

Hurt or Make Afraid

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*We'll find the place which God for us prepared,
In His house full of light,
Where none shall come to hurt or make afraid;
There the saints will shine bright.*

—William Clayton, 1846

I'm cold. We've been walking for a week now, and my feet are long past feeling, but knowing that they're dying inside my numb skin makes it hard to continue walking. The wheels on the wagon keep wickety-wicking with a lurch when they hit a patch of ruts filled with ice. My sister Cordelia doesn't seem to notice, but she is the practical one. Head straight on her shoulders.

"Diana Pratt," she says, "You mustn't drag your feet."

I answer, "I'm not dragging my feet. I am pondering."

She says, "It's not a time for thinking, Diana, it is a time for great actions. God is taking us whither He commands. When we reach the Rocky Mountains, we'll be safe; but until then, we have to keep walking. And you can't walk if you wear your feet to the bone. You have pondered overmuch of late."

We don't go far on any given day—or even any week. The oxen mostly shiver and stumble. I watch the yoke bite into their skin, and they tense their withers, but that doesn't help because the wood bar keeps chewing on their hides. I tell Brother Andrew to fix it, but his smile is false, and he is in no spirit to deal with an ox. His wife is sick in the back of their wagon. Her face is green with disease, and her belly is full with child. I suppose it's his. The child won't live long out here. It's so cold my eyes hurt when I try to close them.

We were happy two years ago. The Prophet Joseph, his eyes as blue as the sky, was still alive. We felt his presence in all Nauvoo. He always said good things to me, to all of us. Very good things. He understood me better than my own father.

That was before they murdered him, an innocent lamb at the

slaughter. While he was calling out to God for their salvation in the jail they locked him in. The same men with their Herods and their Pilates who crucified Jesus.

Joseph liked the way that I knit. I made a blanket for his baby, the little one with the red hair and the curl on his upper lip that Brother Joseph said was where Jesus kissed him in heaven where we lived before we were born. With God by our side. He let me touch the baby when I gave him the blanket, and I rubbed my finger across that lip. His lip was the way my baby's skin will be, soft and not sticky.

I feel him inside me like a sack of potatoes, always moving about. Sometimes he pinches me and I feel it burning down my legs. Once in a while, when I cry from the pain, Brother Andrew lets me ride with his wife, but the stench of sickness is too much, and so I walk and bite my tongue. We two and our large burthens do not fit in the back of a single wagon. I want sometimes to stretch out on the back of the oxen and have angels bear me up, but Brother Andrew glares at me when I get too close to the animals, as if he can see my heart. For I can see his, and there is darkness inside him.

I put my hand on the flank of his ox. Its flesh is warm underneath the hide, and I can feel the muscles move, like I feel my baby move through the thin skin of my belly. Both of them are soothing, and I walk easier.

Sister Patty, the healer for our camp, says the baby is coming soon, that my travails will soon be over. It's almost ten months since I had my last blood: I've counted every full moon. Sometimes the almanac doesn't say all, and we need to wait for the moon to tell us where time is passing to. The moon who pursues me by day is so white that it blinds me at night. Right now time is passing to the West.

I can't sleep at night anymore; the baby pushes and squirms so. I feel as if there is something else inside me, and it frightens me. Who is he? Does he belong to me? Will he remember his father? I wish that he were still here, but he's gone, and there's nothing I can do about it. There is talk that you can find a new husband among the priesthood if you're willing to be a spiritual wife who lives the new and everlasting covenant. Brother Andrew could never save his first wife, let alone an extra. If he were to ask,

I would never accept him unless the apostles commanded me. Brother Andrew's wife could never be spiritual, alone or with company. I don't think that her baby moves as much as Joseph does in my womb. My son shall be called Joseph, in honor of our martyred Prophet. I can feel his power inside me, and it is the spirit of a prophet.

I can feel the fallen Lamanites—Pawnee here—just beyond our vision, hiding in the tall grass. Their evil spirits send cursings to our camp like a pestilence of flies and worms and clouds of smoke. I tell our captain, Brother Benjamin, "The Lord is revealing the thoughts of our enemies to me. I have had a vision and must make a prophecy to you."

He smiles at me and rises up in his coat, as if he is trying to fill it with the Lord's counsel. "What is the word of prophecy for us, Sister Diana? I have attempted to receive a revelation for our camp, but the Spirit has been quiet to me."

