

Two-Dog Dose

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Jarring bang. Wheels leap up, rattling the heavy load of black piping destined for the oilrig. The truck rolls on. Oblivious to what it left behind.

On the macadam, a coyote. From its sacrum back to its hips its hindquarters are now flat, pressed hard against the pavement. Its pelvis and thighs pulverized under the weight of the semi. The creature tries to pull itself forward on its front legs. It makes little progress.

The spring air is cold. It is late and stars command a moonless sky. No car passes on this lonesome stretch of road that runs parallel to the Colorado from Highway 191 to the Potash Mine, until Lorin Gambel pulls up on the coyote in his '94 Toyota. He shines his headlights onto the beast and sees it making an effort to move, straining against its dead back end, but its exertions fail.

Lorin gets out of the truck and walks toward the coyote. That stirs it into action and it raises itself onto its front legs, snarling viciously. Foam and blood leak from between its teeth. Its eyes, vicious in hatred and rage, flash red in the headlights as it struggles to pull itself forward, warning with its snapping jaws that it is not yet dead. It intends damage.

Lorin hears a clatter from the truck. Avek. An old and distinguished lab climbs from the cab. Slowly. Her grizzled muzzle shows white in the back-splash of the headlights. She stands back from the commotion, hair stiff and standing along her dorsal ridge. She is giving a low rumble at the sight of her raging relative smashed bloodily into the road.

“Avek. Truck!”

Still growling low, the dog obeys. Not reluctantly. Age learns its limits.

The dog's human companion, too, is feeling the years press and he stares for a time, watching the rage and vitriol of the doomed

animal. He walks back to the truck and digs under the driver's seat, through the old pop cans, candy wrappers, and other flotsam to find the holstered .375 Smith & Wesson. It's been sequestered for a long time, yet loaded and ready for use. It feels heavy in his hand. He unholsters the gun and pops the cylinder loose and gives it a spin and sees the ends of the bullets displaying their waiting silver primer. He then locks the cylinder in place and steps away from the car.

The old dog has not watched any of this: her eyes have exclusively focused through the front windshield on the coyote. Her attention has not wavered for even a second.

The unlucky animal has lain back down during this interlude.

Lorin approaches the wounded mess in the road and the coyote rises again onto its front legs. Its vicious rebuke is no less vigorous than before, but there is a tremor in its legs that suggests its time in this world may not be much longer. Lorin gets as close as he dares and takes aim. The savage creature is snarling and biting the air. The pistol fires and the canyon lights up from the muzzle flash like the burst from a lightning strike. Just as he pulls the trigger, however, the coyote snaps its head away and the shot strikes the beast in the muzzle. It is jerking wildly on the ground, shaking its head, trying to dislodge teeth and bone that have shattered loose inside its snout.

"Shit." He says and steps forward, takes a better aim at the skull and fires. There is a bang and a whimper, like both scenarios for the end of the world, followed by stillness—save for the ringing in his ears from the explosion. He hears Avek give an approving bark.

He grabs the coyote by one of its front legs and swings it to the side of the road with enough force that it rolls down the embankment a bit. He then goes back to the truck, takes the leather holster off of the front seat, holsters the gun and slides it back under the seat, pushing the garbage collected there out of the way. He crawls into the seat and gives Avek's head a rub. Then, grabbing the steering wheel, he looks at the large bloodstain on the road. He stares long enough that Avek fidgets with concern and begins to lick his face. He looks at Avek. His eyes well with tears. He starts to cry. His cry is not restrained; he weeps in anguish and sorrow. Sobbing, he accepts the licks of his companion, but finds neither solace or discontentment in the wet tongue that scours his face—for his thoughts are far away. Today he killed not only the coyote, but murdered his best friend Karl Tillman and he was coming out of the canyon to

call the sheriff and tell Kay Tillman that her husband was dead.

* * *

It happened on this wise.

When he arrived at the Moab hospital he found Kay sitting in little waiting area. Wheel of Fortune was airing silently above her on a thick-backed TV mounted in the corner. She was on a cell phone. She said, "I've got to go. I'll fill you in later."

