

## Brother Brigham

by D. Michael Martindale

### Chapter 1

Cory Horace Young never could stand Cory or Horace as a name, so when he was old enough to make it stick, he had everyone call him C.H. His great-great-grandfather was Brigham Young, something his parents reminded him of often.

“You are no ordinary boy,” his father would say as they stood before the portrait of Brigham Young that hung in the family room. “You’re a descendant of Brigham Young—one of the greatest prophets of all time. God sent you into this family for a purpose. You have a special mission ahead of you.”

C.H. would stand before that portrait and stare into the eyes of his great ancestor. The grim expression, the astounding white beard, the pursed lips and piercing eyes frightened and thrilled him. C.H. tried to imagine ever being like him, and couldn’t. The man was a towering figure in his family and his religion, almost next to God himself.

C.H.’s father went to graduate school at BYU, and as a young boy fresh out of the waters of baptism, C.H. often visited the campus with him. Behind the administration building stood a life-sized statue of Brigham Young. Whenever they passed it, C.H. would scowl at it out of the corner of his eye. He could almost imagine the statue coming to life, and Brigham Young growling at him in a commanding voice.

“Cory Horace—” He would use C.H.’s two hated names because that made him more frightening. “Cory Horace, are you preparing for your special mission?”

I don’t know how to prepare, C.H. would answer.

“That’s no excuse. You’ve got my name. Don’t you grow up and embarrass me!”

C.H. never liked walking past that statue, but he especially hated it at night. Brigham Young was a dark silhouette then, backlit by the lights from the administration building windows. “Cory Horace!” would boom out from that hidden face, echoing throughout the campus of BYU. C.H. would look down at the sidewalk and try to ignore him.

But one dark evening as they approached the statue, his father said, “Want to see Brigham Young do the funky chicken?”

“What?”

“Here, get on my back.” His father hefted him up into piggy-back position. “Now I’ll run past, and you watch the statue’s legs. It will look like Brigham Young is dancing.”

His father took off, running past the front of the statue about a hundred feet away. C.H. loved how playful his father could be. He couldn’t imagine the fathers of some of his friends ever doing anything like that.

C.H. twisted his neck sideways to look at the statue. The light from the windows of the administration building flashed between Brigham’s slightly parted legs, and it looked like he was wiggling them back and forth, bending at the knees. Doing the funky chicken.

They fell together onto the grass. C.H. rolled around laughing, and his father laughed with him as he fell on top of C.H. and playfully wrestled with him. Students passing by stared at them, and some snickered. C.H. didn’t care.

That experience broke the spell of Brigham Young. C.H. could never fear the man again after seeing him do the funky chicken. Several months later when his father died, C.H. made Brigham Young his imaginary friend. At first he would stand before the portrait in the family room, talking to him. Before long, he imagined that Brigham Young would accompany him wherever he went. Eventually he began to see Brigham. As C.H. grew, he would share his innermost thoughts with him, ask counsel of him, everything he wished he could do with his father. He started calling him “Brother Brigham” after hearing a Joseph Smith quote in Sunday School class refer to him that way.

Many times Brother Brigham would ask him, “Cory Horace, are you preparing for your special mission?” But these days it wasn’t a frightening question. It was asked with concern and tenderness. C.H. even started liking that Brigham called him by those two names. It was his special name, reserved only for his good friend and proxy father. No one else was allowed to call him that.

“What is my special mission?” C.H. would respond.

“When it’s time, you’ll find out.”

“How do I prepare for it if I don’t know what it is?”

“You prepare like every other prophet that has come before you. You live the Gospel and read the scriptures. You pray and listen. You promise yourself that you will do whatever God asks you to do.”

C.H. liked to ask Brother Brigham those questions. It reminded him to keep doing those things so he *would* be prepared for his special mission—whatever it was, whenever it came.

C.H. became a teenager, started seminary, and took up the violin, because his father had always liked classical music. He became interested in poetry and started writing some. His English teacher told him they weren’t half bad, and the girls seemed impressed by them, so he wrote more. One day after a seminary lesson from the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price, he decided on a pen name, and began signing all his poetry *Cain Hell Young*. The girls tittered at it, and his seminary teacher scowled.

After a lesson on patriarchal blessings, C.H. wanted to get his. His mother set up the appointment, and one Saturday morning they drove to the stake patriarch. C.H. trembled with nerves as the heavy hands of the man rested upon his head. What would God have to say to him?