I tell him, because I trust him, everything that the Lord has shown me. "They plan to attack tonight. They know that we will not be prepared, and they wish to steal our food and break up our wagons so that we will not continue in their land. The Lord of Hosts desires us to know so that we may defend ourselves."

He is more frightened than he should be when the Lord has spoken, and he steps back from me. I wait for him to speak as he considers my prophecy slowly, too slowly. "Sister Diana, I bless you in the name of the Lord for your revelation. We will make a wagon circle early, and all the brothers will take up their weapons. The Lord will protect us against our enemies according to the measure of our faith." He pats my shoulder to tell me that he has heard, and I agree.

As the sun disappears, we pull the wagons into our circle. I can see the white prairies through the spokes of the wheel, pie pieces of the dark world outside that you would never want to eat, no matter how much your baby shakes when your stomach rumbles. We gather our bedding in the middle of the camp, and we sisters hold together in the center of it. I feel Cordelia's warmth, and I am glad. Her spirit is comforting and close; I know that, while she is with me, I will be safe. The brothers have their backs to us and are facing out, looking into the night. One of them doesn't move

at all—he's so intent on catching sight of a Lamanite. The Spirit does not leave me as they watch. I know that the revelation is true and that the Lord will bless us for heeding his words. Baby Joseph inside me feels the Spirit too, and he squeezes my womb. The Spirit stings, and I have to gasp, but I know that it is true.

A gun fires, and all the women moan in fear. Except me. I cannot moan because the Spirit is so strong in my womb that it is making my loins' fruit the heir of the Lord's revelation. The men's backs are angry, I can see, and they are whispering our fate to each other. I want to hear what they are saying, but I cannot listen because of my pains.

Two more shots fire into the night, and my sister touches my shoulder. I whisper to her, "I think it's my time. The Lord wants me to present his child to the world and protect it within the holy circle of our camp."

She seems more frightened than she ought. "Sister Diana, how are the pains? Are they coming fast apart, or do you rest between them?"

I'm having a pain so I can't answer her, can't talk, can't say anything but the pain. When I'm ready to answer, a pain has started again, and Cordelia understands what I would have said if I could. She has always been able to know me. She crouches and moves to the other side of the women to summon Sister Patty. They crawl back over the pile of us like wolves, and I see their breath in clouds from their mouths. She reaches out to me, and I enjoy the touch of her warm skin on my belly. When she touches me, I feel a whooshing and the quilt I'm on is wet and warm for a moment. She strokes my belly, and her gentle hand warms my insides.

"Sister Diana, your waters have broke, and you're laboring even as we lie here. I won't let you alone, but I need you not to make a noise. There are Indians and bandits out, and they are vexing the brethren."

I smile at her, "The Spirit revealed that to me, and I am at peace. The Lord will stay my voice from crying."

She has respect in her eyes. "Sister Diana, you are a woman of God."

I like her. I say, "Thank you, Sister Patty. It is God's blessing that we have a healer like you to keep the Spirit with us during our labors." I'm surprised at how warm her hands are despite the

cold. She places one inside me, and it's only prayers and God's grace that keep me from crying out. The pain of her hand is near the worst of my life. Even warm, it's too much to bear, and against my will and judgment, I push her hips with my feet. She falls back into the cold ground, rolling over her bottom onto her back. She knows that I didn't mean it; I can see it clear as day in her face, and I try to tell her with words, but another pain is upon me. By the time it's over, she is at my ear. "We're not ready to push yet, Sister Diana. Just let the Lord prepare you for delivering, and then we'll push all you can figure out to do."

We lie together, her arm across the top of my chest. I do not like to be touched right now, but Sister Patty is so kind that I force myself not to notice. Each time I think it's beyond my power to endure, I have another pain, and I can't feel her touching.

The brothers fire again, and between pains I hear them gathering near the center of the camp. Cordelia leaves to see what's happening with the Lamanites. Several pains pass, and she's back to tell the rest of us, "No one is hurt, but Brother Andrew is sure he saw one of the Pawnee warriors hiding in the grass just beyond the reach of his eyesight. He thinks he might have wounded him, so the brethren are preparing for an attack of vengeance."

