

Jesus Enough

Levi Peterson

1886

When Darby turned fifteen, his mother Cora said if he didn't make up his mind to accept Jesus pretty soon, it would be too late. She said he had to make the choice either to make public his profession of faith or to write himself off as a bad debt and go to Hell. So during the spring instead of going out to the ranch to be with Jack on Saturday as usual, he stayed in town and tried to memorize the hundred and fifteen items of the catechism presented to him by the pastor of the Baptist church out on Mullen Road. He never came anywhere near to retaining all of them. What he did retain boiled down to the following:

By praying to God in the name of Jesus, you send mail to God through Jesus. In effect, Jesus and God are one and the same. You don't really die when you die. Your soul is still alive. This is good if you manage to live righteously because your soul will go to Heaven to dwell with Jesus in bliss forever. Also, Jesus will bless you with a long, prosperous sojourn in mortality. But you are in big trouble if you can't live righteously because Jesus will make sure you die young from accident or disease and your soul will go down into the fire that shall never be quenched where its worm dieth not.

When the pastor asked Darby if he felt he had received an effectual calling to shake off sin and ignorance and be enlightened by faith in the Lord Jesus, Darby said yes, and on a bright Saturday in early May he was baptized in Clark's Fork River just below the bridge at the far end of Missoula. Before the ceremony,

he counted on Jesus giving him the same sweet assurance of faith that his mother had, but Jesus didn't live up to his end of the bargain. While his mother was very pleased by his baptism, Darby still didn't believe and now he had twice as much to worry about, having added deceit to disbelief.

When school was out, Darby went to the ranch to help Jack—his stepfather—tend livestock and harvest hay. At fifteen, he could work alongside any man. Of medium stature, he had broad shoulders and well-muscled arms. He had short, blond hair, parted in the middle, and blue eyes, sensitive to the sun, hence in a perpetual squint, even indoors. He was quiet and polite by temperament. He was handy with a rope and had already developed a knack for breaking horses.

Sometimes his mother came out to the ranch but mostly she stayed at the house in Missoula so she could help out with the church's charitable projects. Darby and Jack came in to town on Sunday for the 11:00 service at the church. They came in a buggy pulled by two prancers—"Just to prove we ain't barbarians," Jack said. "Ain't everybody in town got a rig this fancy." Jack was around fifty years old. He wasn't handsome, having a scarred face from a mine explosion. He never tried to discipline Darby. Generally, Darby didn't require it, and when he did, Jack reported him to his mother and left the matter to her.

One day Darby and Jack were mending some fence on the northern boundary of the ranch and Darby brought up a fact likely to shock Jack but requiring some advice.

"Jack," he said, "I've got something bad to tell you."

Jack stopped driving a staple and looked up.

"I don't believe in Jesus," Darby said.

Jack went back to pounding the staple.

"You got any advice?"

"No, sir," Jack said. "I don't believe in him either."

So it was Darby who ended up being shocked.

After a while Jack said, "Maybe I do have some advice. Not believing don't give you no license to live on the wild side of life. Leave the whores alone and don't get no girl pregnant you don't intend to marry."

It was advice that Darby had the good sense to follow, which meant that he went on relieving his lust by practicing the solitary vice, as the Baptist minister called it during a sermon denouncing the abominations of the modern day Sodoms and Gomorrah of Montana.

1890

The year he turned nineteen, Darby got a job in one of the underground silver mines in Butte. Once a month he took a weekend off and went up to Missoula to visit his mother and Jack. At noon on Saturday, Jack met him at the train station with the buggy and drove him to the house, and come Sunday evening he drove him back to the station. One Sunday evening, Darby said, "An old guy at the mine says my father wasn't killed in a railroad accident. He says my mother worked in a whore house, and that's where I came from."

"Well, if that ain't the wildest damn story I ever heard," Jack said. "Who is this old horse turd that told you that?"

"He's a tally keeper at the mine. He used to run a saloon up in the red light district."

"Your mother wasn't no whore and I'll kill the son-of-a-bitch who says she was," Jack said.

"So where was I born?"

"In a boarding house."

"And my dad really *was* killed in a railroad accident?"

Jack pulled at his mustache with nervous fingers.

"Well, was he or wasn't he?" Darby insisted.

"No, he wasn't," Jack said. "And his name wasn't Henry Shaw, either. Your ma just made that name up. I never asked her what his real name was and she never offered to tell me. She was just seventeen and she was slinging hash in a boarding house, and a man took advantage of her, and when she told him she was pregnant, he lit out, and that's where I come in, because when I moved into the boarding house, your poor little ma was as puffed out as a toad and feeling pretty bleak about things, so when I offered to marry her, she took me up on it even if I had this smashed-up face.

I gotta say, Darby, your ma really is one hell of a good woman, and I hope you ain't ashamed of her."

"No, sir, I'm not ashamed of her."

Jack slapped the reins down hard on the butts of the prancers. "I hope you ain't ashamed of me neither," he said. "I've tried to be a good dad."

"You *have* been a good dad," Darby said.

1891

Darby's best friend in Butte was Harley McAlister, a young fellow from a ranch near Bozeman. Although he was only twenty, same as Darby, he had done some hard living, having signed on for a couple of trail drives into Canada, during which he did what cowboys are famous for, which is boozing and visiting soiled dives and shooting up little towns. But when one of his buddies was killed in a barroom fight, Harley did an instant turn-around. He quit the cowboy life and got a job at the mine in Butte and started saving his money because there was serious talk of a new college in Bozeman and he had in mind getting an education so he could become a Methodist minister.