Cory Horace Young was a member of the tribe of Ephraim, and would rise in the morning of the first resurrection if he was true to his covenants. Then the patriarch said, “Cory, you are a

choice spirit of your Father in Heaven. You have been sent in this time to this family for a purpose. God has a special calling for you. If you are faithful, you will be a great leader in the church, and preach the Gospel throughout the world.”

C.H. could hardly concentrate on the rest of the blessing. He was glad it was being recorded so he could read it later. He couldn't get those statements out of his mind. *God has a special calling for you. You will be a great leader in the church.*

It was what his father and Brigham Young had been saying all these years!

The appearances of Brother Brigham died out as C.H. matured. But he kept talking to Brigham like Tevye talked to God in *Fiddler on the Roof*, even though he knew it was a silly thing to do. By the time he attended Brigham Young University as a music major, even those conversations all but faded away. Only occasionally would he indulge in them as a private joke for old time's sake.

Before he could finish school, C.H. was a newlywed husband and was working as an assistant manager in a B. Dalton bookstore in metropolitan Salt Lake City. He got married in the temple, of course, but not to the girl who promised to wait for him. She sent the usual Dear John letter one month into the best two years of his life in Hamburg, Germany. Instead he married Danielle, a girl from Minnesota attending BYU as a history major, whom he had known a whopping three months before his bishop, home teachers, and roommates convinced him to pop the question.

That was why he was an assistant manager at a small bookstore in the Valley Fair Mall instead of graduating from BYU with a B.A. in music. One marriage and two children later, with he and Danielle proudly espousing the mother-at-home philosophy, school became out of the question financially—for now. He even had to sell his violin. Some day, he vowed, he'd go back and complete his degree. Some day...

“What in the world are you reading?” C.H. said one day at work as he sorted through the holds for expired dates.

“*The Satanic Bible*,” replied Sheila, a part-time clerk who loved reading more than waiting on customers.

C.H. shook his head and rolled his eyes.

“It's pretty good,” she said. “There's a lot in it I agree with. You should read it sometime.”

“That'll be the day.” He pointedly gazed at a customer coming up to the cash register. Sheila took the hint and waited on the woman, pausing an extra second between ringing up each book to read the title and skim the hype on the back.

It's a good thing she's so attractive, C.H. thought. He didn't think she'd amount to much on her abilities. She was smart, but too unfocused.

Milt, the manager of the store, walked up and handed him some papers stapled together. “Here's the week's list of endcaps from headquarters. You want to take care of that?”

C.H. took the papers and started to scan through them.

“Oh,” Milt added, “I guess we'd better get some kind of display up for the General Conference visitors. Why don't you set up one endcap with an LDS theme?”

“You bet,” C.H. said with a smile. Catholic Milt did that every General Conference. Always

waited until the last minute to put up an LDS display. “Most General Conference shoppers go to Deseret Book anyway, so why make a big deal out of it?” was his philosophy.

No matter—this was the sort of thing C.H. liked doing, applying a little of his own creativity to an endcap instead of following the carved-in-stone dictates of the corporate suits. What did they know out east about the tastes of readers in Salt Lake City anyway?

One of the required endcaps had a cookbook theme—boring—and another, romance—worse. But one was Orson Scott Card books, thanks to the release of the third volume in his “Obram Wanderer” science fiction series, based on the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price. Card was a Mormon who had attended BYU and had made it big in the real world in a creative field, so he was a hero to C.H. He decided to start on that endcap first.

From Science Fiction he pulled out copies of random Orson Scott Card books and carried them to the end of the aisle where he figured this endcap should go. He filled all but the top two shelves with them. Another trip back and forth with paperbacks of the first and second installments of the “Obram” series, which he filled the second highest row with. He crowned the display with a top row of hardback copies of the third volume, fresh out of the box—keeping one for himself to check out before he left for the day.

Next he tackled the LDS endcap, because that was the second most interesting one. On his way to the Religion section, he was sidetracked by a customer looking for the latest edition of *The Writer's Market*.

Ah, a creative soulmate! C.H. as a writer of music and poetry felt a kinship with any artistic person. “What do you write?”

“Oh, it's not for me. It's for my girlfriend,” the young man said.

Not a soulmate after all. In fact, he had a look that said he thought the whole idea of writing was silly, but that was what she was into, so he'd better go along. C.H. led him to the reference section and handed him the book, then made sure the customer had no other requests before hurrying to Religion to begin scanning titles for interesting LDS books.

