

## Funeral Flowers

By Breck LeSueur

"Charles Moore died yesterday."

"Who?" Anna asked, wiping her hands on her rosy red day dress, a basket of dark brown hair pinned up behind her head.

"Charles Moore," James replied, stabbing at the obituary in the morning paper. "We went to high school together."

Sitting beside James was the Young's oldest son, Ben, shoveling spoonfuls of oatmeal into his sticky mouth. Ben was nearly twelve with a dirty blond crop of bed hair, cheeks sprinkled with summer freckles. Across from Ben was Brigham, just over ten, munching on toast and eating in slow, calculated bites. Seated next to Brigham was Frances, two years younger than Brigham. The dining room situated in the back of the home was small, a snug fit for the little family. A simple brass light fixture hung over the cherry wood table and two family portraits adorned the wall. A soft morning glow bathed the dining room, and birds fluttered outside the window, trilling and beating their wings in the crisp morning air. A sprightly row of pink and white carnations peaked through the window, as the dew speckled leaves of a black walnut tree tapped against the glass. Peach and white striped drapes hung loosely over the pane glass window providing a cheery view of the trimmed grass yard. Three years earlier the stock market had crashed, plundering nations and leaving their peoples hopelessly poor. The Youngs, like so many families of their time, lived without the luxuries and material comforts enjoyed by the previous generation. James Young was bright, honest, industrious and far more fortunate than most men his age, employed as a store manager at the local Wright's Market. His meager but adequate pay afforded the basic needs of a small family, and selling their Model A Ford a year earlier provided the cash

necessary to meet monthly mortgage payments. Sacrifices had been made but all in all the little family was content and lived by the frugality common to their Mormon heritage. Anna was creative and hard-working, using all of her talents to find ways to spend less and cut excess waste. Optimistic and strikingly resilient, a trait so common to little children, the Young children worked and played and lived life oblivious to the economic dearth that depressed the adults of their decade. James and Anna Young had their children, their religion, and a modest income, living on a prayer in simple happiness.

"Yes, yes, what a shame," James said. "Such a young wife and young children...and he was only my age."

Anna hefted baby Ruth to her shoulder and gently patted her on the back. Ruth nestled her face into Anna's neck and closed her eyes. Brigham looked up from his breakfast and waited for his father to continue with the article. The idea of death was still meaningless and foreign to Brigham, and most of the time he gave the thought little attention. Death was something that happened in stories and to other people, and would never happen to him or someone near him. Children live forever. But there was something strange and unusual about this particular death.

"Read further," mother said, turning off the wood burning stove.

On the previous page James found a brief article about the accident and continued, "It says here that yesterday morning on his way to work Mr. Moore drove through an intersection hitting another automobile. Apparently, the other automobile, owned by a Mr. Joseph Gallagher, was coming the opposite direction and had the right of way. Mr. Moore's Ford Model B smashed into Mr. Gallagher's passenger side, damaging both automobiles and killing Mr. Moore. Unharmed, Mr. Gallagher pulled Mr. Moore from the car. Mr. Gallagher reported that Mr. Moore was dead when he found him after the crash. The funeral--"

"I should have guessed it was an automobile crash," Anna huffed, while wiping the table. "Who will be next? How many people have already been killed by them...here in Mesa alone?" She began counting the accidents in her head, struggling to remember the grisly details. "The day before Christmas, Hugh and Margaret Fletcher's little boy was run down while trying to cross the street. Some careless driver wasn't paying attention and barreled right over him. How tragic...the funeral and all!" Anna began to wipe more furiously. "And only a few months later, Emily Lines and her boyfriend stole off with her father's Model A...took it all the way out to Lehi cavorting about on some crazed joy ride. They lost control at forty miles an hour and plunged headlong into an irrigation ditch. Neither of them survived. Then there was --"

"Anna," James said, "Honestly."

"I like them," Ben piped in with a sticky smile. "Especially the fast ones."

"Well, I'm scared of them," Frances said.

"That's because you are just a baby," Ben sneered. "And babies are afraid of everything."

Frances's mouth wrinkled in a twisted scowl and her eyes narrowed. "I am not a baby!" she cried, pointing her spoon at Benny. "Mommy, Benny called me a baby."

Ben smiled. "Well you are."

"Mama...Did you hear him?"

Brandishing a wet rag, Anna wiped Ben's face and picked up his empty bowl.

"Ben," Anna said, "I think its time for you to start your morning chores."

"Already?"

"Yes, already," Anna said. "With all the talking you're doing you're obviously done eating. Change into your clothes and hurry outside. There's plenty of mowing that needs to be done today."

"But mother she...she tried to hit me with her spoon."

"Not another word. Hurry and change."

Ben glared back at Frances and vaulted from his chair, pacing to his bedroom. Smiling in triumph, Frances returned to toying with her bowl of oatmeal. Anna dropped Ben's dirty bowl into the sink and returned to the counter, dabbing at some pretended blemish on its spotless surface.

"Anna," James said, "consider what automobiles have done for the economy and transportation, for goodness sakes. Honestly, you must consider all of the benefits...I can't imagine what the world would be like without automobiles! At the supermarket alone we can sell so many things that weren't available before. And imagine basic transportation--."

"I *know* what it would be like," she said. "We've been living without one for almost a year and have survived just fine."

James reloaded, raising his eyebrows.

"Ah...remember the evening drives we loved taking together."

"Of course I remember them."

"I'm just saying that you have to look at the benefits."

"Of course I see the benefits," Anna said. "They're just dangerous and I'm tired of seeing people hurt."