She hung up the phone as he approached, and they wrapped their arms around each other in a tight hug. She kissed him on the cheek and held onto both his hands as they separated. She was wearing jeans, cowboy boots, and a T-shirt. She had a large turquoise necklace and matching earrings. Her hair was in a tight ponytail, gray, with pure white streaking through much of it. They had known each other a long time and he could tell she was worn. Exhausted. Not just from what had happened this morning. It had taken him three hours to drive down from Spanish Fork. He had only stopped to drop off his dog at an old friend's place. After, he came straight here.

"How is he?"

Kay dropped his hands and ran both hands over her head as if trying to press things back into place. She sighed and looked at a nearby door.

"They are stitching him up now. It's a bad gash across his shin. I couldn't watch. Had a devil of a time picking the gravel out."

"Dislocated his shoulder you said on the phone?"

"Yeah, they set it. The bastard could have killed himself. He's been so lucid since they slapped the Mematorex Patch on him, I'd started thinking he was back to normal."

"Can I see him?"

"Yeah, just go in. He may or may not recognize you. He didn't know me when I got here. They found him out in the golf course. Now he seems perfectly normal. Surprised he is in the hospital, yeah, but he knows me and Doc Pritchett now."

"Ok."

She took his hands again and whispered, "Thanks for coming."

In answer he gave her another big hug and whispered, "Of course."

He walked into the room. Karl was sitting on a white-papered

physician's table in a hospital gown. He had one arm in a sling and a doctor was putting a bandage on his lower leg. It looked like he was just finishing.

"You tipped over a golf cart? Really, Karl? That's just lame. If I come all the way down, I expect something dramatic. Something with style, a little panache. At least something like getting bucked off a horse, or wiping out jumping a motorcycle. But a golf cart? You are an embarrassment to old geezers everywhere."

"Damn it. I told that biddy not to call you. I'm fine." But his eyes betrayed him. He was glad Lorin had come. It was obvious he was afraid.

Lorin crossed the room and tried to give him a hug but it became more of a friendly pat as he tried to avoid the wounded shoulder and the bandaged leg.

"So what happened?"

Karl looked down.

He was clearly avoiding the conversation so Lorin dropped it, "Are they going to let you go?"

"Yeah, they want to up the meds." He looked down as the doctor gave him some instructions and then left the room for a minute. He looked up at his friend, "It's getting bad. I don't know where I am sometimes. I'll just sit still for awhile and it will usually come back, but it's taking longer and today apparently I never came back."

"Maybe they just need to adjust the meds like you said."

"Last week in Salt Lake the brain doctor said the granules are starting to show up more and more—" there was a long pause, then, "It's going to go bad."

"How's Kay taking it?"

"Not good. She's worn out from worrying. She's been reading up on it and she is getting more and more depressed. I picked up one of the books and . . ." he paused again, "and the next few years are going to be hell."

Lorin knew he was right. He had watched his brother's wife go down with it and it took five years to take her all the way under, but in most ways she was gone in three. The lights were on, but no one was home. Thank goodness his wife had gone quickly five years ago. A heart attack that slowed her down, then another that had taken her in her sleep. He thought about what the next years of Kay's life would be. He looked at the wall.

“Well, I’m going to help as I can. I can get down here a little more. I’ve been thinking of retiring from the University anyway.”

“Well you’ll help me now. It’s time.”

Lorin understood instantly, “No! It’s too early.”

“Look, we agreed. It’s my call. You can’t break the pact now.”

“It’s too early.”

“This ain’t going nowhere but down. Right now my kids have great memories of me. Kay is still strong and chances are she has got some good years with the grandkids coming. After five years of watching me Titanic she’ll be a shell. Already it’s killing her. I can see it. I invoke the pact. My call.”

“No.”

“Don’t do this. We’ve talked about it for fifteen years. We swore on the hunt. My call. I invoke the pact.”

Lorin looked at his friend. He knew he was right. But he always thought he’d go first. This was something Karl was going to do for him. Not vice versa.