I see so clearly that I'm able to talk even though I have a pain. My Joseph has strengthened the gift of prophecy from within my womb. "It is as the Lord has revealed to us. If we will obey his revelation, we shall not suffer."

Sister Patty knows I am right. She tells all of us, "Sister Diana has the spirit of prophecy. It is the Lord speaking through her."

I start to feel a pressure, like someone has placed a wagon wheel inside my private parts, and I want to remove it out of my body more than anything I have ever wanted in my life. My desire is stronger than hunger, and I have to strain to get it out of my body. I push so hard I cannot breathe. Sister Patty doesn't try to put a hand back in me, she just sees me pushing and tries to help. She rubs my back and puts her hand against my feet until I feel that I am a hen on her back with all her feathers plucked out.

My hips start to crack as if my private parts are a tree breaking under the weight of a storm. Still I push. I can't not push. Sister Patty is between my legs, hunched over, studying my womanly

parts. I think she is touching me, but the feeling is too spread out. If her hand holds little Joseph, I cannot say.

Then there is peace. Quiet like the prairie at dawn. I have not even grunted: the Spirit stayed my complaints, and I pushed with it. Sister Patty's rubbing Joseph with a fur blanket, and he cries for vengeance against our enemies. One of the brethren shoots again, and I feel in my heart that the ball has buried itself in the chest of a Pawnee that hungers for our death. I feel another pain, and my afterbirth comes free. They leave it on the frosted ground, a bloody heap of dead slugs and worms. I want to hold Baby Joseph tight and adore him. His nostrils are wide open as he cries, and they are as the archangel's trumpets to me. I see his father's face in his and know that he lives on in our son.

Sister Patty stays by my waist, and Cordelia is at my side. She breathes in my ear, her voice full of pride, "The Lord has blessed us with a daughter for our family. She is my first niece, and she is beautiful, as pure as the driven snow."

I push Joseph away and look at his privacy, where I cannot find his manly member. I am angry at Sister Patty for circumcising him against my will, and that frightens her. "Where is his boyhood, Sister Patty? Where have you put his manhood?"

She tries to explain, tries to hide what she has done. "I have done nothing, Sister Diana. The Lord has blessed you with a daughter, and who are we to doubt the hand of God?"

Cordelia has thus given a name to her sin. She has not only doubted God's hand, but she has stolen his finger from Joseph's loins. I can do no honor to our beloved Prophet if I have no son, and Sister Patty has taken him from me. I push the baby into her arms. "Put him back together. Make him whole again, Sister Patty. In the name of the Lord." She holds him tight, and I roll over with my hands between my legs until my shoulder is under the blankets. A shiver starts in my belly but hasn't the power to reach my arms or legs. I can feel them staring at me, plotting against me, trying to steal the little Joseph that God gave me. Cordelia is touching the shoulder I have placed in the air, but I realize that she helped Sister Patty do what she has done. I push her away, away to see after her wounded nephew.

Not having him on my chest makes me colder, and I hear them holding him tightly against theirs. The Lord reveals to me that they

will never confess their sin, and I can only make them angry if I do not agree, so I will call him Josephine when others are watching and in my heart of hearts I'll always know that he is my Joseph.

There is fear in my sister's eyes, and I know that her mind is on the Pawnee around about us. There has been no gunshot since the one that marked Joseph's birth, and I think the men are growing tired. I feel around me the light that means the dawn will soon bring warmth back to the air, and I thank God that we have survived the night. Through Baby Joseph, we have kept the Pawnee away, no matter the false and fruitless courage of Brother Andrew and his musket.

The milk soaks through the cloths I put against my breasts, and it freezes to the front of my dress. I feel it slippery and cold when I draw my hand up to bring Joseph to the drink that falls from my nipple. I have to rub the icy bosom of my dress to make the milk melt again, and the rubbing makes more milk trickle out, as if I have stepped into a swamp. I believe the scriptures are in error about the land of milk and honey. There is no paradise in the milk that floods my bosom. But Baby Joseph is hungry, and there is nothing he can eat but me.

I lie awake with him at night, as he watches me with big eyes and his father's fine nose. I know that his hair will be full and blond, though now it is brown and thin. We are safe when he rests in the center of my bosom.