"Well, death comes to us all in one way or another," James said. "When God decides that it's time to pass on there's no preventing it."

"All I know is that it's fortunate we sold ours last year," Anna said, regaining her composure, "A true blessing in disguise."

James was plotting his response, but changing his mind took a deep breath and picked up his newspaper. His wife was entitled to her opinion, and he wasn't too proud to let her have the last word. Shuffling through the paper he found the article and continued reading. Frances was using her small fingers to stuff the oatmeal into her mouth. Lumps of oatmeal were stuck to her face and spilling over the edge

of her bowl. Little Ruth had begun to whimper, so Anna bounced her about and stepped into the other room. Nose in his newspaper, James continued reading, Brig desperately wishing he would read aloud. Scooting himself across his chair, Brig attempted to peer into the folds of the paper, but Father's arm was blocking the words.

"Do you need something?" James asked, eyeing him curiously.

"No," Brig mumbled. "I'm fine."

Trying to read the article right now was hopeless. Brigham's only opportunity would be to read it after Father left for work. With the paper all to himself, he would find the article and discover something new about the accident. After laying Ruth down, Anna paced back into the kitchen. She spotted Frances dipping her hands and fingers into her oatmeal.

"It looks like you're done, too," Anna said, picking up Frances's bowl.

Frances nodded, with an impish smile.

"Change your clothes and you can help me bake bread."

Beaming, Frances picked up her crutches and slid onto her feet. Her crutches "click-clacked" across the kitchen floor as she hurried to her bedroom. Anna picked up a piece of cold toast and sat down next to James. In Anna's face glowed a sweet harmony of strength and beauty, tenacity and compassion. She brushed a long strand of hair from her youthful face and took a bite from her toast.

"So, did you know him very well?"

"Not very well," James said. "We both attended Mesa High and graduated together. We had different groups of friends...played against him in church basketball. I ran track with him...incredible at hurdles and the long-jump. If I remember right he was state champion for a couple of years in a row. Very popular, yes, I remember that...very popular."

James took a drink of milk. "Ah, and he was student body president."

"Where did he work?"

James bit his lip and looked down. "I think he helped manage the Alhambra Hotel on South McDonald and Main. If I remember right, he did very well there; and survived the market crash better than most. Very successful in his business and was moderately wealthy, I believe."

"I'm surprised I don't know his wife and children," Anna said.

"I think they live on the other side of town," James replied, "and kept to themselves. I rarely saw him or his wife at the store."

"His poor wife and children," Anna said, thinking about how tragic it would be to lose James. The thought of losing him made her regret the things she had said earlier. She wanted to tell him how tragic life would be without him.

"Charles left a lot of money...and the bishop and ward will help," James said, referring to the local Mormon community who would bear the responsibility of taking care of the small family. Member donated funds were set aside to help the needy when necessary.

James finished off his toast and washed it down with a glass of milk then stood up, brushing some crumbs from his white shirt and stubby brown necktie. Athletic, strong and an inch under six feet, James, like his wife, was healthy and young. His tawny-brown hair was combed tightly back and a pair of piercing blue eyes studded his face. James folded up the newspaper and stuffed it into his briefcase, Brigham's eyes following its every move. His heart dropped and furrowing his brow, he took another bite of his breakfast. Jaws chomping and mind racing, he plotted how to retrieve the paper before his father left for work.

'Perhaps he will forget something in his room, and then I can snatch it,' Brigham thought. 'Or maybe when he is kissing mother or looking for his lunch?'

James picked up the briefcase with the newspaper trapped inside and walked across the kitchen to the refrigerator. He opened the refrigerator door, rummaged around inside, and found his lunch. Anna stood up and met him halfway to the door.

"Thanks for making my lunch," James said, smiling. They stared at each other for a moment and then kissed.

"Are you going to the funeral?" Anna asked, her cheeks flushed red.

"No, unfortunately not," James replied. "We have three new employees starting and I'm supposed to spend the day training them."

Anna mentally mapped out her schedule for the day. "I'm so busy, too...work in the garden, Frances's dress... and Ben's pants need stitching."

"I wouldn't worry," James said.

Anna looked out the window at her flower bed and then at Brigham. "I'll send Brigham with some flowers."

Brigham, who had been peering pensively into his bowl of oatmeal, heard his name and looked up. "What?"

"Great idea," James smiled. "Love you."

"Love you, too."

James stepped outside and hurried down the driveway. Anna sat down at the table and picked up her toast.

"What did ya need?" Brigham asked.

"We need you to run some flowers over to Brother Moore's funeral."

A funeral. Brigham had never been to a funeral before. A deluge of questions washed through Brigham's mind. Where is the funeral? Who do I give the flowers to? If I go alone they'll laugh at me and make me leave. Will everyone be crying, except me? Question after question, unanswered and ugly, came stumbling and tripping through Brigham's mind. Like a clumsy crowd squeezing through a doorway, each thought elbowed and shoved, struggling its

way in. The blinding fog of fear thickened with each new question. Who would be at the funeral? How long will I have to stay? Was Brother Moore's family going to be there? I will be *alone*.

"Why me?" Brigham asked, fear kindling in his eyes. Little hairs began to prickle on his ears and tingle like spiders down his neck. His fingers grew cold and clammy, and the oats in his stomach began to swirl like milk cream in a butter churn.

Anna divined the distress in Brigham's eyes and gently touched his face, "Why not?"

His skin was cool and moist and his cheek muscles tensed. "And why are you so cold?"

A war drum throbbed in Brigham's chest and the numbness now stretched from crown to toe. His small heart tightened and a few stray tears trickled down his cheeks.