“Look, Karl. It’s crazy. We’ll both end up in the Terrestrial Kingdom.”

Karl laughed. “You haven’t believed in that for years. I’m the religious one. Remember? And I think the Lord is OK with this. This is an act of courage. Jesus laid down his life. I’m just following him.”

“Karl, I’m not going to kill you.”

“Yes, you are. I invoke the pact.”

* * *

That night after dinner, they were sitting out on the deck looking at the glow of the La Sals in the setting sun. Their bellies were full of good T-bone steak that Karl cooked one-handed. Old-style over charcoals. Kay had conjured up a potato salad and some camp beans, flavored with the same sauce the beef was marinated in. They were drinking Postum mixed with hot chocolate, Karl’s invention nearly twenty-five years ago on a deer hunt. He called it Nephi’s savory coffee, then it became just NSC. It had been a staple until the company quit making Postum years ago, and he had brought it back when they started making it again.

To Lorin the flavor brought back memories—delicious with bright colors. He and Karl had been friends since they roomed together at BYU and as he looked at his old friend he felt a loss that

hung over him like the sword of Damocles. He could not kill him as he wanted. Yet he could not not honor the pact. It had been a sacred part of many a Canyonlands hike. He knew what lay ahead for his friend and his wife and his eyes welled with tears as he thought about the darkness just over the horizon.

The top of the La Sals were bathed in orange light and the desert rock that lay before them had almost disappeared in darkness. The three old friends were silent as they watched the last of the sunlight climb toward the summit of Tuk, Utah's third highest mountain. Lorin sighed. There were things he could do. And things he could not. Despite his promises he would not kill him.

He looked at Karl. Karl was staring back at him strangely. A mixture of fear and what? Karl turned to Kay with that same expression. She looked at him at that moment and fear stamped her face with such immediacy Lorin took in a breath.

"Karl? Are you OK?" There was panic in her voice.

He was looking at Lorin, then at Kay. His face was a mask of confusion and fear. His eyes were wide. He stood up.

"Excuse me. Who are you? Are you from the church? From the stake?"

"Karl. It's me, Lorin. Remember? We were just talking about the deer hunt."

He sat down cowed but his obvious fear and confusion did not abate.

Kay said, "Karl. It's me. Kay. Remember?"

He gave a very fake smile, "Kay. Yes. Of course. I remember we've met. I'm Karl."

Kay was crying now. She jumped up and ran into the house, tears streaming down her face.

Karl continued his fake smile, "Did I say something to upset her? Do I know you?"

He could see Kay in the kitchen pacing frantically and talking to someone on the phone.

"Excuse me a minute, Karl." Lorin ran into the kitchen, "Are you OK?"

"Don't leave him alone!" She screamed and sure enough when he got back he was gone, but he had not gone far. He was standing on the side of the house confused.

Karl looked at his friend and said, "I'm sorry, but I can't remem-

ber where I live. Can you take me home? I think the house is yellow.”

“You live here, Karl. This is your house.”

“This isn’t my house.”

The fear in his face was turning to anger, “Please take me home, or leave me alone.”

“Karl, this is your house.”

“This isn’t my house!” he yelled, “Get away from me!”

Kay was running toward him waving her arms, “Don’t make him angry,” she whispered.

“Can someone tell me where I am? Where do I live?”

“Karl, just relax, this will pass. You’ll remember.” He walked toward him holding out his hands in a gesture of reconciliation.

“Stay away from me!”

“Karl.” He then reached out to reassure his friend. His friend punched him hard in the face. Lorin went down. His nose broken. Kay screamed. Karl ran.

Lorin got up quickly, his nose was bleeding but he took off after Karl. Just then an ambulance pulled up and Kay ran over and directed it toward the man running down the gravel lane that fronted the house.