Darby met Harley on the night shift at the mine, and they hit it off right away. Harley took a bunk at the boarding house where Darby rented, and they spent Sundays together on the weekends when Darby didn't go up to Missoula to visit his mother and Jack. On Saturday nights Darby and Harley had a bath and a shave and then went to the Butte Miners' Union reading room and caught up on the newspapers. On Sunday, they'd attend a service at the Methodist chapel. Afterward, if the weather was good they'd hike in the hills beyond town; if it was bad, they'd go back to the Union reading room to finish the day. Either way Harley talked a lot about religion. It was a marvel and a glorious wonder, Harley said, how the Carpenter of Nazareth had framed us a doorway into a better life on the Other Side. Darby was fascinated by Harley's fervor for religion even if he didn't share it. It was a strength to be around somebody who wasn't worried about dying.

1893

Things changed between Darby and Harley when Colin Morrell hired on at the mine and rented a bed in the boarding house where Darby and Harley stayed. They became a threesome—except that Darby found himself left out of the conversation a good deal of the time. Furthermore, Harley did another turn-around, this time going back to what he must have been while he was still a cowboy. Darby was confounded by the change in Harley. It was as if he had never had a religious feeling in his entire life. What surprised him most was that when Colin started talking about getting out of the rut of hard labor in the mine by robbing a bank, Harley took to the idea. Darby was therefore not surprised when he came in from a night shift in the pit to find that Harley and Colin had left town.

Midsummer, Darby received a letter from Harley's mother, Rhetta McAlister, which said:

My boy has played the fool they will hang him on august 16. Would you be so kind as to fetch him home his corpse I mean. His father has disowned him.

Colin and Harley had robbed a bank in Cody, Wyoming. The teller was slow in forking over the cash, and Colin killed him. A posse formed and kept on their trail. By nightfall, when an utterly dark, rainy sky forced them to bivouac, Harley's horse developed a limp. Soon after dawn, the posse caught up with Harley while Colin made good his escape with the booty. Harley was sentenced to hang at the penitentiary in Rawlins as an accomplice to the murder.

On the night before the execution, Darby spent a half hour with Harley in the prison. There was a man of the cloth there, too, an Episcopal minister. Harley had the shakes, his cheeks were grey, his lips were blue. "I don't want to die, I don't want to die," he said over and over.

"Pray with me, son," the minister said. "Trust in the blood of your Savior."

It was as if the minister weren't there. Harley stared past him, as if he could see something beside the brick walls and iron door

of the cell. When he looked at Darby, Darby could see deep pools of eternal nothingness in his eyes.

The next day, riding with the coffin in the baggage car, Darby mulled the words of the minister at the prison gate. The priest had gripped Darby's arm with iron fingers and in a voice choked with grief said, "Let us trust in the blood of our Savior," and Darby wondered if the minister was exhorting himself. Remembering the strange, bottomless pools of nothingness in Harley's eyes, Darby wept, silently he hoped, stifling a sob from time to time, consumed by the inexhaustible pity of being a creature destined to meditate upon the certainty of its own demise. The only good of it all was that, when the baggage car attendant helped him load the coffin onto a waiting wagon at the Bozeman station, he was drained of his weeping. He could now put on a manly impassivity.

Rhetta McAlister rode on the wagon seat beside Darby, her face as stolid and emotionless as Darby's. By and by they passed a ranch house. A man stood on the porch, his arms folded, his forehead creased by a frown.

"It's my husband," Rhetta said. "We can't stop here. We'll take Harley to my brother's ranch."

Her brother's ranch was on Bozeman Creek—a pretty spread, Darby could see. It was what he wanted, what he intended some day to have: a mountain valley, grassy with a creek running through it. It was late in the day and the brother said to bring the coffin into the house. "Better not," Darby said. "It stinks." So they unhitched the horses and left the wagon sitting outside the pole fence, about a rod from the porch. After supper, the brother brought chairs out onto the porch, saying, "We'll sit up with him tonight and dig his grave in the morning."

His wife said they ought to talk about his virtues and strengths.

"Harley was a good hand at roping," the brother said. "Never missed."

"He was a thoughtful boy, real considerate of others," Rhetta said.

"He was my best friend," Darby said.

"What I don't understand," Rhetta said, "is how he got together with that Morrell fellow."

“We roomed in the same boarding house up at Butte. First thing I knew, he and Harley were working the same shift, and after that things weren’t the same for me. Harley kind of forgot me. Colin Morrell is a strange guy. He’s like a fast river when you fall in it. Once you’re in, you can’t get out. It sweeps you downstream.”

Late in the night they dozed in their chairs. Darby roused from time to time, feeling guilty for not watching the night through.

The family cemetery was on a ridge south of the ranch house. It was a pretty place to be buried—yellow bunch grass, some scarlet Indian paintbrush, a few ponderosa pines. They dug the grave at dawn and after breakfast brought the coffin up. The brother’s wife brought a Bible. “What shall we read?” she said. They decided on the Beatitudes, also Psalm 23. Before they filled the grave, Rhetta said, “He really was a good boy. I hope the Lord will forgive him.”

Darby seized a shovel and went to work filling the grave. At least he didn’t believe Harley had gone to Hell. As Jack said, when you’re dead, you’re dead.

1899

When the bottom dropped out from under the world price for silver, Darby went down to Park City, Utah, where he heard the silver mines were still hiring. A foreman at the Silver King mine told Darby, “What I need is a man on the timbering crew. Can you handle an axe and your end of a crosscut saw?” He could, and that’s how he ended up working in a timbering camp on the north slope of the Uinta Mountains, felling and sectioning lodge pole pines for shoring up shafts in the Silver King and Ontario mines.