"Brigham, what's wrong?" Anna asked, using a thumb to wipe the tears from under his puffy, red eyes. Anna pulled him closer and laid his head against her arm, wiping another tear. Brigham sniffed and wiped his nose.

"What's wrong?" she asked again. "Are you worried about riding your bicycle to the funeral? It's not very far."

Brigham shook his head slightly. Several thoughts lay scattered before him and he desperately tried to discover the cause of such terrific feelings. He, himself, wasn't sure why he was crying and didn't know why he was so frightened.

"Look at me." Anna cupped his head in her hands and stared into his face. Brigham opened his eyes; deep, blue, and beautiful, like his father's, Anna thought. "Brigham, it will be okay." Each word was kind and calmly enunciated. Brigham stared back, his mother's chestnut eyes wide and searching. *You will be okay*. Then suddenly the fog was gone. Anna watched the light splash back into Brigham's eyes. His muscles relaxed and his skin grew warm. The trembling in his arms and chest subsided. Anna

held him for a moment longer until his breathing calmed. Frances hobbled into the room, smiling like a spring flower, freshly dressed and ready for the day.

"Come here," Anna said, gathering her up. The three sat for a moment in a prolonged embrace until Benny trotted in.

"Ew...what are you doing," Ben said. "Brig, you are such a baby!"

Brigham jerked out of the embrace, head low.

"Benjamin Young!" Anna jabbed her finger toward the back door. "I think your weeds are waiting."

The sun still cowered low in the east, its lustrous rays preparing to paint the bluish sky. The morning air was cool and crisp, and the trees had come alive with restless birds rustling their branches. A parade of orange blossoms caught a passing breeze, fluttered for a moment and drifted to the ground. Freshly fallen leaves sprinkled the wet, glimmering grass and the low growl of Benjamin handling the lawn mower reverberated nearby. James Young had purchased the small parcel of land seven years earlier from a neighboring farmer. Fortunately, he had acquired the land before the market crash. As a result of the stock market crash, few men his age owned any land, much less property this close in town. In the spirit of his pioneer forefathers, James wrestled with the land, tirelessly nurturing it, until the desert soil teemed with life. "They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them..." Brigham heard his father reading from Isaiah. And occasionally he would speak of the desert, which would "blossom as a rose." It was no small endeavor to transform the harsh Arizona soil into a suitable womb for vegetation; and James Young had done it. Lofty columns of black walnut trees encircled the lot and provided a bordering slice of shade. Orange trees rife with popcorn blossoms dotted the yard and a fruitful

garden occupied its northeast corner. The Youngs worked the harsh, desert soil until it became a cornucopia of grapes, watermelons, carrots, squash, zucchini and plump tomatoes. The panoply of fruits and vegetables supplemented the families income, particularly helpful after James' wage cut in '29.

Brigham picked up the milk bucket and hurried across the lawn toward the barn bracing the eastern border of the property. The sunny resplendence of the fresh morning panorama lightened Brigham's mind and washed away the fears which had vexed him earlier. In his mother's eyes he had found solace and chores kept his mind busy. Twice, thoughts of the funeral had tried to creep in, but Brigham promptly chased them away. For now, he preferred to bury them.

Upon reaching the barn, Brigham sat the bucket down and found his father's irrigation boots. Sitting on the ground, he pulled the oversized rubber boots up to his thighs. There was something strangely electric about wearing the boots. Stepping into them magically transformed Brigham into his father. While the boots were on his feet, Brigham was endowed with an added measure of confidence. The boots filled him with courage and unusual strength.

After struggling to stand up, Brigham picked up the milk bucket and waddled into the barn. The dank smell of manure pinched Brigham's nostrils as he stepped through the doors. There had been times in Brigham's life when he was afraid of the barn. On multiple occasions he had felt that someone else -- or something else was in the barn with him. Brigham's wasn't sure if he had seen anything, but expressly felt that he wasn't alone. He experienced the strange sensation one gets when feeling someone staring into their back. Those fears of the bar had subsided with age and the magical assistance of father's irrigation boots.

Neatly strung along the wood slat walls were father's tools: shovels, spades, hoes, shears, loppers, a saw, a

hammer, a rake. Hanging on one wall was a rusty red wheelbarrow and a leather saddle beside it. A cabinet of nails, screws, bolts and other doodads was pushed against the opposite wall. Small slices of light traced the wood ribbed ceiling and a heavy bag of chicken feed dangled from one of the rafters. Occupying the back half of the barn was a muddy stall where Ginger, the Young's only milking cow, waited patiently. "Ginger" was the appellation sarcastically bestowed by Anna in reference to her favorite baking spice. Brigham found the milking stool and stood it next to Ginger.

Brigham patted her bulging belly like his father always did and whispered in her ear, "Good morning, beautiful."

Resting on the stool with the bucket under Ginger's belly, Brigham started to pump her udders, rhythmically squeezing up and down. He repeatedly pulled and squeezed, Ginger occasionally shaking her head and stamping her hoof.

Milk began to fill the tin bucket as Brigham's thoughts strayed. Thick darkness hung around him now, extinguishing a slice of light peaking through the grubby glass window. The questions at the breakfast table began to pour back into his mind. 'What else happened?' He wondered why he was so curious about the accident. After all, it wasn't his business; and who would care that a kid wanted to know what *actually* happened. Brig wanted to ask his father, but knew he would only be annoyed. Questioning father would only frustrate him.

'Brigham, it isn't your business,' he heard his father say.

Squirt. Squirt.