*The Satanic Bible* practically jumped out at him. It was one of those books that a decent employee in a bookstore could only hold his nose and shelve—the same detached attitude he used when customers came in and bought cigarettes or beer at the 7-Eleven he once worked at. But Sheila had made him curious. She was no active member of the church, basically a de facto apostate who lived in sin with her boyfriend and never did much of anything religious that he could tell. But she was no fool either, and he wondered what could possibly be in such a book that would impress someone of her intelligence.

Resisting an impulse to look over his shoulder to see if the coast was clear, he picked the book up and gazed at it. The black cover—appropriate—and the picture of its author with his shaved head and glaring eyes and doing that creepy Satanic hand signal with his two fingers spread along the table, almost made him put the book back. Instead he thumbed through it, reading some of the chapter titles.

*Wanted: God—Dead or Alive.*

*Hell, the Devil, and How You Sell Your Soul.*

*Satanic Sex.*

*On the Choice of a Human Sacrifice.*

Gruesome! So far he couldn't see the attraction.

“How’re the endcaps coming?” Milt’s voice burst in, making him jump.

“Oh, fine, fine,” C.H. said, feeling like he’d been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. “I’m working on the LDS one now.”

“That’s good.” Milt glanced at the book in C.H.’s hand, raised an eyebrow, and walked on.

He stuffed the book back on the shelf and started picking out titles appropriate for LDS customers.

C.H. always looked forward to coming home from work. He loved to grab up his two diapered boys and give them hugs and kisses. And he loved to see Danielle, his wife. She was so beautiful with her strawberry blonde hair and one dimpled cheek. Two pregnancies had filled her figure out some, but C.H. thought it made her look better. She had been on the good side of too skinny when he married her.

She usually gave him a deep, lingering kiss when he got home, unless she was in a foul mood. Being a full eight inches shorter than he, she always leaned her head back as he held her steady with his hands on her back. It made him think of Rhett and Scarlett kissing—it made him *feel* like Rhett, and that was fun. C.H. suspected her passionate kisses might have as much to do with welcoming the childcare relief team as with true love, but since he enjoyed them so much, he didn’t mind.

When they first got to know each other, Danielle thought it was a hoot that he signed his creative stuff *Cain Hell Young*. That intrigued C.H. immediately. Most good Mormon BYU coeds clucked or shook their heads in disapproval at his irreverent joke. One even called him to repentance with the words, “How dare you combine the name of a son of perdition and a swear word with the name of one of the greatest prophets of the Lord?”

After explaining to her that Young was *his* last name, and telling her to get a grip, he ended the date right there and brought her back to her huffy roommates. All of them turned their nose up to him ever after. Since she was the only non-sweet spirit among them, and he had lost all interest in her, he couldn’t have cared less.

But Danielle immediately took to calling him Cain, and he called her Dani, and their romance built from there. On their wedding night, Dani admitted that it intensified her arousal to call him Cain, like she was doing something naughty making love to the first murderer.

As C.H. walked in the door to their tiny rented duplex, he tossed the Orson Scott Card book that he had checked out—minus the dust jacket, which he was obliged to leave in a file drawer at work—onto the VCR on top of the television set. Petey popped a bottle out of his mouth and trotted over. C.H. scooped up the grinning toddler into his arms—dripping upside-down bottle and all—and smothered his face in kisses. The boy giggled.

“How’s my little Petey doing?” he said. “You been a good boy for your momma?”

“Good boy,” Petey said.

His two-month-old son was crying from their only bedroom. “Dani, sweetie? What’s wrong with Glenn?” He followed the cry into the room.

Dani sat on the bed with little Glenn lying next to her, frontally naked, and a diaper flopped open filled with that yellow goopy stuff that reminded C.H. more than anything of scrambled eggs—something he tried hard not to think about at breakfast. This batch of waste had exploded

all over Glenn's back. One look at Dani's eyes and C.H. knew what he needed to do.

"Here, sweetie, let me finish that for you." The new look she gave him as she slid aside to make room for him made the whole ordeal worth it. He winced as he employed wet wipe after wet wipe that Dani handed to him one at a time. A huge wad of soiled wipes lay in the abused diaper before Glenn's behind was a sweet baby's bottom again. C.H. wrapped the diaper around the wad and sealed it tightly shut with its fastening tapes. Dani handed him a clean diaper, and he restored Glenn's modesty, letting out a sigh of relief. Glenn was still crying, but he hadn't squirmed much, and there were no urinary surprises. All in all, not as bad an episode as he had expected.

C.H. went to the bathroom to dispose of the diaper and wash his hands, then returned and sat on the bed next to Dani and Glenn. He took Glenn from Dani's arms and bounced him gently up and down. The crying soon stopped. Petey wandered in and climbed on his lap. Dani leaned over and kissed C.H. on the cheek. "Thank you," she murmured.