There were three other men on Darby’s crew: Curly, Dean, and Albert. Albert, whose last name was Mason, was a Mormon, and he had some family in a little town called Oakley. Once in a while, Curly and Dean made fun of Albert for being a Mormon, but Albert didn’t get riled or flustered. He just laughed with them. Darby could see he believed in Mormonism lock, stock, and barrel—Joseph Smith, the gold plates, the Book of Mormon. It was curious, bunking with someone who knelt at the side of his

cot at bedtime saying a silent prayer for ten or fifteen minutes. What did he pray about?

After a couple of weeks, Albert invited Darby to spend Sunday in Oakley with him. When they got off the train at Wanship, they found a waiting buggy, driven by Albert's sister Tilly—a girl of nineteen or twenty, who had dark, shoulder-length hair and blue eyes set in a long, slightly freckled face. Relegating her to the back of the buggy, Albert took the reins and invited Darby onto the seat beside him.

Albert's mother struck Darby as something like a duchess or countess. Her chief function was the supervision of her daughters, who were busy setting the table and preparing supper. These included—besides Tilly—Belle, Madge, Ona, and Myreel, descending in age from Tilly, the eldest, by increments of three or four years till it came to Myreel, who was only three.

When it came time for the meal, Albert sat at the head of the table and asked Belle to say a blessing on the food. "We honor the priesthood in this home," Mrs. Mason explained to Darby as she passed a bowl of creamed green beans.

Darby slept that night with Albert in an upstairs bedroom. "I should have explained earlier," Albert said, "that my father has two families."

"He's a polygamist, I guess," Darby said.

"Yes. I hope it won't offend you. In the eyes of the law, he is not married to my mother. He spent six months in the penitentiary in Sugar House, and he can't live in this house any more. He has to stay in Kamas with Aunt Sheila. Sometimes he visits."

"At least you know who your father is," Darby said. "I can't say the same for myself."

The next morning, Albert took Darby to priesthood meeting at 9:30 and then Sunday School at 10:30. At noon they went home for a big dinner that Tilly and her sisters had prepared, and then at 2:00 they all went to sacrament meeting, which went on till nearly 4:30. He had to hand it to the Mormons: they could preach. After meeting, they went home for a light supper of bread and milk and bottled fruit. After that, while the younger girls did the dishes, Tilly took Darby to the henhouse

to gather eggs. Tilly wore a dress of light blue cotton with collar and cuffs of white. She asked him to hold the basket while she picked eggs from the nesting boxes. At the last nesting box they faced each other wordlessly. It seemed to Darby that something needed to be said. At least it was obvious that they both wanted to say something. What was it? He didn't know.

Albert and Darby got up at 3:00 the next morning, and after a quick breakfast Tilly drove them to the Wanship station, where they caught the train headed for the timbering camp. They sat on crates in the swaying caboose. After a while Albert said, "Tilly is gone on you."

Darby's eyes widened.

"I know you wouldn't lead her on," Albert added.

"No, sir, I wouldn't."

"Because whoever she marries has to be a Mormon."

Darby thought about Tilly for several days in the timbering camp. At breakfast one morning he said to Albert, "What does it take to be a Mormon?"

1900

To Mr. & Mrs. Jack Wilson, Missoula Mont Dear Mother and Jack It's best I tell you I have been courting a Mormon girl. Her name is Tilly Mason. She has freckles but is very pretty. She has dark hair and blue eyes. I have never seen that in a girl before. She comes from a good family. Mormons are people just like everybody else. I wish you could meet Tilly. Your loving son, Darby.

To Darby Wilson, Park City, Utah Dere Darby; Yore mother says to tell you you are trifling with damnation to tye in with the Mormons. She says to tell you you are welcum here any old time but your gal is not. That aint my idea Darby For me, you are grown up and know yore own mind Best of luck, Jack.

Darby tried hard to convince himself he wasn't becoming a Mormon just so he could court Tilly with a free hand. He wanted to take on Mormonism lock, stock, and barrel, just like Albert. He had a lot to overcome. He wasn't sure he could master the long list of do's and don'ts. Giving up tea, whiskey, and an occasional

cigar was no problem, but coffee was another matter. Also, the Mormons spent a lot of time in meetings. Furthermore, Darby had his doubts about mastering the ins and outs of Mormon theology, which was strange stuff.

Albert said Mormons don't believe in hell, just in heaven—a different sort of heaven, a multiple one. There were three kingdoms in the Hereafter. The highest was called the Celestial Kingdom. Nobody but good Mormons went there. The middle one was called the Terrestrial Kingdom. That one was for all the good folk on earth who hadn't managed to hear about Mormonism or who had been tricked into disbelief by the craftiness of man. That would include his mother for sure, who had been misled by Baptist ministers. As for Jack, Darby wasn't sure, Jack being a disbeliever. Jack might end up in the bottom tier, which was called the Telestial Kingdom. This kingdom was reserved for the truly wicked—adulterers and thieves and sorcerers, etc., etc.—which, if Albert was to be believed, would include about nine-tenths of the people ever born. Darby could see that he himself would end up there if he couldn't manage to get past his disbelief.

Ironically, it'd be the place where Harley McAlister and Colin Morrell would be. That would be okay for Harley, who had paid for his participation in a crime with his life. But it would be far too nice a place for Colin Morrell. Maybe there ought to be a place of eternal torment for people like him.

1901

To Mr. and Mrs. Jack Wilson, Missoula Mont Dear Folks It is my honor to tell you Miss Tilly Mason has consented to become my bride on Oct 17th in the Mormon temple in Salt Lake City. There will be a wedding supper after in Hotel Utah. Please come. Someone will meet you at the train station and make sure you get there. The Masons have many relatives in Salt Lake who can put you up just fine. Your loving son, Darby.

To Darby Wilson, Park City, Utah Deare Darby Yore mother says dont bother her with no more newes about yore doings amungst the Mormons That aint

my idea If you luv this gurl I luv her too A ten doller bill is enclosed Yore affecshunite father Jack Wilson.