What bothered Brigham most was that no one was asking the important questions. Mr. Moore supposedly ran a stop sign and smashed into the side of another automobile. But was it *really* his fault? Did he *really* run the stop sign? The news article said that he was dead when Mr. Gallagher found him. Was he *really* dead when Mr. Gallagher found

him? Perhaps he lived a few minutes longer and muttered a few parting words. Brigham wasn't sure why he was so skeptical, but was definitely frustrated by his ignorance. Perhaps he could find the article when his father returned home. He could read well and should be able to understand most of the words.

Squirt. Squirt. Ginger swished her tail.

Lurking beyond the endless list of unanswered questions was a fearful thought that Brigham couldn't put his finger on. Brigham felt as though he could not be at peace, until that single, horrid thought was revealed. Brother Moore. The crash. Two mangled automobiles. Brigham traced back, sifting through the confusing collection of scattered thoughts. The funeral. The flowers. The body. *The body*. Would Charles Moore's body be at the funeral? This single fear, above all others, deeply disturbed Brigham. The haunting image of Brother Moore's corpse loomed lonely on the center stage of Brigham's mind. Fear gripped Brigham's arms and wrapped around his legs. Ginger's udders turned icy in Brigham's fingers and sweat began to swirl on his forehead, salty rivulets trickling into his eyes. Growing cold inside and feeling his chest start to throb, Brigham grasped for any salvation from this new found fear. He stared down at his father's irrigation boots, stuck deep in the paste of Ginger's manure.

'Pa's boots!' Suddenly courage flooded his heart and the throbbing in his chest subsided. The aching fear began to ooze out of his mind. 'Father would not be afraid. Father would not be scared.' Brigham took a deep breath and hefted the milk bucket out from under Ginger. 'Father would not be afraid. Father would not be scared.' He repeated these words in his mind and hurried to the open door of the dingy barn. Stepping outside, he took another deep breath, relieved by the sun's warming hand. Still wearing the manure caked irrigation boots, he dashed across the lawn. Brigham

reached the back door and absentmindedly trudged into the kitchen. Anna screamed.

Anna followed Brigham out onto the front porch, brandishing a pair of pruning shears. After feeding the chickens and hoeing weeds, Brigham glumly changed from his soiled work clothes into a blue button up and brown slacks. Attacking him with a wash cloth, Anna mopped up his grimy face and ran a comb across his head, parting it nicely to the side. Anna knelt down and picked out the most beautiful daffodils, snipping them at the stem. Piling the daffodils into a sheet of butcher paper, she sidled further down the road to a cluster of carnations. Selecting the flowers with the brightest and broadest petals, she began to snip again, collecting the carnations in her hand. After carefully choosing several carnations, Anna laid them into the butcher paper with the daffodils and wrapped them together into a beautiful bouquet. Despite all of the worries and fears which lay thick on Brigham's mind, the sight of his mother gathering the flowers and tying them into a bouquet brought a smile to his face.

"Mother," Brigham said, looking down at the flower garden which was missing its most beautiful flowers. "Why did you choose the best flowers?"

"Brigham," Anna said, stooping down to face him. Her chestnut haired poured over her ears and cascaded down her shoulders. "The Moore family is very sad right now...and there is nothing like flowers to cheer up the broken-hearted. Brother Moore's children are without a father now...and their little hearts are aching for their father, who they won't see for a very long time. Imagine how happy they will be when they see my best carnations and daffodils wrapped up in this...butcher paper." Anna and Brigham laughed, and she gave him a soft squeeze. His long fingers dug anxiously into the folds of Anna's sleeves. She sensed that something still bothered him.

"Are you still worried?"

Brigham nodded. He couldn't to begin to describe the horror he felt about going to the funeral. Undoubtedly, Mother would understand and listen carefully, but planted deep in Brigham's soul was the growing pride of a little man who didn't feel right about expressing his fears. The omnipresent authority of his father was reminding him 'not be afraid' and to 'handle his fears.'

'You're becoming a man,' Father would say. 'God hasn't given us the spirit of fear, son. But of power, love, and a sound mind.'

Brigham knew about fear and power and love, but not sure about a "sound mind." He guessed it had something to do with the opposite "mind" that he had now. He didn't want to feel this fear, but it relentlessly gnawed and stung like an unforgiving tooth ache. Brigham tucked those fears to a hidden corner of his mind, trying to think past them.

"All you have to do is go into the meeting house and there should be someone at the front door who will show you where to put the flowers," Anna said.

"That is all," Brigham replied. He had expected a much more elaborate delivery. These instructions didn't include the body or funeral service. His hopes rose and his heart lightened. "Just hand them the flowers and leave?"

"Yes," Anna said.

"I don't need to go into the funeral?"

"Nope. Just hand them the flowers and come home," Anna said with a smile. "And when you come home I imagine there'll be a very special treat waiting.

The dead weight of the fears he had harbored slowly began to dissolve.

"Now, go get the bicycle and we'll put the flowers in it."

Brigham hurried over to the rusty red bicycle leaned against a wall and walked it to his mother. She gently laid the bouquet in a basket above the back wheel. Brigham

thought it a strange paradox that such beautiful flowers would be present at a funeral. Funerals were dark, gloomy places and a vibrant bouquet of flowers would most assuredly be out of place. Out of place or not, the flowers added a coat of comfort to Brigham's heart as he gave them one final look before mounting the bike. Anne kissed him on the forehead and waved him off.

"Now, hurry and I'll have something special waiting."