He smiled and stood up, heading for the hallway, carrying Glenn and dragging Petey beside him. "So what's for dinner?" he called, looking back at her. He stopped as her face filled with a weary and apologetic look.

"Sorry, I haven't even thought about that yet."

Oops! That joke had been a mistake. "I was just kidding," he said. "Don't worry about it. I'll fix something."

After dinner and feeding the kids and putting them to sleep, C.H. and Dani sat on their frayed sofa—one of their "DI wonders" bought from thrift store Deseret Industries—and stared at the TV, a *M\*A\*S\*H* rerun. Dani snuggled her head on his shoulder and wrapped both her arms around one of his. C.H. took it as an expression of gratitude.

"Sheila was reading *The Satanic Bible* today," he said during the commercial.

Dani chuckled. "She's really something else. How many earrings does she have?"

"I think about half a dozen per ear."

"Should I pierce my ears half a dozen times?" she murmured into his biceps. "Do you think she looks pretty that way?"

C.H. thought about it. Sheila was just a few years younger than they were. Her dark red hair and deep-set eyes appealed to him. Often at work, he would catch himself staring at her before turning away in chagrin. But there was no reason to burden Dani with every little trial of temptation he faced. He loved his wife; it wasn't like he had any intention of acting on his casual attraction to Sheila. "She's cute enough, but not because of all those earrings. I'd just as soon you pass on that idea."

Dani laughed a single "hmm."

C.H. pulled his arm from her hands and put it around her shoulders. He kissed her, caressing her arm. His hand slid up her shoulder and down her chest, until it cupped her breast. He started to caress it.

She pulled away, gently but firmly. "I'm sorry, Cain. I'm just so tired."

C.H. straightened up and let Dani put her head back on his shoulder. He would have to grit his teeth for one more day. He could count on two fingers how many times they'd had sex in the

last several months—none of them since Glenn was born eight weeks ago. But he didn't want to press things. He knew she was giving him no lame excuse—she usually *was* exhausted with two little boys, both in diapers, one exclusively breast-fed.

Dani went to bed early and fell asleep immediately. C.H.'s legs and feet were sore from standing all day, and he knew he would only thrash around for a while before he slept, keeping Dani awake. So he stayed up and stared at the TV. He toyed with the idea of starting to read the new Orson Scott Card book, but decided he was too tired. He was always tired after work. Dani was always tired all the time. What a life they were leading!

If he'd stayed in school, he'd have graduated by now. This situation was supposed to be temporary, until they got on their feet. But C.H. was beginning to wonder if they'd ever escape.

At work, C.H. was officially on a track to become a manager. He had to wait for two other assistant managers in other stores in the district to become managers because they had more seniority, then it would be his turn. Then he would be making enough money to go back to school.

And have absolutely no time to do it. He saw how hard Milt worked. C.H. had to work most Sundays because Milt took them off. But that didn't bother C.H., because Milt worked his butt off the rest of the week. Milt's store was one of the top in the district, but he paid a heavy price to keep it there.

And C.H. would be in the same position as a manager. There would be no time for school.

C.H. lay back on the sofa and closed his eyes. A Deseret Book commercial came on TV. As he started to doze, he thought he heard something about Brigham Young.

"Brother Brigham," he murmured, half asleep. "Where do I go from here? How do I get out of this trap?"

He thought of his patriarchal blessing. "And when is my special calling coming?" He chuckled a little. A special calling seemed like the last thing that would ever happen to him. Nothing special in their lives at all. Just the same old grind like everybody else.

Glenn's crying woke C.H., and he crawled into bed, since Dani would be awake now anyway. Both boys woke up several times during the night, Glenn for his feedings, Petey just on general principle.

When C.H. awoke the next morning, Dani and the boys were still asleep. He checked the clock. Ten thirty—General Conference had started half an hour ago! With a groan he clambered out of bed and padded into the living room, turned the TV on and fumbled to unwrap a video tape from its plastic wrapper. He always taped General Conference so he could listen to a little bit of it every morning before going to work, to get him into a good frame of mind for the day.

At least that's what he always intended to do. Somehow every day for six months he never got around to it. At the end of every six months, when the next General Conference rolled around, he would repent and say, "This time for sure!"

When he finally got the machine recording, he sat back into his recliner with a sigh, popped the footrest out and leaned back. He'd missed the first half hour. He'd have to make sure he read it in the *Ensign* Conference reports. This time for sure.