Unfortunately, once again the Holy Ghost didn't measure up to Darby's expectation and turn him into a believer. Darby was somewhat ashamed of himself for accepting this fact so easily. However, he knew he had to bear testimony as to the truthfulness of the Latter-day Saint view of the gospel in testimony meeting once in a while. He chose to do this in the testimony meeting closest to the quarterly stake conference. This kept him on the good side not only of Tilly but also his father-in-law, Harold Mason, who happened to be the second counselor in the stake presidency. Tougher duty than that was presiding over his own household—that is, over himself and Tilly in the apartment they rented at the back of a farm house a couple of miles out of Park City. As a holder of the priesthood, he called on Tilly to say family prayer before supper on one day and on himself to say it on the next. It couldn't be a brief prayer. He had to call on the Lord to bless the president of the Church and the Quorum of the Twelve, also to bless by name each member of the stake presidency and the Oakley Ward bishopric as well as each member of the immediate Mason family and a lengthy retinue of uncles, aunts, and cousins, also to bless Darby's mother and Jack, since Tilly expected it. Luckily, this didn't snuff out his love for Tilly. In fact, he sometimes felt he ought to be paying an even stiffer toll for the privilege of being her husband.

1902

Tilly went into labor at dawn on the day before Christmas, and her screams went on throughout the day. It didn't matter where Darby went, in the house or outside, he could hear her screams. About 9:00 on Christmas Eve the screams stopped and an infant wailed. Darby was in an adjacent room. Tilly's mother opened the door briefly and said, "You have a daughter." They had already decided on a name—Millicent. After a while his mother-in-law called him into the bedroom and laid the infant, wrapped in flannel,

in his arms. Darby sat beside the sleeping Tilly, carefully cradling the tiny bundle in his arms. About 4:00 on Christmas morning, Tilly awoke and nursed their child. Darby floated weightlessly above the earth, lost in an ecstasy not far below the moon. He loved Tilly beyond bounds, he loved their child beyond bounds. He regretted giving up on those long prayers at bedtime. He really was going to try harder to believe.

1905

Western Union May 5 1905 Darby Wilson, Oakley Utah. Your ma Cora Wilson has died of typhoid -stop- your pa is besot with grief -stop- best come. Hanna Simmons.

Western Union May 6 1905 Hanna Simmons, Missoula Montana. Will arrive tomorrow night -stop- please hold on funeral. Darby Wilson.

The minister of the Mullen Road Baptist church preached the funeral sermon, assuring his listeners that Sister Cora Wilson had died in a state of grace. He also made sure everybody understood there were certain ones among the congregation that day who perhaps would not die in a state of grace were they so misfortunate as to be unexpectedly cut off from this mortal coil. "There are those, even among us at this instant, who have not opened their hearts to Jesus." He looked hard at Jack and Darby while he spoke.

Jack and Darby lingered at the grave for a while after everyone else had left.

"She was a beautiful woman," Jack said.

"She was," Darby agreed.

"I hate to leave her here," Jack said. "Somehow it seems wrong just to put her in the ground like that and walk away. Funny damn thing, ain't it? Dying, I mean. Just suddenly not existing anymore."

Darby nodded.

"It could make you wish Jesus was real."

"Yes, sir, it could. It does."

"Folks you live with believe he's real, I expect."

“They do.”

Jack loosened his tie. “Just having *her* was Jesus enough for me.”

Hannah and Wilmer Simmons had Jack and Darby in to supper that night. “What’s your plans?” Wilmer said to Jack.

Jack shook his head dismally. He pulled out a bandana and wiped his cheeks—something Darby had seen him do every few minutes since he had got out of bed that morning.

“I think he ought to come down to Utah with me,” Darby said. “It’s time he met his granddaughters.”

“So how many have you got?” Hannah said. “I’ll bet they’re real pretty.”

“They are so,” Darby said. “Millicent is two-and-a-half—no question who is boss when she’s around. Katie isn’t three months old yet. Big, bright blue eyes, like her mother.”

“Well, there you go,” Hannah said. “You just do that now, Jack. Go down to Utah and get acquainted with those pretty little girls.”

Jack shook his head and dabbed again at his cheeks. The next day, as he accompanied Darby to the train station, he agreed to get someone to look out for things out at the ranch and come down to Utah for a visit.

About an hour after Darby got aboard, his train passed through Butte. He couldn’t help thinking of Harley McAlister and Colin Morrell. Wasn’t it time for him to find Colin Morrell and kill him? Didn’t he owe that to Harley? Then he reproached himself for such thoughts. They weren’t proper for a man married to a woman as kind and decent as Tilly.

1906

Jack moved to Utah to stay in the spring. He sold the house and lot in Missoula and traded his ranch for a ranch in the Heber valley, about sixteen miles from where Darby and Tilly lived on the outskirts of Park City. Darby spent some Sundays helping Jack put up barbed wire fences and a corral. They also did some repairs on the dilapidated old ranch house. This troubled Tilly, of course. She liked Jack but she was down on Sabbath breaking.

1908

In the middle of October, Darby and Jack rounded up some cows on the flank of Mount Timpanogos. Tilly had been in Oakley with her mother for a month, giving birth to daughter number three, Deborah. After they had the cattle gathered and moving nicely toward the ranch, Jack said, "I've got something to tell you. I have met a sweet little Jew lady from Salt Lake City, up visiting a friend in Heber. Her name is Aliza, Aliza Sharnner. She don't practice the Jew religion. She has converted to no religion at all, which is my sort of religion. Me and her want to get married and start up a boarding house in Salt Lake."

Darby's mind churned. He was bowled over, knocked down. It wasn't right for Jack to betray Cora by marrying somebody else.