Brigham pushed off and pedaled down the smooth dirt road. The sun was high overhead now and pressing on Brigham's back. Sweat began to bead on his head and neck, and his shirt was damp under his arms. Pedaling faster, the oncoming wind brushing his face was a welcomed distraction from the oppressive sun. Brigham let his head hang back and smiled, the wind washing over him. The bicycle ride was smooth and exhilarating and quickly flushed the fears of the funeral from his mind. Returning a brief wave from a neighbor on his porch, Brigham turned a corner west and onto Main Street. Ahead Brigham could see the Mesa Temple rising into view. Like an unshakeable mountain of white cut stone, the edifice was built after the pattern of King Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem. Often Anna would recount to Brigham the day the land for the temple was dedicated. Heber J. Grant, seventh prophet and president of the Mormon church, traveled from Salt Lake City and participated in the ground breaking ceremony for the prospective temple. After returning home from the service Anna began to feel the pains of labor, and five hours later Brigham was born. She liked to say that the two events were connected in some way, and the fact that he was born on the same day as the ground breaking made him special. In consequence of this concurrence of dates, Brigham had always felt an affinity for the temple and a special connectedness to it from a very young age. The temple was the spiritual center of the Mormon community and represented the culmination of Latter-Day Saint worship. It

was the holy of holies and most hallowed sanctum; a beating heart that pumped life into the surrounding community. Like the ancient temple of King Solomon, it was a place where heaven and earth connected and God made his will known to man. Brigham looked forward to the day when he could cross over its holy threshold and experience the ordinances that awaited him there. The sanctity of the moment was shattered by the snarl of an automobile that sped by. The smell of exhaust and cough of engines grew louder as more automobiles filled the street. Moments later Brigham was pedaling along downtown Mesa, which was booming with activity and the murmur of commercialism. Crowding Main Street were a hodgepodge of businesses decorated with elaborate signs. Store windows were a cacophony of colorful product displays. Pedestrians and shoppers moved in and out of stores and congregated on corners, laughing and gushing about the latest gossip and headline. Downtown Mesa had a noise. Brigham reveled in the familiarity of the raucous, but noticed its stark contrast from the serenity surrounding the temple. The patchwork of stores flashed by in a colorful blur as Brigham curiously peeked in each window. Brigham weaved in and out of the crowd of people, carefully navigating his way down Main Street. He passed the Valley Bank, the Mesa Opera House, LeSueur and Gibbon's Groceries and Dry Goods, the Nile Theater and Wright's Market, where his father was working. After crossing Country Club Road the swarm of pedestrians and automobiles began to dwindle. The meeting house wasn't much further now, and suddenly the slumbering fear began to rise in Brigham's throat.

'Dear God, please don't let the body be in the front room,' Brigham prayed. He had seen his mother pleading to God in prayer and believed it would help him, too. Anna taught him that God would hear his simple words and understand his thoughts in his heart.

*God, please help me not to be scared.*

God, the flowers, and the wind temporarily buoyed his spirits. Brigham looked back to make sure the flowers were still in the basket and imagined using them as a shield if Brother Moore's body was present. Holding them in front of his face, he would enter the meeting house. After handing the flowers over he would turn and run. *Yes, that would work.*

The Alma Ward meeting house soon appeared at the end of the street, automobiles and visitors crowded closely around it. Besides the customary Sunday meetings held at the church, Brigham had attended socials and other Mormon community events held there. The meeting house was sizeable and strong with white milky walls and crowned by a distinct gabled roof. Visitors poured in through two grand doors that faced Main Street and some mingled on the porch and sparkling lawn. Beyond the meeting house Brigham spotted a row of familiar cottonwoods hugging Extension Road. Shaded by the trees was the canal where Brigham and his friends would swim during the hot summers. Happy memories of family and friends usually flowed from this place, but today Brigham looked upon it with a worried brow and heavy heart.

Instead of going directly inside, Brigham parked his bicycle at the edge of the property -- waiting and watching. The procession of visitors continued to grow, streaming into the meeting house; some carried flowers and envelopes; others sobbed with their heads hung low. Most of the visitors were somber with ashen expressions of chiseled stone. Children scurried about, oblivious to the gloom enshrouding their parents. One mother clutched her little boy's hand as he wriggled and tried to break free. Brigham could see her hushing him with a pointed finger. Pedaling closer, Brigham tried to stare inside the front doors, but heads and shoulders blocked his view. Child after child passed through the tall doors of the chapel and Brigham

could hear Benny's taunts reverberating through his mind:  
*Brig, you are such a baby!*

"I am not a baby," Brigham replied, almost audibly. If so many children younger than him could go into the chapel, surely he could. Brigham hadn't heard any childish screams, so he concluded that Brother Moore's body must not be in the foyer. Taking a long breath, Brigham mounted his bicycle and crossed the street. The crowd had dispersed a little and most of the visitors had crossed through the foyer and found a seat in the chapel. Brigham parked his bicycle just outside the door, timorously picked up the flowers, and peaked inside. No casket. No corpse. Gripping the bouquet, Brigham stepped into the foyer and was stopped by a black-suited sentinel, staring down with obsidian eyes. Brigham didn't speak, but just looked down and around, anywhere, but into the obsidian eyes.

"Are those for the bereaved?"

Brigham wasn't sure who the "Bereeves" were, specifically remembering "Moore" as being the dead man's name, but handed the flowers to the man anyway, hoping he was at the right funeral. The usher took the flowers with a smirk and added them to the collection of other gifts on a table nearby. Brigham's original plan had been to dash out of the foyer after delivering the flowers, but now he stood frozen, staring at the door to the chapel. Through the door Brigham could see everyone reaching for their hymnals as the organ began to groan. Brigham saw a little girl on her father's lap, looking down into the hymnal, smiling and playing with her curls. Down the aisle from her was a boy playing with a pocket knife, which his mother quickly confiscated. After the brooding chords of the organ's prelude, everyone joined in singing "I Know That My Redeemer Lives."