On Joseph's fourth night, I receive another vision. In it, I hear the Lamanites murmuring, and they are jealous of us. They laugh that the Illinois mobocrats attacked us to our ruination. They only wish they had been there to shoot our beloved Prophets through the chest with their poisoned arrows. They wanted their death for themselves, and the only way they will rest is to have our blood. They would come inside our camp and destroy us.

I tuck Baby Joseph under Cordelia's sleeping arm and trust that she will keep him safe. She stirs but still sleeps, and I point downward, "Watch him while I meet with Brother Benjamin."

He is still awake. I think sometimes that Brother Benjamin never sleeps, the weight of our suffering is so heavy upon him. I wish that there was something more I could do, but all the Lord

has seen fit for me is to warn him when the enemies of the Lord are upon us.

I tell him the plans of the Lamanites. He knows that they are a slippery people, to be feared, not trusted. By the morning after Joseph's birth, they had scattered without a trace, leaving no footprints in the hard ground. I see that this time they will escape us again, but I know that we must pursue them. The Lord has revealed to me that the Pawnee are our Jericho. If we shall destroy them, we must blow the horns of Jesus's strength until they crumble. I tell Brother Benjamin, "You are our Joshua to lead us to the Promised Land."

He sends Brother Andrew and two other brothers into the night in secret with a gun and a prayer. He blesses them—both hands on their heads—that they will find the enemy, and our camp will be safe again. I watch Brother Andrew disappear into the night, his head disappearing before the rest of his body, and I peek into the back of his wagon, where his green wife lies. He will not find the Lamanites. He has squandered his soul on a wife who listens more to the discouragement of the Devil than the revelations of the Lord.

At breakfast I hear whispers among the camp that the brethren found nothing on their mission and that the Spirit wasn't in it, but Brother Andrew refuses to speak to me. He leans up against the back of his wagon when we stop and looks in at his wife. She's not green anymore, but the color of rotting leaves. Her skin is not healthy, and I suspect that she'll soon be too sick to continue our trail of sadness. I see that she is jealous of my Joseph. She looks at him with longing smeared across her face. I can see the way it makes her eyes slippery. Sometimes I think the only thing she beholds is the jealousy she feels for my sweet Joseph. Her babe will never be born; the Lord has made that known to me.

Brother Andrew's wife has died, and the whole camp is mourning. They say that another of the faithful servants of the Lord has fallen by the wayside as we make our journey to our New Zion in the Rocky Mountains. I say she would have died even if we stayed in Illinois and didn't keep moving on. Going west would not have saved her. Brother Andrew has some brethren help him, and they bury her in an unmarked grave so that the Lamanites won't dig her

up. I don't say anything, but I know that they are right. The Devil is all about and would vex both the living and the dead.

Her death means a grave for two, the tiny one still inside her. When they could see she was dying, there wasn't a soul didn't think about whether they needed to pull the baby out of the inside just like they say Julius Caesar escaped the womb, but there wasn't a brother bold enough to do it, and Sister Patty would not act without the priesthood.

I was the first to find her. Brother Andrew was sleeping with his arm over her side. I could see she wasn't breathing, and her face looked no warmer than the inside of the wagon she rides in. I told no one. My Joseph doesn't mind. He sensed from the start that her new child was no one he needed to be reared with.

We're moving again. Now that Brother Andrew's wife is gone, there's room for me in his wagon, and I'm grateful for the chance to rest. I could tell that he would rather have the wagon empty than suffer me to ride in it, but I saw the way that Brother Benjamin talked to him, and now I can ride all that I need, whatever Brother Andrew's malice toward me. My feet feel much better now. The red wet furrows on the soles of my feet have started to heal.

Joseph rides with me in the wagon, and we dream dreams. His body contains the pure intelligence from before he was born; and when I look in his face, I can see the works of God. After a week of our new routine, Brother Benjamin invites me to his wagon, and I am proud to move to the front of the train.

Baby Joseph tells me that there is a mob of Missourians and men from Carthage coming; and while he speaks, I see the Prophet Joseph in vision, standing above him. He is as fair and strong as the day he died: strong shoulders, the twitch of his nose, his perfect blond hair. He is grateful for baby Joseph. He says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, and blessed art thou, Sister Diana, for thou hast done honor to the least of these my brethren by the sacred name of Joseph the Seer."