"That ain't all," Jack said. "You been itching for a ranch of your own for years. Let's get my ranch appraised. We'll figure half of it is already yours, an inheritance from your mother. The other half, you buy out, and that's what Aliza and me will use to set up a boarding house. I'm tired of ranching, Darby. I just want a little time to enjoy life before they cart me to the cemetery."

Darby was still speechless.

"I've been hell for lonesome," Jack went on. "It's eating me up. Your ma told me the day she died, 'Get yourself another wife, Jack.' I said, 'I can't do that! I can't never forget you,' and she said, 'You don't have to forget me, but you ain't cut out to be alone.' And you know, Darby, I truly ain't."

Darby sighed and shook his head. "Do whatever you've got to do," he said. "It isn't for me to stop you."

"I'm still your dad," Jack said. "That ain't going to change."

1909

Western Union June 9, 1909. Mr & Mrs Jack Wilson, Salt Lake City. Wife's brother Albert killed -stop- funeral Oakley Fri -stop- please come. Darby.

A horse Albert was riding shied and he fell among some rocks, splitting the back of his skull. At the viewing, he lay in a satin-covered

coffin with his skull bandaged. He was dressed for Sunday in a black suit and white shirt and tie.

Darby had Jack with him when he took a final look at Albert before the closing of the coffin.

“He sure looks dead, doesn’t he?” Darby said.

“They always do,” Jack replied.

“My mother-in-law has gone to pieces. Melted like butter in a frying pan.”

“It’s pretty tough, I imagine, losing your only son.”

“Tilly is taking it pretty good,” Darby said. “‘He’s just gone on a trip,’ she says. ‘He’s gone to visit grandpa and grandma. He’s gone to Jesus.’”

Jack nodded. “It’s best if you can see it that way.”

“I wish I could.”

In bed that night, Tilly asked Darby to hold her tight, and while he did, she sobbed. He knew then that her talk about Albert just being gone on a visit was whistling in the dark. He pitied her but that didn’t keep him from taking advantage of her vulnerability and doing what a married man has a right to do. Moreover, he didn’t withdraw in time and went off inside her. He went on holding her after he had finished, and eventually she went to sleep. The next morning, feeling depressed and guilty for exploiting her grief, he sat on the edge of the bed before dressing for the day. Though he and she had figured they weren’t ready for another baby, he had very likely got them one. Just as he made a motion toward standing, she put her arms around his waist and held him tight. “I do love you so,” she said, and his emotions changed. “I love you too,” he murmured, powerless to express the strength of his feelings. Love was a prairie alive with wind-whipped grass. That was how he felt about Tilly.

Tilly stayed on at Oakley, mothering her little sisters and taking care of her mother, who didn’t get out of bed except to use the chamber pot. Darby thought maybe his father-in-law’s other wife would pitch in and help out, but she didn’t. Darby lived by himself at the ranch all week and came into Oakley on Saturday night, leaving the ranch in the hands of a hired hand, a Ute Indian named Chester.

1910

April 14, 1910 To Mr. Jack Wilson, Salt Lake City, Utah *Dear Jack, It is 2:00 am and I can't sleep. I am in Oakley right now. I hope to hell things are okay out on the ranch. Chester is a pretty good hand so I likely don't need to worry. I used to come in from the ranch Saturday nights and spend Sunday. Now it's rare I spend more than a day at the ranch each week. It's been nearly a year since Albert was killed. You'd think we'd start to recover by now. My mother in law is pretty much an invalid. Ditto for Tilly just now. The new baby is fine. Another girl as you might guess. We named her Cora for my mother.*

We've hired a neighbor lady to come in and help out around the house during the daytime, also to stay with Tilly on the nights I go back out to the ranch. Tilly takes a good deal of propping up. Surprises me. The way she used to rely on the Lord, etc., I thought she was tougher than me. Not so, it turns out.

Well, here I go giving in to my feelings again. I am going to quit feeling sorry for myself though to be truthful Albert's going has hit me in the belly very hard too. Sorry to say, it has brought up my feelings over Harley McAlister. I haven't ever said this to anybody before but it's true. It has been a rare day ever since I watched them hang poor Harley that I haven't had dismal thoughts about him. What's worse, I can't put down thoughts of finding that son of a bitch Colin Morrell and killing him. That isn't right, is it, Jack, thinking every day of wanting to find a guy and kill him.

As it turned out, Darby tore up this letter. He couldn't admit to wanting to kill somebody. Also he didn't want Jack thinking he was feeling sorry for himself.

1911

Sept 14, 1911 *Mr & Mrs Jack Wilson, Salt Lake City Dear Jack & Aliza, I have got where I don't know how I should be feeling over the way things are turning out. I spend two, sometimes three nights every week out at the ranch but it's still mostly in Chester's care and doing okay. We ought to make some money on our steer shipment this fall.*

But the damndest thing has happened. My dad in law has finagled me onto the board of the Utah Horse and Cattle Growers Association. I hope you can put me up a night or two toward the middle of October when I come down to Salt Lake to attend my first board meeting. I don't feel up to it, Jack. But I know what you'd say. You'd say, hell, yes, you are up to it. If I know anything at all about ranching it's because of you, Jack. Thanks for all the things you taught me.

On the day before the board meeting convened in Salt Lake, the neighbor lady, Mrs. Morris, came over to spend the night so Darby could leave Oakley at a very early hour. She said she would tend the kids so Darby and Tilly could go to bed early. As usual at bedtime, Darby and Tilly knelt beside their bed to say their secret prayers, Darby feeling bad because he was merely pretending to pray.

Tilly didn't rise immediately after her prayer. "Why has Jesus abandoned us?" she said.

"Abandoned us?"

"Why has he sent us so many tribulations? Why did He desert Albert? Why won't He heal Mother?"