"...what comfort this sweet sentence gives," Brigham whispered quietly. "He lives-"

He noticed the usher at the front door had turned his head and was watching him carefully.

"Are you going in?" he asked.

Brigham responded by stepping slowly through the chapel doors. He spotted a section of empty chairs in the back corner and hurried toward them.

"...He lives, my ever-living head."

Brigham sang along in a whisper, looking out over the congregation and chapel. Spilling over the pulpit and its supporting wood-work were a brilliant array of flowers, sprays and ornamental wreaths. Brigham could see the top of a wooden bulge below the pulpit and realized it was the casket. Similar to the pulpit, it was adorned in layers of colorful flowers and seemed to shroud the lifelessness of the man sleeping securely beneath. Brigham had expected to be terrified when he saw the casket, but strangely felt at ease. The casket was far enough away and Brigham planned on keeping his distance. Still, the feeling of being in the same room as a dead body was unsettling. Brigham knew Brother Moore's spirit had gone out of him and traveled far away to inhabit a new place. But where? He remembered the chalkboard in Sunday School where Sister Smoot drew a series of circles and connected the "Earth" circle to the "Spirit World" circle with a long ladder. Brigham wondered if he was ascending the ladder and decided it was probably just a way to make the journey easier to understand. Surely, God had a better way of moving spirits from one place to another. Seated behind the podium were the presiding clergy wearing white shirts, ties and suits and singing along with the congregation. Behind them an older woman crouched intently over the organ, gnarled hands laying into the chords. Her fingers danced skillfully, only pausing to lift her horn-rimmed glasses, which appeared to be helplessly slipping down her nose. The organ's chords were long and deep, and ponderously stepping from one measure to the next. The beautiful blend of organ and congregation gave

birth to a palpable energy, rich and soaring, which flooded the room and washed over everyone present.

"Oh, sweet, the joy this sentence gives," the congregation sang, voices strong and united in faith and hope. "I know that my Redeemer lives."

The organist let go of the keys, but Brigham's heart continued to sing. Embedded in the chords, words and soaring melodies was a whisper that all he had sung was true. The electricity lingered and Brigham took a breath, thinking about the emotional waves still swelling in his heart. A few of the clergy at the stand were wiping their eyes as someone approached the pulpit and began to pray. Brigham instinctively folded his arms and bowed his head as the opening prayer was given. The first speaker, Brother Moore's surviving brother, took the pulpit and began a long and elaborate history of Brother Moore's life. Brigham smiled at the fact, that now he knew more about Charles Andrew Moore than his father did. He heard the facts concerning Moore's birth in St. George and later move to Arizona as a child. And a record of his glory days as a track star at Mesa High, which awarded him a scholarship at the University of Utah. After graduating *summa cum laude* in business at the University of Utah, Charles Moore served a full-time, Latter-Day Saint proselytizing mission. Subsequently, he returned home to Mesa, married Mildred Hathcock, and began working at the Alhambra Hotel. After working at the Alhambra for several years he became the head manager and prospered in that position up until his death. While living in Mesa he served in a variety of callings in the Mormon church, and during their thirteen years of marriage had six children. Each new nugget of information concerning Charles Moore left Brigham wishing he had personally known him. His name, so foreign and face less in the newspaper, now took on an added dimension with edges and a lifelike shape. Brigham read the reality of his life in the face of his brother, and later, the face of his

close friend. He was a loved father, brother, husband and friend who had lived, breathed and was suddenly gone. When Charles' two small daughters sang a duet, Brigham's heart seemed to crack wide open and spill out onto the floor like a broken egg. Tears began to collect at his eyes and he wiped them away, remembering it was the second time he had cried today.

*Brig, you are such a baby.*

Looking back up, he watched the girls finish and return to their seats. Brigham watched Mildred Moore embrace the little girls and lift them onto her lap. From the back, Brigham could see that her head was low and her shoulders shaking. Charles' younger sister approached the pulpit and began to speak.

"Such a sad, sad place to be today," came a hoarse whisper from behind Brigham. Brigham assumed the man was talking to someone else and proceeded to wipe his nose.

"Don't you agree?" the stranger asked, taking a seat next to Brigham.

*Of course I agree.* Brigham wanted to scoot over slightly, but decided it would be rude. Not sure how to reply, he nodded with a curt, "Yes."

The stranger was tall, almost lanky, with a full-head of polished brown hair, supported by a steep, worried brow. His eyes were deep and distant and his lips puckered in a frown. Brigham noticed his long, white fingers tightly interlaced and turning blue.

"Look at their poor mother," the stranger said, his neck stretched, struggling for a better view of the family. "And the little girls, how beautiful they sang."

Brigham nodded.

A prolonged silence followed, and neither the stranger or Brigham moved, each listening closely to Charles' sister speak.

"And all the nice things they say about him," the stranger said, with a short smile. "As if he were the

embodiment of every good quality God had bestowed upon man."

*How incredibly rude.*

"Student body president, track hero, *summa cum laude*, successful hotel manager..."

*And what did he do to you?* What right did this man have to come to a funeral and speak about the deceased like that. Perhaps this man was a business rival. Or maybe he was a track rival from high school. Undoubtedly he was an enemy. *Did he beat you at the state championships? Did he humiliate you in front of your family and friends?*

"As if he owned the world."