His recliner was a hand-me-down from his mother instead of a DI wonder like most of their furniture, and in a little better condition. He always sat there unless he wanted to sit next to Dani. Almost immediately his eyes drooped, and he dozed. When Dani came out and lay on the sofa, he

woke up. Some unfamiliar General Authority was speaking, probably one of the Seventies. He was warning his listeners about the danger of apostasy.

“Keep your eye on the prophet,” the man said. “He will never lead the church astray. We have that promise from God.”

After a few more words, the nameless General Authority amen'ed and sat down. Some choir of combined institute students from Davis County broke into a rendition of “We Thank Thee O God for a Prophet.” How appropriate for that song to follow that talk, C.H. thought. He wondered if it was deliberately planned that way, just dumb luck, or if whoever chose the songs was inspired.

He dozed again, letting the waves of music wash over him and break up into incoherent ramblings of the half-asleep mind. Dani began to snore, partially rousing him to consciousness, but not enough to open his eyes. He dreamed Brother Brigham standing at the podium, looking as he must have looked in real life all those years ago. He was speaking, but C.H. couldn't make out the words. It was the same deep, resonating voice he had always imagined for Brother Brigham.

“Cory Horace,” said a whisper.

“Hmm?” One eye lifted halfway open and stared at the TV. The choir was still singing.

“Cory Horace.”

C.H.'s eye slid closed again. He could see Brigham standing at the podium, gazing straight into the television camera, lips pursed, eyes piercing C.H.'s soul. “I have a task for you to do.”

“Mm-mmm,” said C.H.

“The salt flats,” said Brother Brigham.

“Mm-hmmm-hmm? What?” C.H. muttered.

“In the Great Salt Lake Desert.”

Dani snorted loudly with one snore, startling herself and C.H. awake. She giggled with embarrassment and fell back to sleep.

The hymn was over, and another nameless General Authority was speaking. “Many are called, but few are chosen,” he said. “Who does the calling? The Lord, usually through his inspired servants. And who does the choosing? We do. We choose ourselves by accepting the call and fulfilling it.”

C.H.'s stomach growled, and he got up to make himself a ham sandwich. He had a vague feeling of something communicated to him in a dream, but it slipped away as he spread the mayonnaise and sliced the tomato. When he accidentally tipped the salt shaker over as he reached for the head of lettuce, he suddenly remembered. “Salt flats,” he murmured. Brother Brigham had said something about the salt flats. What in the world was that all about?

C.H. shrugged and pressed the slices of bread together, poured a glass of milk, and returned to the recliner. The next few speakers were actual apostles with names and faces he recognized. It amused him how many of them were former BYU presidents. That must be some sort of boot camp for apostles.

After the sandwich, sleep took over once more, Dani's soft snoring notwithstanding. Glenn's cry woke them both, and Dani hurried into the bedroom. Commercials had taken over, meaning that the morning session was over. Good thing he taped it—well, most of it. It made him feel better about sleeping through the whole thing. He could go back and watch the tape. This time for sure.

He got up and stopped the VCR, rewound the tape until he found the end of the morning session, then left it loaded and ready for the afternoon. He couldn't do all that with the remote control these days because it was long lost. Probably Petey dropped it in the garbage and no one noticed until the garbage man drove away. He'd put it there before.

C.H. smacked his mouth several times at the dry and disgusting flavor inside. Probably a jillion bacteria grew off the remains of his sandwich and milk while he slept. He walked to the bathroom, brushed his teeth, and rinsed with a mouthwash loaded with alcohol to kill the unwelcome creepy-crawlies in his mouth.

“How about mowing the lawn?” Dani said as she came up behind him and embraced him.

“But it's Sunday.”

“It is not!” she said with a swat on his butt.

“Oh, yeah.” General Conference always did that to him. Made him feel like Saturday was Sunday. Still, it seemed disrespectful to do something as mundane as mowing the lawn between spiritually uplifting sessions of Conference.

Not that he got much inspiration staring at the back of his eyelids.

“Glenn's back asleep. I'll make breakfast while you're out there.” Dani gave him a squeeze, kissed the nape of his neck, and headed out of the bathroom.

“Thank you,” he said, keeping quiet about the ham sandwich. It hadn't filled him, and he knew, with the smell of more food, he would get hungry again.

He retrieved the mower from the shed. The mower required three tugs to start. It sputtered and smoked as he started on the front yard. He could hear a couple of other husbands in the neighborhood who had been banished to the lawn to get one more mowing in before winter took over. It was a nice, sunshiny day, after all, even if the temperature was a bit nippy.