He edged close to her and placed a hand on her shoulder. "Tribulation is what this world is for," he said.

"At least I have you," she murmured. "You are such a good man."

They rose, turned out the light, and got into bed.

Darby had hoped to make love to her but the moment seemed too troubled, too fraught with concern, for such a carnal deed. Resigning himself, he rummaged about his mind a bit, seeking some thoughts that would help him fall asleep. Then she spoke in a tone with just an edge of surprise. "Don't you want to do it?"

"Do you mind?"

"It feels good to have you hold me," she said. She tugged her night gown to her waist and lay waiting.

* * *

Darby arrived in Salt Lake in time to take lunch with the other board members in a small conference room in the just-completed Hotel Utah. Counting himself, there were seven members of the

board, some of them hailing from faraway ranches. The chairman of the board owned a giant ranch in the northwest corner of Utah that extended into Nevada and Idaho. "This is Harold Mason's son-in-law," the chairman said while introducing Darby. "He comes highly recommended, being not only a gentleman of the first water but a practitioner of the latest methods of livestock and range improvement." Darby could see that an ability to slather on the compliments was one of the requirements for a chairman.

After lunch, the board settled down to business, which was principally concerned with sending a delegation from the Utah Horse and Cattle Growers Association to the annual convention of the Western States Livestock Association, assembling in February in Phoenix, Arizona. The board's immediate duty was to prepare a revision of the bylaws of the larger association for consideration at the convention. A lesser duty was to designate a speaker for the opening session of the convention.

"It's an honor for the Utah delegation," the chairman said, "to be asked to provide the keynote speaker for the opening plenary session of the convention. It shows that Utah has got beyond the stigma of polygamy in the minds of our associates from other states."

Hobart pulled two photographs from his briefcase, saying, "I propose that we choose one of these two ranchers as our speaker. They are prominent men, both of them, one from Uintah County in the northeastern part of the state, another from Iron County in the southwestern part."

He pushed the photographs toward the board member who sat on his left, "Take a look and pass them along."

He paused as if debating what he should say next. "I am modern, gentlemen," he said at last in a voice in which pride and embarrassment mingled. "I took along a photographer and had photographs taken of both—including myself in both, of course, to overcome their natural reluctance to be thought desirous of prominence. They are truly solid, down-to-earth men. Take your choice. I am convinced either will give us a stellar performance."

Another photograph had slipped from Hobart's briefcase, which lay on its side on the table. He took up the photograph

and contemplated it for a moment before replacing it. “Here’s one that got away,” he said. “William Prothman’s his name. He has a ranch out east of Kanab on the border with Arizona. In fact, his spread laps over into the House Rock valley east of the Kaibab plateau. That would have been something, wouldn’t it, a speaker with holdings in both Utah and Arizona? But he said no, very emphatically. Didn’t want to be photographed, but I already had this one from the county clerk in Kanab.”

Sitting at Hobart’s right, Darby saw the photograph clearly before Hobart placed in his briefcase. He saw it and froze, for staring at him in black and white was a man who looked very much like Colin Morrell.

Darby had supper that night at Jack and Aliza’s boarding house. The boarders, all of them men, were university students and a couple of professors. Their conversation was lively, but Darby scarcely listened. His mind cycled furiously around the question of traveling to Kanab to see for himself whether this William Prothman were truly Colin Morrell. If he were, he was no one for a novice like Darby to stalk. What capacity for self-defense did a man have who found it distasteful to cut off the head of a chicken for Sunday dinner? And say Darby somehow bested Colin in a shoot-out, wouldn’t the law hold him liable for having taken on a duty proper to an officer? Yet it still galled him to leave Harley unavenged. Harley hadn’t died easy. When he dropped through the trap door of the gallows in the Wyoming penitentiary he was supposed to die instantly of a broken neck, but instead he had suffered a long, slow strangulation—another particular for which Colin needed to pay.

At bedtime, Jack took Darby up a back stairway to a room in the attic. Though it was tiny, it was clean and had a dormer window, which let him look out on the lights of the city. Darby undressed, turned out the light, and got into bed. He was still in a state of panic. His stomach was tight, his muscles tense. Then, suddenly, it came to him what he could do—what he *should* do. He would attend the convention in Phoenix, but he would leave early and, unknown to anyone else, he would visit Kanab to ascertain whether this prosperous rancher William Prothman was truly Colin Morrell. Moreover, he would go incognito in case chance

brought him face-to-face with Colin. And if Prothman proved to be Colin, Darby could alert authorities in Wyoming and Utah as to his whereabouts, and, if asked, he could serve as a witness. He could exert every legal effort, make whatever expenditure it required, to see Colin bereft of the spoils of his crime. And with that determination, Darby fell into a deep, tranquil sleep.

1912

Darby disliked deceiving anyone. He especially disliked deceiving Tilly, which he did by failing to tell her that his itinerary for Phoenix included an arduous detour by way of Kanab—a detour, moreover, that might be of such length that it would altogether preclude his attendance at the convention. As a disguise, he had grown a beard and mustache. Though his whiskers were modestly trimmed, Tilly had protested. “It’s not you,” she wailed in mock despair, welcome words in Darby’s ears, that being exactly the effect he hoped for. To complete his disguise, he carried literature and samples from a saddle and harness shop in Salt Lake City, and, after boarding the train, he put on a derby common to traveling salesmen. In his pocket nestled a snub-nosed, double-action, hammerless revolver. He had bought it in Salt Lake before returning home from the board meeting, and he had fired it enough to believe it reliable.