The ambulance driver was a young kid who had been nearby when he got the call. He ran to Karl rather quickly, but it did not go well. The driver grabbed Karl, and Karl went crazy, swinging wildly. The kid, not trained to handle this, blew up in anger and a full-blown fight erupted. Kay ran over and tried to pull the driver off her husband. He had fallen and the driver was trying to sit on him to hold him down. Karl found an old piece of rebar and swung out hard from his supine position and capped the knee of the driver. The sound of the crack pushed Lorin out of his shock and he ran over and pulled the kid away from Karl, who was snarling like a cornered animal. Kay was hysterical. The police arrived. The kid was rolling on the ground clutching his knee. Kay was beating the officer’s chest with her fists begging him to help her husband. Two more officers arrived. Karl had to be cuffed and was placed in the back of the police car. Kay was placed in the second ambulance, clutching one hand with her other. Somehow in the scuffle and confusion she had broken two fingers. The kid from the ambulance was put in a stretcher and loaded onto a third ambulance, which tore away with the siren and the kid screaming.

Lorin tried to explain to one of the officers what had happened while holding some ice to his nose. Was it really only thirty minutes ago that they had been watching the rays of the sunset igniting the La Sals?

* * *

Two days later Karl was sitting on the couch watching TV. His eyes were glazed and somewhat blank. He knew where he was. He knew who Lorin was. He knew he was in his own house. But he was drugged. Sedated. Just until his new meds had time to adjust things, the doctor said. No one could risk another episode like the one of the other day. Best to ensure his calmness chemically.

Lorin was sitting at the kitchen table across from Kay. Her eyes were red and swollen, the bags under her eyes aged her ten years. She hugged a large convenience store diet Coke. She looked at Lorin and tried to say something, but just looked past him to her husband. Finally she said, "I can't do this."

"Kay, this is temporary. The doctor said he just needs to get his medicine stable and . . ."

Kay was looking at him like he was an imbecile. She smiled sadly at him, "It will never get better. Only worse and worse and worse and worse . . ." She trailed off into a sob.

He got up and put his arm around her. She did not move to return his embrace. He looked at his friend and the sad empty look on his face. Eyes hollow.

He felt Kay's sobs along his arm wrapped around her back. Worse and worse and worse, she had said.

Karl had invoked the pact.

"It will be all right," he said to Kay, stroking her head and staring sadly at Karl.

* * *

Lorin watched as Kay leaned into the window and kissed Karl goodbye. She said she was pleased to have a couple of days to get some things done. The few weeks had been a mixture of bad and good. Sometimes he was as cogent as he was right now. Occasionally he faded, but the sedation kept him from acting up. Lorin had driven down again from Spanish Fork, ostensibly to give Kay a break.

"We'll be fine. We are going to the temple, walk the grounds,

maybe ask someone to add a few names to the prayer roll—don't worry, I won't let him go in by himself. It's the House of the Lord. This is a good thing. Then we'll explore some of our old stomping grounds and maybe jog his memory circuits a little."

She nodded. Kissed Karl and stepped away from the car. She looked worried. Lorin had talked her out of giving him the drugs that kept him calm. She had believed him when he said that he would be blessed for visiting the newly built temple in Monticello. Karl assured her that he would be fine.

They pulled away and she watched until they turned onto the highway toward Monticello about fifty miles south of Moab. As she passed out of sight, Lorin turned left onto a side road. She would not see them as they turned away from the city driving south and then doubled back north on Spanish Valley Drive, back onto the highway, and back through town. Most of the way both men were silent. After passing the Arches National Park entrance, they turned west on Potash Road.

"You all right?" Karl asked as they began following the Colorado toward the potash mine.

"No."

"I suspect not. But you're doing the right thing."

Lorin did not answer. He looked at his friend, "Just stay with me. OK. Try hard."

"I'll do my best."

They found the old jeep trail they were looking for and turned up it. It took considerable skill to maneuver over the old mining road. Avek, lying on the backbench kept being tossed to the floor. She finally gave up repeatedly climbing back onto the backseat and just stayed on the footrests.

"She's a good dog." Karl said.

"That she is. I was so mad when Sandy brought her home after the kids left. But she's been one damn good dog. She's seen me through a lot."

"Get Kay a dog. OK? A good one. A lab like Avek."