The new guy across the street was deep into working on his car. He had headphones on—listening to Conference, or some raucous music? C.H. had gone over and met him last Saturday when he moved in. He was single. His name was Moroni. C.H. hoped that meant he was a member of the church. Then no one in the ward would be pressuring him to “spread the Gospel” to the new neighbor. He also hoped the man had been listening to Conference—otherwise he might be inactive, and everyone would expect C.H. to fellowship him. He had no idea if Moroni had been to church last Sunday, since C.H. had been at work. But the fellow's long blond hair and stained tank top shirt made C.H. doubt it.

Moroni waved and C.H. waved back.

The chill air lost its bite as his body warmed up from the exertion of mowing. When C.H. had finished the front yard, Moroni was still working waist-deep in engine. C.H. dragged the sputtering mower reeking of burnt oil into the back and started in on that lawn. It was really the front lawn for the second half of their duplex, but since the back apartment was currently vacant, C.H. had offered to keep the yard up for a cut in rent.

“Cory Horace.”

The sound made him jump. In spite of the mower roaring in his ears, the words were clear and soft. C.H. looked from side to side and saw nothing.

“Cory Horace.”

He whipped around and looked behind him. Brother Brigham stood there in full view, a vivid image in the sunlight. It was as if he reflected more light than what shone on him. He

seemed to be outlined with a thin layer of glistening sun rays. He had a robe on, open at the chest, and C.H. immediately thought of the visit of the angel Moroni to Joseph Smith. Brigham's feet were bare and stood inches off the ground. The colors of Brigham's robe, face, beard, shimmered with unreal ferocity.

"Brother Brigham," C.H. said, the hairs all over his skin creeping.

"I have a task for you, Cory Horace." His voice reverberated against the grumbling of the mower.

"The salt flats," C.H. said with a sudden rush of memory.

Brigham nodded. "Yes, go toward the salt flats and the Great Salt Lake Desert. Take Interstate 80 to the Clive exit. Follow the frontage road west until you get to mile marker 45 on the freeway. Walk perpendicular to the road one hundred yards. You will find a backpack there. Bring it home and wait for further instructions."

"When?"

"*Now!*" Brother Brigham barked, then smiled cryptically and vanished.

C.H. blinked and rubbed his eyes. His head swam with shock. Brother Brigham hadn't appeared for years, even though C.H. still talked to him occasionally. And he had never appeared like that, so vividly in appearance, so vibrant in color, speaking so forcefully and succinctly. Always he had spoken more like a patient, understanding father. Always he had been a bit vague and drab in appearance, a bit dubious in location, shifting here and there, with his voice coming from no particular direction. This visitation was strong, intense, authoritative, and *real*. Or so it seemed, compared to all the others.

And that robe! Brother Brigham had never worn a robe before.

C.H. absently shut off the mower and, leaving it where it stood, walked around to the front door and entered the house. Dani stood at the stove, still trying to get some eggs scrambled with Petey, now awake, clinging to her leg. "Done?" she said.

C.H. stared at her, trying to understand her words. "No, I—I've got to go somewhere." He grabbed his wallet and car keys sitting on the counter.

"Where are you going?"

He tried to think what he could say, but only shook his head. "I'll tell you when I get back." He slammed the door behind him as he rushed out to the carport, climbed into their rusting Corolla and drove off with a slight squeal of tires.

He felt disconnected from the world. They lived just south of I-80 on 400 East. In a moment he was on the freeway heading west. As he drove, his thoughts started to collect, and he chanted, "This is nuts! This is nuts!"

What on earth was he doing? His imaginary friend shows up and tells him to go get a backpack in the middle of nowhere, and he actually goes? Was he out of his mind?

"What's going on, Brother Brigham?"

But it was so easy to keep traveling in the direction he was already headed. The freeway jogged north for the short time it combined with I-15, then west again. He drove past the Salt Lake International Airport, the Airport Hilton fountain glistening in the sun, past the Saltair resort building with its onion-shaped domes. The faint stench of Great Salt Lake brine filled the air.

"Did you really appear to me, Brother Brigham?"

Of course not—it was absurd. Certainly, as a Mormon, he believed that supernatural

visitations were possible—theoretically. But a visitation to him? Nonsense.

As he approached the Oquirrh Mountains on the left, the smokestack of the Kennecott copper plant belched out smoke. His feelings of foolishness deepened, and he told himself he would get off at the Tooele exit and turn around. The Great Salt Lake shone to his right, a vast sweep of greyish-blue nearly lapping up to the freeway and extending to the horizon, with Antelope Island breaking the view—or was it Stansbury Island? He could never remember which was which.

