

Story for performance #975  
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Alex and I drove into Utah from Wyoming, on our way to see *Spiral Jetty*. We'd driven pretty much all the way across Wyoming the day before, through the stiff prairie wind and into the sun. Alex did most of the driving and ended the day with hands tight from fighting the wind. But we didn't have far to go, into Salt Lake City to pick Matthew and Paula up at the airport. Called them from baggage claim after they'd landed to see if there was a Starbucks on their side, dying for a half-decent coffee, but their phones were off. We look like a demographic: bald men from the Antipodes with slim American women. Drove north for about an hour to Brigham City, and a slightly run down Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge. There was a pool, and a whirlpool, but they didn't look very appetizing. Took a spin around the town, which was small, with a long, wide main street with the inevitable strip malls that ran into what must have been the older part, where there was a cluster of solid, square, reddish brick buildings. Kept an eye out for anywhere that might have decent coffee. Quite often there's a hipster who has opened a Planet Java or similar, but not this time. Looking for somewhere to eat, pulled into the parking lot behind a barbecue joint, but we spotted a Confederate flag sticker and thought it wouldn't be worth the trouble, one of us would be bound to say something; settled on a Mexican restaurant in what had been a drive-through fast food building. Inside, from our booth in the front corner, we noticed a crow flurrying around a tall bush: it took a while to work out that it was attacking the chicks in the nest of a smaller bird. I went out to shoo it away, but too late, as it flew off with one.

In the morning, we packed up and went to a diner we'd spotted the day before. A local cop, presumably, in plain clothes but with his gun on his hip, was sitting with another man in the booth behind Matthew and Paula, talking about his divorce. We ordered eggs. The state route signs in Utah have a beehive design on them, which we didn't know anything about, and we asked the waitress, who was pretty, tattooed, in her twenties, with a hint of the 80s in her semi-beehive hairdo, as it happened. She said that Utah was the beehive state, but she'd never thought to ask why, and that she'd ask if one of the older people knew.

One of 'the older people' quickly showed up, a stocky, square-headed man, maybe seventy, with beard and no moustache, belt and braces. Definite Old Testament mien. Utah was meant to be called Deseret, he told us, but them back east wouldn't have it. As for the bees, the early Mormons were as hard-working a people as you could ever imagine. He paused for effect. Busy as bees. We thanked him, but he hadn't had enough, and asked us where we were

from. New York and Massachusetts, we said, and he seized on Massachusetts: they had to have somewhere to keep the Kennedys, he cracked. Mm hm, we murmured. He'd been to the east, too, so he knew what he was talking about: he'd been to see his son and daughter-in-law in Jersey. We looked at our eggs, two omelettes, two over easy, yellow and white on the white plates, and cooling. They'd been to a baseball game, and a woman sitting behind them had picked up that he was Mormon, she'd been quite agitated, apparently. Wanted to know if it was true, that Mormons have horns. Oh, we said, a sinking feeling travelling around our booth. Told her to come and sit on my lap and I'd show her, he cackled, pumping his fist and forearm up and down. Mormons with horns, ha! We nodded, looked at our eggs again. He'd have to leave us alone, eventually, though he was enjoying our discomfort. Well, nice talking to you, he said. Mm, we about grunted.

We didn't say that much about it in the diner. We ate the eggs, then slipped out of the booth to the bathroom in turn. Our Mormon friend was in the other side of the restaurant, no doubt amusing others among the older people with our eastern liberalism. We paid the bill between us, then spilled out into the street in a burst of incredulity at his display of passive aggression. They fucking murdered the Indians, someone said.

Back in the car, we went through a bird sanctuary, where we saw a barred owl hunting in broad daylight, and then to the Golden Spike National Historic Site, where the transcontinental railroad was completed, on our way to *Spiral Jetty*. We ran out of finished road, then took a left at a little cardboard sign, turning onto a dirt road that ran across grazing land. Across a cattle grid the track began to get rougher, and narrowed. We had to persuade some cows to get off the track, while the Great Salt Lake opened up in front of us. We passed some abandoned military vehicles, kept bumping along slowly past the point where we began to wonder where the thing was, and then there it was. Submerging, or surfacing, half under water, smaller than you think, and much stranger and more unlike anything you've ever seen, than in the photos. There was a crude turnaround in the track, and someone had put an old bench car seat there, lined up with the jetty, in the perfect viewing position. We spent a while there, then took the track on past it, heading across the national park to the Sun Tunnels, a hundred miles away. As the jetty ran away behind us, the old man in the diner became a story about getting there.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Frazer Ward.*