"Shit, to replace you? I'll get her a city pound mutt. That seems more appropriate."

"Take care of her."

"Take care of her? Hell, I'm going to sweep her off her feet and talk her into marrying me. Steal her right out from under your nose

and when she gets to heaven she'll be saying, 'I want Lorin.'

Lorin was surprised to find he was crying, making his claims lose some of their force.

Karl smiled, "It won't work. I see what you're doing. Trying to get me to stick around. Forget the pact. Nope. I wouldn't mind you taking Kay. They say in heaven everything will get sorted out. And besides," Karl laughed, "you don't believe in the Celestial Kingdom no more so you'll get nothing on the other side. Likely they'll castrate the likes of you. So have fun with Kay, she'll be your last taste of a woman for the next zillion years."

Karl was now crying too.

They went through a rough patch where some of the road had washed away, creating a bit of tricky maneuvering. It looked for a moment like Lorin was going to leave them high centered, but he pulled it off.

"Hey. Be careful coming back. I don't want to see you on the other side for a few years at least."

"Whatever."

They went on climbing along the edge of a high ridge.

"Can you imagine the work it took to cut this road?" Karl observed.

"This is the kind of stuff my dad did."

"Really? He must have been disappointed his son became an English professor."

"Yeah. I think he was, actually. Maybe. Hard to say. He was a difficult man to read. Sometimes I thought he was as proud as hell about me, other times I wondered if he thought my life had been wasted."

Karl suddenly said, "Pull over." He seemed scared and Lorin worried that he might have started slipping away, but his friend added, "I want to change into my temple clothes."

"You know they are just going to rot."

"Well, no one knows the day or time of His appearance. I want to be buried properly. I wish you could dedicate my grave, but given your heathen status . . ."

The truck stopped. Both Karl and Lorin got out of the car and he let Avek out to give her a chance to stretch her legs a bit. Karl changed into his white clothes, and put on the accouterments of a man garbed in the robes of the High Priesthood, like someone

ready to make temple covenants, or to meet the Lord should the need arise.

Lorin pulled some sandwiches out of a bag and passed one to Karl decked out in his priestly garb. He pulled a couple of Mt. Dew's out of a little cooler and handed one to his friend. They ate in silence after a brief toast to Kay for providing such a perfect lunch and a couple of teases that the food was reason enough for Lorin to go after Kay when Karl was gone.

But after a couple of bites, Lorin set the sandwich down. His appetite fled so he gave the sandwich to Avek. Karl ate with relish, savoring each bite with a look of contentment on his face. After eating without a word they got back in the truck and continued banging up the unruly mining road.

Lorin looked over at Karl, "You know you look ridiculous in that getup."

"I remember the first time I put it on. It was all supposed to be sacred, but when I saw everyone dressed like this, I couldn't help but laugh. So there I was in the temple, knee deep in what was supposed to be the most holy experience of my life and I can't help it but I'm trying damn hard to suppress my giggles."

Lorin, focusing on the road, said, "Not me. I took it so serious I felt like I was standing before God Himself. There was an aura over everything. I felt like every electron in my body had suddenly reversed directions because everything had changed in fundamental ways. Everything was new."

"Ironic, hey, how you are now the unbeliever and me who laughed at the sacred am hanging on until . . ."

"Funny. Yeah. Maybe I took it so earnestly I broke it. It couldn't stand the gravity of my seriousness and it just collapsed. Maybe if I would have laughed more at it, I could have found something to cling to."

"Maybe it's not too late."

"Maybe."

A few hundred yards from their destination a rockslide blocked the road with red rock boulders ranging in size from basketballs to Volkswagens.

"Looks like we are going to have to walk." Karl said brightly. There was a giddiness about him as if he were a kid about to sit on Santa's lap.

“I reckon so.”

Lorin took a small backpack out of the back of the truck and grabbed a shovel strapped to the side of the bed and threw it across his shoulder. He took a large bolt cutter out of a box in the back and handed it to Karl saying, “Here, you carry the heavy stuff.”