He holds out a hand to my cheek, and I take it in both hands, so that I can rub the back of it across the chapped skin on my face. There are no rings on his fingers, and his hands are filled with en-

ergy. My whole body is warm, and I can feel that Baby Joseph is warming through me as he rests between my legs.

He continues to teach me: "Sister Diana, I have a message for you, and for you alone. You have been blessed with a special sight, and you are the vessel to whom the Lord reveals that there are apostates among you, men who have sold their souls to the Devil and are conspiring with the Indians and Missourians."

"I know who they are, Brother Joseph," I tell him.

He smiles at me as he did when he was alive, full of pride and full of love. "Sister Diana, you are right. The Spirit has shown me that they envy and fear you. They have tried to hide their true natures from you, but they shall not succeed, for the Adversary can never prevail against the Saints of God unless they are fallen, and there are fallen men in this camp." He starts to weep, the big drops of sorrow that he cried when Brother Patten died. I want to embrace him, but he steps away from me. I have to pick up Baby Joseph off the ground because he has slipped from my lap, but he doesn't mind. He is watching the Prophet with both of his tiny eyes.

"Only Brother Brigham remains true. I know his heart, and his heart does not waver. But, lo, even the heads of companies, captains of fifties and hundreds are seduced by the wiles of the Adversary." He walks closer, his tears dried, I think, by the heat from his white chest.

He disappears, and I am left with Baby Joseph asleep in my lap. His tiny wrinkles match the larger ones in my skirts. We both of us could hide something if we had to. The camp is still asleep, and no one bothers me when I make my way from Brother Benjamin's wagon to Brother Andrew's. The brethren have fallen deaf to the Lord's warnings.

Brother Andrew sleeps with his son Thomas now that I have left their wagon. Young Thomas rests in peace. This boy of ten years does not miss his mother, and he has no need to. I look at Baby Joseph and wonder whether he will miss me when I'm gone. He loves to drink from me, and he melts into my flesh when he sleeps, but that cannot last forever. I see Thomas curled up beside his father, and I want to believe that he loves him, but just one week ago, the son was under the mother's belly, and now he looks no different. As if his parents are one and the same. I want to be-

lieve that Joseph is not like Thomas, but I do not feel an assurance from the Lord.

Thomas doesn't move when I slip him away from his father, just a gentle push of my hand between his back and his father's stomach. I don't want them together when the Lord decrees his wrath. Brother Andrew wears his knife at his waist; but when he sleeps, he pushes it around to his back. I've watched him do it as he prepares to sleep, when he thinks no one is watching. It's not hard to remove it from the sheath he carries it in. The night is still and dark, and there is no reflection from the blade.

I know that the Devil can be stopped in his tracks sooner if I can get to his neck, but I'm afraid that he will awaken. I know that he's stronger than me. Even if by Nature he is a slight man, the spirit of the Devil has made him mighty. But the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

I know that my grandfather died a week after an angry bull pushed its horns through his stomach, so even if it doesn't happen right away, I can stop his horrible design to bring our company to ruin by placing the knife in his belly. Even in sleep, his body wears the mark of the Devil.

I have the knife in my hand, which is under the blanket that covers them, and Joseph slips from my other hand. He cries out startled as I catch him with my knee, but I slip, and the blanket rises, and then I see Brother Andrew rearing up like the many-headed dragon. I have to push out blindly to protect myself. There is warm, sticky blood on my hand, and then I feel his arms behind my neck, holding me firm. One hand holds my arm, covering it with blood while he squeezes until it hurts too much to hold the knife, and I let it drop. Baby Joseph has fallen to the ground and cries his fear to the entire camp. Tears cover my eyes, as I realize that I have failed the Lord and his Prophet, that my frailty has made the Lord's plan come to naught. My only hope is that Baby Joseph will be safe and that Brother Benjamin will know the language of prophecy. But my revelation makes me doubt that he will understand the messenger of light.

I see in blurred vision that Thomas has taken Baby Joseph and is comforting him. He has not been touched by the evil in his father, who drags me like a lamb to the slaughter toward Brother Benjamin's wagon. By now, the camp burns with activity, forgetting

the Indians who will see us. Lanterns are ablaze, and several of the brethren are prowling with guns. But it's all unclear to me because Brother Andrew is hurting me, and I am fighting with all the power that the Lord has given me. Two more brothers come to help, and I hear their low voices laughing, mocking me in their fear.

