitude
- He ministers unto the least of these
- The great catastrophe and the young artist who repents
- His blind father who can't see what he most wants to see until Christ literally puts his thumbs in his eyes
- The Messiah has come and He will come again

The lights go up. I fish my ragged hat out of my bag, put it on for the first time that day, and walk outside into the golden sunshine. The pretty sister from Austria and another from California ask me how I liked the film. I am polite and tell them, truly, that I have taken from the film what it was designed to impart. I walk out the northwest gate and turn east to see if "Heather" is at her post. Mercifully, she is not.

Moroni blazes in a perfect sky. How could someone like me ever measure up to such great beings who hover above our earth like silent starships? I am less than, always, and my life is colored by this, the glory of what the Saints have built against the sparkling days, a garden so beautiful it defies description. I am, like my brothers and sisters on the streets, both at home and in a strange land far from home. I look south through the gate and to the far end of Temple Square. Not a soul in sight. I am finished. I fit the tablet into the bag and, like everybody, begin again.



#### POSTSCRIPT

*Tuesday, 25 April 2006, 10:30 a.m.* The bedraggled little man with saddle shoes, recently arrested, hits me up at Broadway & Main. I give him nothing and may have lied to him as well. A statuesque blond with a face so smooth and impassive she could be a mannequin passes close by. She must have spent two hours putting herself together. I make a point of ignoring her. No matter, she'll find other lookers in abundance. Even in Zion. 