They easily skirted the slide and started their march to the mineshaft. Karl in his temple slippers was walking carefully, almost mincing toward their destination. His robe blew in the slight wind and he had to hold down his cap to keep the occasional gust from unsettling it.

“What’s the shovel for?”

“Clean up the dog poop. Can’t leave a mess in the wilderness,” Lorin joked, giving both men a laugh, but then he added, “I don’t know exactly. Just thought I’d bring it. Who knows maybe I’ll need to hit you in the head with it if you don’t go down easily.”

“Just don’t mess up my beautiful face.”

The men moved slowly. The old slightly arthritic dog followed closely behind, seeming content with the easy pace. They moved now in silence. There was a strong sense of belonging here. The sage and juniper, the red rock, the scattered pieces of yellowcake, the blue-bellied lizards darting away as they approached. It was all intimately familiar. They knew this land. They had both been raised in Moab and had spent a lifetime wandering its environs.

There was a wide clearing in front of the mine. They found a large flat rock and they both sat down on it. Sweating and puffing. A palpable fear starting to grace both their faces. They both looked at the big gate bolted deep into the rock over the entrance.

“Bats,” Karl said.

“What?”

“Bats. That’s why the BLM put these gates in. It turns out these mines are critical bat nurseries. If people come around disturbing the bats, entire generations might be lost.”

“OK. Bats.”

Karl walked over to the chained door with the bolt cutter. It was secured with a thick chain.

“Lorin! A little help here.”

Lorin got up and between the two of them squeezing the huge calipers, the bolt came free. They opened the gate and wandered about thirty yards in until they came to a large hole that shot straight

down. They both looked into the shaft.

“Deep.”

“Yeah. About a hundred feet, if our plumb line was right when we were here twenty years ago.”

“Twenty years ago.”

“Yup.”

They walked back out of the mine and sat down on the same rock. Finally Lorin said, “I don’t want to do this.”

“We made a pact. I’m holding you to it.”

Lorin looked at him for a long time. The face he had known longer than any living soul. “What if next year they discover a drug that will make it all better?”

“If fishes were wishes we’d all have a fry. Let’s do this. The longer we wait the harder it will be. Let’s get it over with.”

Lorin did not move for a long time. Finally he fished a couple of small bottles out of his daypack.

“I told Avek’s vet that he was too old and it was time to put him down. I told him I had a lady friend whose German shepherd was ready to go too and we were going to the mountains to do it together. I’ve known the vet all Avek’s life and he was good enough to give me both doses.”

“I’m getting a two-dog dose then.”

“Yup,” he said, then hesitantly held out bottles, “It’s your call. If you use them, this is you not me.”

Karl did not take them.

“What happens?”

“The vet said that it takes about twenty minutes before the dog falls asleep. Once asleep he’ll last about ten more. Then he sleeps forever.”

Karl nodded and reached for the pills, “OK then. For Kay.”

“For Kay.”

Lorin sighed and handed him the pills, “There’s five in each bottle, take them all.”

“Any side effects?” Karl asked. Both men burst into laughter.

“Not if used as directed.” Lorin smirked.

“Consult your doctor to make sure your heart is healthy enough for death,” Karl joked, but it fell flat.

Lorin just said, “Yeah.”

Karl took a water bottle out of his pack, poured all the pills into

his hand, and swallowed them down in almost one gulp. He finished and said, "That's that."

The men sat in silence for a few minutes looking over the landscape.

"Lorin?"

"Yeah."

"Thanks."

"It was a pact. I swore an oath. Thank that. I'm not happy about this."

"Kay will be. Not if you told her. Not if she suspected anything. It will sting at first, but in a year from now she'll start moving on. Being a grandma. She'll get over it. Otherwise, in a year she'd be hollowed out and empty from taking care of me. She'll have worried herself into a short life."

"I suppose."

"The kids will remember me strong. With a good mind. No memories of a blank deer-eyed man staring at nothing and who has no idea who he is. Are you going to stick to the plan?"