But as the Tooele exit neared, he asked himself, why? Why was it nonsense? Joseph Smith was fourteen when he received his first heavenly vision. Samuel in the Old Testament was called by the voice of God as a young boy. Why should it be nonsense for C.H. to receive a vision? God had worked through unremarkable people before.

Because C.H. wasn't very valiant in his service to God, that's why. Hardly ever went to church, thanks to working so many Sundays. Slept through Conference. Couldn't remember the last time he'd prayed, not personally, not with his family. Hadn't cracked the scriptures for personal study since his religion classes at BYU. Didn't even have a church calling anymore. Not valiant—that's what described C.H. Just like the passage in the Doctrine and Covenants said. Bound for the terrestrial kingdom. C.H. never did anything really *bad*—he just wasn't valiant in doing good.

The Tooele exit beckoned to him. No, he couldn't have had a heavenly visitation. Not him. He wasn't worthy of such a thing.

But Brother Brigham had appeared so different, so real.

It was absurd to think there could be anything valid about all this. So he visualized his imaginary friend more vividly than ever before, so what?

But what if it *was* real, and he didn't go? Once more he would be unvaliant in obeying a commandment.

The exit was past and he was still on the freeway. The bottom line was he knew it would drive him nuts if he never found out. So he would drive out to mile marker 45, count out a hundred paces, find nothing, and go home feeling silly, but satisfied that it was just his imagination acting up. Punishment for falling asleep during General Conference.

Mile marker 98 was the first one after the exit. What would he tell Dani after driving halfway to Wendover for no reason? He already felt chagrin at not telling her what had happened before he left. It wasn't like he was in the habit of keeping secrets from her. He was just in a daze—who would think straight after seeing Brigham Young in a vision?

And when he drove out there and found nothing, what would he say then? He didn't know if he could admit to the love of his life what an utter fool he had made of himself. Especially when it was costing a large portion of the gas in the tank. They weren't exactly swimming in money.

For a while the freeway pierced the Great Salt Lake. It felt creepy to have water on both sides. Eventually the lake receded, and the Morton Salt plant appeared on the right with its piles of white salt. Dull grey mud covered with patches of grass and salt brush took over the landscape. C.H. began to hope a backpack really was there so he wouldn't have to excuse his trip to Dani.

But if a backpack *was* there, then the real Brigham Young *had* appeared to him, *had* told him to perform a task, *had* promised him further instructions.

Could this be his special mission?

He shuddered. No, it had to be a ridiculous daydream. Why would God call someone who was unvaliant? Even Paul, persecutor of the early Christians, had been valiant in what he believed was right. Why hadn't God just spewed lukewarm C.H. out of his mouth, being neither cold nor hot?

Mile marker 60 passed, then 55, then 50. A sign announced the Clive exit. He turned off. The frontage road was gravel, but C.H. didn't slow down much. He watched anxiously for the little spot of green on a post that said 45. The freeway mile markers were easy to see, the frontage road being so close.

His heart began to pound as 45 appeared. There had been no traffic on the gravel road, so C.H. stopped in the middle of it and shut off the engine. Grass stalks waved and salt brush quivered in the wind. A small herd of elk meandered off in the distance, munching on the vegetation. A semi zoomed by on the freeway, rattling the car windows.

C.H. spent a moment repressing feelings of embarrassment, then climbed out of the car and slammed the door. The elk jumped and wandered further away. C.H. stood at the edge of the road, staring at the ground before him.

"Technically, Brigham, this isn't the salt flats," he said out loud. Those were further west, next to the Nevada border. They were white and devoid of growth, and maybe even underwater for the winter by now. Then he remembered—it was the "dream" Brigham that had told him to go *to* the salt flats. The "real" Brigham had said go *toward* the salt flats. He pursed his lips in shame at his careless criticism of a prophet. The expression became a frown as he realized he was thinking of the Brother Brigham apparition as real.

C.H. strained to see anything unusual. Just grass and salt brush. He tried to visualize a hundred yards. A football field. He imagined himself sitting in the endzone of the BYU stadium—something he'd done often enough with various dates—and tried to determine where the far endzone would be, then looked hard for anything unusual around there. Nothing.

Almost he turned to leave, but that "had to know" feeling was still there. He checked right and left for any highway patrol approaching on the freeway, not quite understanding why he felt guilty, then headed north away from the road, peering ahead intensely, counting paces as he went.