Brigham considered standing up and leaving, or moving seats, but sat still, trying to ignore the stranger. Rethinking the statement, Brigham suspected that even the vilest of criminals only have good words spoken about them at their funerals. Friends and family only want to remember the good things. Let the bad die with them. Nonetheless, Brigham felt the stranger's comments about Brother Moore extremely unfair, especially at his funeral.

The stranger listened quietly as the sister spoke of Moore's resurrection and read from the Book of Mormon about how his "soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul" and "all things shall be restored to their perfect and proper frame." The scriptures were soothing to Brigham, considering that the image of Moore's broken body had struck him with fear earlier in the day. Brigham's new vision of Moore was glowing and glorious, smiling and united with his kindred dead.

"I doubt it a happier place...for him, at least."

Brigham's skin grew cold, his mouth curled and lips tightly pressed. *Is this stranger for real?* The juices of the moment boiled inside of Brigham as he considered what the stranger had said. Frustrated and confused, he wondered if there was something the stranger knew that he didn't. After a

few minutes his anger cooled to a slight simmer. *Maybe this stranger knows something that I don't?*

The stranger looked over at Brigham curiously, noticing his fingers gripping the chair and face flushed red. "You're probably wondering why I am treating him this way...speaking about him like an enemy," the stranger began, straightening his jet black suit coat. "I know him well and know what kind of man he really was."

Brigham listened intently, considering for a moment that the stranger knew things about Moore that his friends and relatives weren't ready to admit at his funeral.

"Overall, Charles Andrew Moore was a good man. He bristled with confidence and ambition, believing he could do anything. Even from a young age he felt that he could have whatever he put his mind and muscle to. He aspired to become a great track star and focusing his energy on that goal achieved it. He wanted to do well in school and excelled in that sphere. He wanted to make money and subsequently, became moderately wealthy. He always tried to be honest. He knew that marrying and having a family was important, so he was married and had six children. He spent his life fixed on *his* goals and *his* ambitions and achieved them all." The stranger paused and rubbed his pasty, white hands together. "He put all of his strength and energy into *his* ambitions...and thought he would die a happy man."

Several seconds of silence passed, and the stranger appeared to be watching the bishop speaking. The stranger now had Brigham's attention and Brigham waited impatiently for the stranger's version of Moore's life. His version was basically the same version every one else had given. The stranger's version included the same details, but from a different perspective. *And what was so wrong with what he achieved?* They were all worthy and nobles causes. Brigham could contain himself no longer and finally spoke: "So what made him unhappy?"

The stranger smiled and turned to look at Brigham.  
“He forgot his compass.”

Brigham wasn't sure he understood.

“Charles Moore surveyed the world and decided which direction he would go. And he arrived...but arrived in the wrong place. See that beautiful family there,” Moore nodded to the front row of the chapel. “*Having* a wife and family was one of his goals, but creating a meaningful relationship with them was not. Oh, he loved his wife and children dearly...but he didn't let them know that he loved them. He provided food, shelter, clothing and material comforts...but never gave them enough time. He was so busy achieving *his* goals, heading *his* North, that he never arrived at the most desirable destination. Those little girls would have loved to have him read to them. Those little boys pleaded with him every day to play ball...just for a few minutes. Giving his family the time they deserved wasn't one of the rungs on his ladder of success.”

For some strange reason, Brigham believed every word the stranger said. Pity and sadness replaced his feelings of admiration for Charles Moore.

“Never forget your compass,” the stranger whispered. Brigham mulled the advice over in his mind.

Reaching inside his coat, the stranger checked his pocket watch. “Time for me to go.”

The stranger stuffed the pocket watch into his coat and slipped out the back door of the chapel, before Brigham had a chance to ask him who he was. Immediately, the organist stoked up the organ and began to play “Till We Meet Again”.

Brigham wasn't sure if he was more sad for the family or Charles Moore himself. That he and his family would meet again, Brigham felt assured. And he was sure that Charles Moore would greet them with strong embraces, long kisses and the time necessary to show them the love he had failed to give while on earth. When the hymn ended the

congregation ceased singing, but the organ played on, each chord long and brooding. Brigham saw Moore's wife, children and other close relatives stand. Next the congregation stood simultaneously and watched as Moore's casket was pushed out of the room, followed by his family. Once the family had exited the chapel, the congregation turned into a buzz of activity. The visitors began filing out of the chapel doors, and Brigham wondered what to do next. He followed the crowd out the double doors, through the foyer, and onto the scrupulously manicured lawn of the meeting house. Everyone watched as the casket was lifted into the back of the motorized funeral coach. Several other automobiles pulled away from the meeting house and followed the hearse down Main Street. Brigham assumed they were taking the casket to the cemetery now. A new desire to see Brother Moore began to rise within him. Earlier day today he had been frightened that he might see him. Brigham had heard so much about him from his friends and family; and the stranger. Suddenly it felt as though he would be missing a fundamental piece in the mysterious puzzle of Charles Moore's life if he did not see his face. Perhaps in the lines of his face and the shape of his smile, Brigham would be able to tell if all that the stranger had said was true.

"Brig," someone shouted from behind. A hand grabbed his shoulder and a fist gently socked him in the arm. Brigham turned around to face one of his close friends, Ralph Mckee. Ralph attended school with Brigham, and they spent much of their free time together. Ralph's father, Donald Mckee, was the bishop of the Young family's "ward."

"Hey ya," Brigham replied, with a smile.

"Are you here alone?" Ralph asked. He yanked a gray derby from his back pocket and pulled it down over his barley brown hair. A smiling checkerboard of missing teeth

stretched across his face and a pair of suspenders held up his breeches.