"Yeah. I'll drive down to Bluff and that footpath that crosses the San Juan by the reservation. I'll say we were remembering good times and I turned around when I heard a big splash."

"Tell her we didn't call from Monticello because we were having so much fun."

"I'll tell her. Don't worry."

"And we drove to Bluff to remember more good times. She'll understand the need to visit memories with this thing I've got looming."

"I'll tell her."

"And you'll call the police."

"Yup."

"They'll drag the river."

"Yeah."

"It's running high with the thaw. No one will even expect to find my body."

"I suppose."

"Lorin?"

"Yeah?"

"Thanks for doing this. It's right. It's going to fix a lot of things that would get broken."

"I think you are very brave. This will be a good death."

Lorin reached out and put his arm around Karl, who leaned into him. They were silent a while.

Karl, pulled back and looked at him, "Sir, you are a good friend!" His voice sounded somewhat slurred. Lorin knew the medicine was taking effect.

"Karl, you are a good friend, too. I love you, buddy."

"I love you too, but let's not muddy this up getting sappy."

They were silent a few more minutes. Then Karl said in a very slurred voice, "Last night I didn't know where I was. I was laying on my bed and I did not know where in the hell I was. I thought I must be staying in a hotel somewhere. I saw Kay beside me and I thought my hell who am I in bed with. It was strange. I thought I'd just lie there until things came back to me. I fell asleep."

"I'm glad you were awake today."

"Me too."

"Lorin, I'm tired. Can I just lay down here in the sand? Just for a minute."

Lorin helped him from the rock and assisted him so he could lie down on his back. He opened his eyes for a while looking at the one lone cloud in the sky.

"I love this place. I love the desert. I love you. I love Kay. I love God."

"They all love you, too."

Karl closed his eyes and began to breathe more evenly.

"Karl?"

"Umm?"

"Let me know what's on the other side."

"Ummmmmmbbb."

Karl slept for some time. Longer than the ten minutes that the vet suggested. His breathing got shallower and shallower and several times Lorin checked to see if he was breathing. He repeatedly was. After about fifteen minutes he worried something had gone wrong. After twenty-five minutes Karl made a funny sound, raspy and hollow. It was his last breath.

It was getting late in the afternoon. Lorin wept for a bit. He watched the body of his friend until flies started to gather and land on the corpse. He decided to get to work. He had never intended to throw his body into the mine. He knew he could not stand the sound of his friend's body striking the bottom of the shaft. He also

worried that some kids would invariably break into the mine and do something crazy like rappel down the shaft. They would discover the body. That would raise questions and likely start an investigation. Karl had always had more faith in gates and locks than he had.

He walked over and picked up the shovel and walked down to a rock overhang a good sixty feet down and west of the mine. A rock overhang—part of a larger red rock formation—created a depression that protected what was once a small sandstone bowl that had, over the centuries, filled with sand. Over the top was a patchwork crusting of cryptobiotic matting, the delicate microbial mass that stabilized much of this desert soil, giving the sandy surface the crumbly look of an overdone coffee cake. This he delicately removed by digging beneath it and placing it carefully a few feet away. Once the sand was exposed, digging was easy. Still it took most of the remaining afternoon to get a hole about four feet around. He dug until he hit sandstone, likely the lower portion of the tipped-over bowl that shaped the overhang. The configuration of rock allowed the wind to slowly fill up the bowl with the sand he had just removed, if he left it for a century or so it would fill back up. A friend of his called these formations wind-blown sand eddies.

He climbed back up to the mine and tied a bit of rope around Karl's legs and dragged him carefully down the hill. Once he could have carried him, but now it took everything just to drag him downhill to his grave. Avek was very curious about Karl and kept sniffing him and looking inquiringly at Lorin for some explanation.

He dragged him right into the hole, but his body was left sort of sitting up and leaning on his side against one of the walls of the grave. Lorin jumped down and arranged him on the floor of the hole, on his side and slightly curled up. He climbed out of the grave and rested a while.