By the time he was a first-down's worth of distance away from the far endzone, he saw the backpack, partially hidden behind a swatch of grass. C.H. shivered, suddenly wishing it hadn't been there. This should not be happening. Brother Brigham had to be a figment of his imagination—the real Brigham Young wouldn't appear to him. The backpack had to be an elaborate, vivid mirage, as vivid as the hallucination of Brother Brigham. That must have been some ham sandwich.

He stopped before the backpack and studied it. Olive green, Army surplus backpack, made of canvas. Filthy with the residue of evaporated raindrops. Well-worn, but still in decent condition. How long had it been there?

C.H. dreaded to pick it up. Slowly he reached for the strap. The tips of his fingers touched it—it was real. He grabbed the strap and had to yank it free from being half-buried in dried mud. The entire backpack came up with it, leaving a moist imprint. A handful of bugs skittered away.

A blast of chilly wind made him shiver. The faint warmth of the sun from above was soothing. C.H. hefted the backpack, testing its weight. There was something inside, but it wasn't especially heavy.

“What’s in here, Brigham?”

He opened the flap and peered in. A musty smell of mildew assaulted him. Inside was paper, countless bundles of green paper. Money green. He pulled one out. The band around the bundle was imprinted with “\$100.” That was the standard band for one dollar bills that came from the bank in bundles of one hundred. But these bills were not ones—they were hundreds. At least the top one was. C.H. riffled through them—they were all hundreds. If a hundred of them were bundled together like one-dollar bills always were, that would be—ten thousand dollars! He rummaged through the rest of the bundles. They all seemed to be hundreds. C.H.'s breath came in short gusts. How many thousands of dollars must be in there!

Instinctively he swung his head around, peering guiltily at the freeway. A couple of cars passed by, but no cop had appeared. The elk were way off in the distance. He scanned the area around where the backpack had lain. For an instant he thought of skyjacker D.B. Cooper, but decided that was too outlandish. So where had the money come from? Who would leave it? Did someone come out here with it and die? Then where was the body, or the picked-over bones? Where were the footprints? No, there wouldn't be any footprints if this thing sat out here for as long as it looked like it did. They'd have been washed away.

C.H. headed with a forced stride back to his car, trying not to look guilty. Now more than ever he didn't want a cop finding him out here with a bag full of hundred dollar bills. At the car, he opened the passenger-side door and flung the backpack onto the floor. The dry side poofed out a cloud of dust. He slammed the door shut and leaned his back against it, breathing heavily and trying to calm his pounding heart.

“What am I supposed to do with all that money, Brother Brigham?” Part of him wished he'd have another visitation right now so he could get those “further instructions.” Part of him hoped the second visitation would never come.

He finally felt recovered enough to drive, but he couldn't bring himself to get back into the car with that backpack lying inside. He stared straight ahead at where it had once lain on the ground. Why did it have to be there? What would he tell Dani? Explaining to her why he went on a gas-wasting wild goose chase seemed the better option now.

A brief siren pulse blasted behind him, and he nearly jumped into the air as he let out an involuntary cry. He turned and found a highway patrol car stopped along the freeway shoulder, nothing more than a barbed-wire fence between it and C.H., and an officer standing on the far side of the vehicle, leaning on his open door, staring inscrutably through dark glasses. “Is there a problem, sir?”

“Oh, no,” C.H. said, trying hard to keep his voice calm. “Everything's fine, officer.”

“Why have you stopped in the middle of the road?”

“Oh, I dozed off at the wheel and thought I should step out for a minute to wake myself up.” C.H. stared at the officer, trying to read his face, trying to figure out if he was buying his lie. A lie from someone called of God!

“Good idea,” said the officer with no emotion in his voice. “Are you okay now?”

“Yes, I'm feeling pretty alert.” That was certainly true, with about a thousand gallons of adrenalin pumping through his body.

“Alright, then, move on.” The patrolman gazed around one more time as if hoping to find probable cause for something. C.H. held his breath to keep from visibly panting.

The officer climbed back into his car and drove away.

He had to wait another several minutes to calm down again, then rushed into the car and started it. Torn between getting out of there as fast as possible and not wanting to attract attention, he forced himself to make a careful U-turn, then drove thirty miles an hour back to the freeway ramp. Once on the freeway, he continually pulled his foot off the gas pedal to bring his speed back down to the speed limit. All the way to Salt Lake his head swam, and he breathed shallowly with apprehension.

“What the hell is going on, Brigham?” he shouted. He was too agitated to feel bad about swearing.