“Yeah.”

Bishop Mckee and his wife came up behind the boys with their other children trailing close behind. Bishop Mckee was short and tubby with a rotund face and sparkling eyes.

“Hullo, Brigham,” Bishop Mckee said, reaching down and shaking Brigham’s hand. “Do you have a ride to the cemetery?”

Brigham shook his head.

“Well, then hop in with us,” Bishop Mckee said. “We’re heading there right now.”

“Follow me,” Ralph said.

Ralph dashed across lawn and through the crowds of visitors still filing out of the chapel. Brigham hurried close behind until they reached the Mckee’s truck. Ralph stepped onto the running board and vaulted into the bed of the truck, Brigham clambering in close behind. Bishop Mckee and his wife got into the front of the truck and a few of their other children piled into the back next to Ralph and Brigham.

“So boring, wasn’t it?” Ralph said. The truck’s engine sputtered to life and growled, pulling away from the chapel and turning onto Main Street.

Brigham wasn’t sure how to respond, “It was long.”

“Did you see the body?” Ralph asked.

“No.”

“It was creepy,” Ralph said. Ralph’s little sister, Helen, was nodding in agreement, her green eyes wide in surprise. Brigham would have asked more about Brother Moore’s body, but planned on seeing it himself and didn’t want Ralph to ruin it for him.

Behind the truck, Brigham could see a long procession of automobiles snaking up the road. The procession trailed up Main Street and eventually turned north on Center Street. Despite the fervor of the pressing sun, the

afternoon air was moved by a calming breeze. A mountain of mashed potato clouds stretched across the cerulean sky, hanging heavy and low, almost scraping a distant range of rugged peaks. Brigham wiped sweat from his forehead and covered his eyes, thinking a derby like Ralph's would be useful at the moment. After crossing Mckellips Road they arrived at the cemetery, where Brigham spotted the funeral coach parked on the road. The grassy green expanse of the cemetery lot was dotted with headstones of all shapes and sizes. Many of the headstones were in good condition and decorated with flowers, while others were unkempt and crooked with age.

Several pall bearers in suits pulled the coffin out of the funeral coach and hefted it to their sides. Brigham watched the hanging heads and leaden pace of pall bearers as they carried the casket to the grave. Ralph, Brigham, and the other Mckee children climbed out of the bed of the truck and followed the mass of mourners to the freshly dug hole. Brigham left Ralph and pushed further into the knot of mourners, winding his way through the maze of suits and dresses. Suddenly, he was standing a few feet from the gaping hole, sliced deep into the black dirt. He peered inside and imagine the horror of falling inside. The thought of being buried, dead or alive, terrified Brigham. Across from Brigham, at the edge of the darkened hole was Charles Moore's casket. The casket was a hand-crafted box of burnished oak with strips of glinting bronze lacing the sturdy base. Polished brass swing-bar handles were bolted to each side. Adorning the top of the casket was a wood-cut depiction of the Mesa Temple against a backdrop of rugged mountains and a setting sun. The ground beneath the casket seemed to groan under the weight of the casket's solid oak. Shocked that he was so close to the casket, Brigham recognized, for the first time, his courage in attending the funeral and coming to the grave side service. The mere thought of Brother Moore's body frightened him to tears

earlier that day and now he was standing a few feet away. Now, he wanted more than anything to get a single glimpse of his face, but he worried that he had missed his chance.

Huddled around the casket were Mildred Moore and her six surviving children. One of the little girls had laid her head on the oaken lid, her little curls spread across the carving of the temple. In Mildred's arms were two of the children, tears dripping off her face and down her dress. Just as the bishop began to speak, Mildred's quiet sobs crescendoed into a chilling wail. She dropped to her knees and tears began pouring down her hands and onto the coffin below. Mildred's mother came up from behind and held her shoulders, and two of the children squeezed her tight. In between her frantic cries, Mildred whispered something into her mother's ear.

"She wants to see Charles one last time," Mildred's mother told the bishop.

The bishop looked on, eyes sympathetic and searching, struggling to decide what to do. The dedication of the grave had not yet been pronounced so he nodded his head in approval. Brigham scooted closer to the casket realizing this would be his final chance to see Charles Moore. One of the pall bearers unlatched the lid and slowly began to lift it. Brigham nudged closer and closer, wiggling his way through the mourners that surrounded the grave and casket. The pall bearer lifted the heavy lid completely and Mildred Moore stared in side, continuing to cry. Brigham pushed around one other onlooker and was finally close enough. He leaned over and stood on his toes, staring into the satin, stuffed lining of the casket. Moore's alabaster face was cold and calm, silently sleeping in a peaceful repose.

Brigham screamed.

The blood-curling shriek sent Mildred Moore and her children reeling back, horrified at Brigham's reaction. For a brief second, everyone stood petrified, aghast at what Brigham had done. The mourners unleashed a flurry of

whispered hisses and violent “hushes” upon Brigham. Incognizant of the barrage of invectives, Brigham sprinted across the cemetery and away from the crowd of mourners. Tears began to fog his vision and unseen hands seemed to pull at his stomach and wrench it forward and back. He tripped on a headstone, falling to his face, but quickly picked himself back up and ran faster and faster. Now he could hardly see, faintly making out the Mckee’s truck in the distance. Upon reaching the truck, he slid underneath its chassis and hid his face in his arms, tears turning the dirt into mud beneath his cheeks. Brigham took a deep breath and finally faced the reality of what he had seen. Slumbering deep in the heart of the casket was the stranger who sat beside him at the funeral service. Charles Moore.

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