He looked at the grave with Karl resting in his dirty and disheveled temple clothes. His cap had fallen off and his apron and robe was twisted all round. This would not do. Although he was no longer a believer, he believed in Karl and his intent. He jumped into the grave and brushed the sand off his clothes and arranged them properly as was fitting a High Priest of the Lord. When all was done he climbed back out of the hole and stood by the side of the grave. He felt like he should say something and remembered back to when he was a bishop in the Church. He had dedicated many graves and

he decided that despite his heathen status Karl deserved a proper Mormon ritual.

In the low, late afternoon sun, he looked around him. While he no longer believed in the white bearded god he had grown up with, there was something powerful in the landscape that lay all around him. A presence that made itself felt. An ancient attendance that cared very little about him, but that he could acknowledge and feel. An old god. This was something he could worship. So while the rituals that had shaped the people of this landscape had been born elsewhere, they had entered this land and made themselves part of the high desert, the wind- and water-carved variegated Canyonlands. He was a part of the landscape and the people that called it home. He knew what to do.

He raised his arm to a square pointing his palm toward the rusty reds, oranges, and white sandstones in the valley below:

“By the power of the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood I hold, I dedicate this grave to be the final resting place of my friend Karl Tillman. I ask that this place be hallowed ground and will be protected from the elements and beasts that would disturb this place, until the morning of the First Resurrection. In which you will arise, Karl, if anyone will.”

Then he sensed that strange force which had always overcome him whenever he had given priesthood blessings to his wife, or children while they were growing up. He felt his voice detach from his own will and speak as power flowed from something higher and better than he was.

“I bless you, Karl, that you’ll not be found here. I bless your children that they will find comfort in the goodness of your life. That the things you taught them as a father will be remembered and cherished. That your life will be recalled as worthy of emulation. I bless that Kay will be comforted by the Holy Ghost and she will also find meaning in your life and will remember and hold onto those memories that you both cherish. Karl, I bless your friend who took your life that he will forgive himself for what he’s done and take comfort in the sacrifice you have made for your family. God bless you, Karl, wherever you are.”

“I say these things in the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Lorin started to shake and sob as he picked up the shovel and with blurry eyes filled in the grave. When it was about half full he

carried and rolled some large flat stones to form a protective barrier from predators that might sense something aging under the sand. It was nearly dark when he finished burying the flagstones he had placed over his friend. When he was done, as carefully as he could, he replaced the soil surface crust. It didn't work as well as he hoped, much of it crumbling as he tried to place it, but it was something that gave it an air of having never been disturbed. Mostly.

On the wall of the overhang where the stone entered the sand that made up the grave, he carved with his pocket knife, "Karl Tillman, 2014." It would be mistaken for a random bit of graffiti, if anyone ever noticed it, such as is common to the rock faces and aspens of this area. He walked back to the gate on the mine and tried to fix the chain they had cut. He put the links together and angled them in a way that would hold together unless someone noticed the cut and reoriented them to loose the links. He pulled the chain in a way that the break was hidden behind the gate.

It was done. Karl was dead. Murdered really. But he felt so light ,he started to sing one of the old hymns of his youth through his tears.

* * *

There is blood on his hands. There is also blood all over his pants and shirt. Why had he not noticed what the coyote had left on him? It will not do to call the Bluff sheriff covered in blood and claim his friend has gone missing. He walks down to the Colorado and washes his hands in the very cold, brown, sandy water. He's near a sandbar and wades out through calf-deep water and takes his shirt off and washes it quickly like his pioneer ancestors might have. He keeps his trousers on, but takes up a handful of river sand and scrubs his pants clean with it. The blood is fresh and the water cold and the stains come out easily.

He hikes back up to the truck passing the dead coyote grimacing at him. Its eyes are fixed on nothing and everything. Lorin is exhausted. He spreads his shirt onto the back seat, places his shoes on the floor of the backbench, and then climbs into the driver's seat. He reaches over and scratches Avek's head. She seems jittery and eagerly licks his hand.

"It's been quite a day, girl. Still some shit to do."

He then puts the truck in gear and pulls away. Leaving behind the coyote on the side of the road.