A note in Darby’s handwriting:

Feb. 8, 1912. I shall keep this log in case I am called upon to testify in court. I departed Salt Lake City this morning at 9:17, bound for Marysvale, a very small mining town, as I understand, where a spur of the Utah Central ends. From there I must take the mail stage tomorrow morning, which will stop tomorrow night in Panguitch. I expect to arrive in Kanab on Saturday evening. I am in for a bad shaking I am told, the roads being in poor condition due to the hard winter. I had no idea making my way to Kanab would prove so onerous. It’s almost enough to turn me back.

Truly Kanab was a hard place to get to. For miles the road from Panguitch was no more than two tracks over the crusted snow. Moreover, it was a dark, broody day and gusts of wind rocked the stagecoach from time to time. Kanab itself counted scarcely

forty houses. But it had a hotel, a bank, a courthouse, and a livery barn where Darby arranged to hire a buggy and a team of horses for a few days.

“We don’t see a lot of fellows like you around here in the winter,” the owner of the livery barn said. “There ain’t but maybe thirty ranches between here and the canyon.”

“Maybe I’ve made a mistake,” Darby granted, “but as long as I’m here, I just well see what I can sell. We’ve got a superior line.” He started to walk away, then turned back. “You ought to get in this line yourself,” he said to the owner. “This country’s goin’ grow. You can get in on the ground floor. You can do more than just make a living. You can leave your kids an inheritance.” Darby stopped, ashamed of himself for talking like a real drummer.

He took a room at the hotel, which was a two-story house with rooms off a central corridor upstairs and down and two outdoor privies in the back, one for women, another with a three-hole seat for men. It was while using the latter that Darby was advised to consult the postmistress for the whereabouts of local ranches. “She knows everybody,” his advisor said, who happened to be a judge of the circuit court, in town for hearing grievances and property disputes. Darby took account of the judge’s presence with a double satisfaction, knowing that such a magistrate was precisely the sort to whom the presence of a fugitive from law like Colin Morrell should be reported.

A note in Darby’s handwriting:

Feb. 10, 1912. Arrived this evening. Cold wind rising. Not much difference between this hotel and a run of the mill boarding house. Three Forest Service men at table for supper. They are on their way to measure snow depth on the Kaibab plateau thirty or forty miles south of here which I am told butts onto the Grand Canyon. We gathered in the parlor after supper with a nice rumbling fire in a glazed German stove. That must have cost a pretty penny to tote way out here.

By the time Darby turned off the kerosene lantern and got into bed, a blizzard was in progress outside. At dawn, the wind abated and the sky began to clear, but wild, irregular dunes of fresh snow obliterated the roads that led from town. That was

ominous. Making his way to the ranch of William Prothman was a dubious proposition given the best of weather. Once again, the precariousness—no, the utter foolishness—of his plan bore in on him, and he was of half a mind to take the northbound stage when it left, though that wouldn't be until the next morning. Like it or not, he had a Sunday to spend in Kanab.

His prospects improved while he and the Forest Service men still sat at the breakfast table. While the girl who had waited on the table was clearing dishes, the hotel's manager—a portly woman—came into the dining room. "Would one of you men be so kind as to help Mrs. Prothman who rents the back rooms get in some wood?" the manager said. "Her husband didn't show up in that storm yesterday, and she's trying to split wood in this snow. She's been sickish, and her baby's got the croup too."

"I guess I could do that," one of the Forest Service men said.

"Let me," said Darby, quickly standing up. "The exercise would do me good."

Out the back door and around the corner of the house, Darby found a small woman wearing a long coat buttoned at the collar and a scarf tied over her head. In her bare hands she held an axe with which she tried to scrape snow from a mound of wood.

"Let me do that for you, ma'am," he said, reaching for the axe.

She seemed reluctant to give it up. He tugged and she released her grip.

"Go in," he said, and she did.

He split an armload of wood and took it in. The woman stoked the stove, which fortunately had embers enough to ignite the snow-dampened juniper. A boy of maybe six years sat at a small dining table writing on a slate. An infant of less than a year lay on a sofa, breathing noisily. An empty crib stood in a corner. "She's got the croup," the woman said.

Darby split wood steadily for a couple of hours, filling the wood-box next to the kitchen range. Each time he brought in an armload he looked about the room. A shelf was hung on the wall next to the door. On it were silver salt and pepper shakers, a few knickknacks, and several photographs in frames. There was none of a person who resembled Colin Morrell.

Without her coat, the woman appeared close to being emaciated. Her cheeks were sunken, her long blond hair tied back. She seemed eager to talk, responding readily to Darby's questions.

She said she was ill. It wasn't the croup. Something in her lungs. She said it was lonely in town. She didn't feel lonely out at the ranch though it was just her and Bill and the kids out there, plus a Paiute family that worked for them. This was her first year in town. Their boy Bobby was six now and needed to go to school. But Kanab wasn't an easy town to live in if you weren't a Mormon. She didn't tell Darby that until after she had asked him in a timid, roundabout way whether he was Mormon and he had decided he would learn more from her if he told her he wasn't, which in a sense was true. As for this woman—Agnes was her name—she said she and Bill didn't belong to any church. They just believed in Jesus. They read the Bible on Sunday nights when they were together, especially the parts about Jesus.

She was a native of Barstow, California. She was working as a waitress in a restaurant when she met Bill. He was in town selling cattle. He swept her off her feet. She had never met anybody like him. They were both orphans, more or less. That is, her daddy died when she was a little girl and her mother died the year Agnes turned fifteen, and Bill's parents were killed by Indians in Kansas. A kind couple from Wichita raised him, but they were dead now and so neither Agnes nor Bill had anywhere to go back home to. But she didn't mind. Bill was so kind, so gentle. It was something to watch him with the kids. She didn't know what she would do without him. She just hoped and prayed he didn't have an accident or a renegade Indian didn't come along and shoot him. She prayed hard Jesus would protect him. "Jesus! He's our hope, he's our sustainer," she said.