Brother Benjamin bears anger in his face, and I know that the spirit of darkness has taken possession of him also. Seeing him, I remember that the Prophet said as much when he gave me the vision.

The brethren pray together, asking what to do, and I prophesy in tongues to overcome the cries they are making to Satan, their Master. I'm not sure whether it is with my spiritual eyes, but I see Cordelia holding Baby Joseph, and I sense that, no matter what happens to me, he will be safe, and we will be safe through him. He shall be mighty unto the Lord. The tongues I speak are the pure language, and I know that the Lord and Father Adam can hear my cries. There is no one to interpret my tongues, but I know what they mean, and they are a prayer for mercy and deliverance.

The brethren wrap me tight in a quilt, like swaddling clothes, and young Thomas sits on my legs because I am kicking. Brother Benjamin puts his hands on my head and says, "By the Priesthood of Melchizedek and Abraham, and in the name of Jesus, I command the evil spirit to be gone from Sister Diana Pratt. You are not welcome in her body, and I command you to leave. I rebuke you." His voice is filled with devilish power.

His words become so large inside my head that I want to cry, but I know that it's the Devil wearing sheep's clothing, and inside he is the wolf he's always been, waiting for the next full moon to consume us upon his lusts. I focus, and the sounds slowly stop pounding inside my skull. I am quiet, and I watch the brethren. They have not let go of me; they keep digging their fingers like talons into my sinews. I stop moving entirely, and I feel them loosening their grip. I know that if I make a move they will kill me. I can see the Devil's anger filling their eyes like a cauldron of hate boiling over and scalding their faces.

"Sister Diana, are you free from the evil spirit?" asks Brother Benjamin, pretending that he is concerned. I can see that he knows in his eyes the lie he is making just so the others who have not yet succumbed will not suspect. I look around to see if the

Spirit will reach someone through my eyes, but their faces are all hollow. Brother Andrew limps, holding his deep red thigh, and he glares at me.

My voice is hoarse from holding in a scream, so I have to whisper. I try to pretend that I have calmed, but it's only by concentrating on my fingertips that I'm able to still the trembling. "Brother Benjamin, praise the Lord for his mercy, and may all of us forever stand true to the Lord Jesus Christ and Brother Joseph the Seer." I have the advantage over them because I am on the Lord's side and I can take His name and not in vain, and He will protect me.

I pretend that I'm rubbing my neck so that I can see who is around me, and there is a small hole in the mob. I cannot see Baby Joseph anywhere; and though it frightens me, I know I must seek out help from another camp of the Saints. Only they can free our camp from the evil that has possessed it. If I move forward, they will try to capture me, but if I go backwards, to the next camp, the camp that must be only two days behind us, I will not be pursued. People look more at ease after I praise the Lord and his Prophet.

I ask someone for water to drink; and while they cast about looking for something, I am already running. I feel the Spirit of the Lord inside every member of my body, and I run with the strength from my stomach pouring into my legs. My feet are burning with the Lord, and they push strong off the cold, hard ground. Brother Andrew's gritty voice calls out, "Let the Devil run," and I know there can be no prophet in his own country. In less than a moment, I am beyond the wagons, and though I hear pursuers I do not turn back. My bones are grinding as I push harder, faster, and the tears in my eyes are freezing to my stung cheeks. My breathing burns like I'm tasting fire, and I gasp, but the Lord is my protector, and the angel of mercy lifts me up on his wings, and I am running. The panting pounding of the evil men becomes invisible to me, and still I do not stop running.

It is dark now; and if it weren't the plains, I would not be able to run so fast. The stiff limbs of grass push hard against my shins, but I continue on. Before I'm aware it has happened, I'm on the ground, my toes screaming that I have caught them on one of the few rocks. My bones are not broken, and I spin myself around, as low as the grass against the cold earth. All is shadow, and I gulp as quietly as I can, so that they won't hear me.

I wait and wait. I feel the warmth draining from me into the ground. My breathing is quieter now, and I can hear that no one is bending the grass. I am free.

I stand up and start walking away from the light that is fading in the distance, though I'm not sure where the road lies. I know that I must find the road, or I will freeze unto death. When daylight comes I will find the road again, but now I must rest. I close my eyes, and I see Joseph's perfect face.