All this Darby gathered intermittently as he brought in the split wood. It was interesting but unrevealing. He felt let down, frustrated, even angry, being no closer to knowing whether William Prothman—her Bill—was Colin Morrell than before he had launched himself upon this fool's errand.

And then things changed with a cataclysmic suddenness: the sun stood still, the waters of the Red Sea parted, Vesuvius erupted.

As he entered the kitchen with a final armload of wood, Darby heard an exclamation of delighted surprise from Agnes, a happy shout from Bobby, and the murmuring intonation of a deep masculine voice, and he knew with no doubt whatsoever that Colin Morrell had just come home to his wife and children.

Darby panicked, thought of dropping his armload of wood on the floor and running, but finally froze and stood where he was. Agnes entered the kitchen, closely followed by Colin and Bobby.

“This nice man has filled our wood-box to overflowing,” Agnes said.

“I’m in your debt,” Colin said.

“It’s nothing to speak of,” Darby mumbled, bending to conceal his face while he carefully deposited each stick upon the overfull wood-box.

“I meant to be here last night,” Colin said, “but the storm forced me to hole up along the way.”

Darby backed from the kitchen into the snowy outdoors, waving a hand as he closed the door. Though he had been working in his shirtsleeves, he was sweating. He retrieved his jacket and his bowler from a fence post where he had hung them and trudged to the front entrance of the hotel and went to his room. For the moment, he was feeling superior, triumphant, on top of the world. William Prothman and Colin Morrell were one and the same person. “We’ve got him!” Darby said silently to Harley McAlister. “We’ve nailed him!”

The room was cold so he put on the jacket and also his overcoat. He took off his shoes and lay on the bed. He could feel the revolver in the pocket of his jacket. It comforted him. Also it sobered him, brought him down off the top of the world. Colin wasn’t in custody yet, and taking him could prove a dangerous business. So what was Darby’s next move? Inform the circuit judge of the presence of a felon wanted for robbery and murder in Cody, Wyoming? Or first look up the county sheriff, assuming there would be such an officer in Kanab, the seat of Kane County? Or might there be a federal marshal in town?

He could hear the tolling of a bell, probably the signal for the Mormons of Kanab to gather for sacrament meeting. He wondered how many of them truly believed in a living Jesus. A

strange question, that, just now. Or maybe not so strange. Those who believed were the lucky ones. They had an antidote, a cure, for fear. They felt watched over and protected. *Felt* watched over, *felt* protected. Sooner or later Jesus would let them down just as he would very, very shortly let Agnes Prothman down. She relied on him to protect her husband from accidents and renegade Indians. At this moment she basked in her husband's presence, blissfully unaware of the looming presence, not of a protective Jesus, but of the blind goddess who in one hand held the scales of impartial judgment and in the other the double-edged sword of Justice.

What was there about Agnes that reminded him of Tilly? Agnes was blond and had grayish eyes and a sweet, plaintive smile, quite unlike his blue-eyed, dark-haired, befreckled Tilly. Wasn't the common bond between them their wifeliness, their motherliness? He regretted having thought of Tilly just now. For years he had imagined her grief and devastation should calamity befall him. For years he had tried to be cautious, to foresee and thereby forestall danger, to keep himself hale, hearty, and whole for the benefit of those who depended on him. And now, far too easily, he could imagine the approaching devastation of Agnes Prothman.

He could see where his sympathy for her led, and he tried to steel himself against it. "I won't abandon you," he said to Harley. He imagined himself rising from the bed and finding the judge this instant but he didn't. Later, reading a days-old newspaper in the dining room, which served as the hotel foyer between meals, he continued to assure himself that he would shortly seek out the judge, but he didn't. Nor did he say a word to the judge after sitting with him at supper. In bed, he lay rigidly awake much of the night, determined to see the thing through at first opportunity in the morning.

At breakfast the stage driver announced that a cowboy from Long Valley had informed him the road to Panguitch was passable, and he therefore intended to start north as scheduled. After the others had left the breakfast table, Darby remained sitting there for a few moments, but no longer in a state of paralysis. He *had* abandoned Harley, he saw. He *couldn't* ruin Agnes Prothman, *couldn't* plunge her into widowhood. This gross miscarriage of justice had to be, whereby Colin Morrell went on enjoying the fruits

of robbery and murder. Darby rose and went out to tell the stage driver he intended to be in the coach when it rolled northward.

As much as possible Darby kept his thoughts centered upon Harley throughout the long day in the pitching, jolting coach. It was a memorial session of sorts, a way of paying respect and affirming their friendship, also a way of begging forgiveness for conceding to Agnes Prothman's greater need. By way of compensation, Darby tried to recall scenes from those happy two and a half years in Butte when they had spent sabbaths together, rambling over the hills in good weather and frequenting the union reading room in bad weather.

On the second day of the journey northward, the coach driver halted the stage briefly and pointed out the log cabin in which the famous bank and train robber Butch Cassidy had grown up. His present whereabouts were, of course, a matter of debate. Some said he was living out at Robber's Roost or in New York City under a new alias. Others said he and the Sundance Kid had migrated to South America and had been killed in a shootout with Bolivian soldiers. Darby couldn't help wondering whether such stories had grown up in the vicinity of Colin Morrell's boyhood, wherever that might be—certainly not in Kansas as Agnes Prothman had been led to believe.

This reflection brought Darby back to the ambiguity, the moral uncertainty, of his decision to spare Colin for the sake of his wife. His wife prayed to Jesus to keep her husband safe from accidents and renegade Indians. Ironically, it was a mortal Jesus acting in proxy who had saved him most recently. But wasn't that the way with the real Jesus? The real Jesus was the Jesus in good men and good women who did the right thing when it was needed. A make-do Jesus? Yes, but under the present circumstances, wasn't that Jesus enough?