

Over the last two months, the adjunct had read the books and papers on the professor's syllabus. He compiled notes on Joseph Smith's life, which is to say he began and then archived many Word documents in which he copy/pasted entries from Smith's diary. He particularly enjoyed recording Smith's entries on the weather—the hail the size of chestnuts, the rise of the Mississippi, the pine floated downriver. Once he printed out the documents, he began leaving his own comments in the margins.

Why the adjunct did this he could not really say. Despite his initial fascination, he did not expect to find out who Joseph Smith really was, nor did he expect to uncover the truth of any great secret. He harbored no intention of becoming a Latter Day Saint.

If pressed, the adjunct would say that, for the past few years, he'd found himself in a crisis. Sleeping gave him trouble and when he woke up in the night, he sensed something bad would happen, though he was not sure what. At first, he thought his insomnia was a matter of physical discomfort, and so he placed a pillow between his knees and wrapped his arms around another one. Still, he woke up. In the middle of the night, the adjunct's life seemed most real and most terrible. He understood the meaning of an angel's visit: That the price of such a visitation means you see yourself for what you really are. He was tired of himself—he could not keep being himself—but whenever he woke up in the morning, whatever was most terrible again appeared most unreal.

Perhaps then, he told himself, he was ready to slip into someone else's life. The tabulation of a stranger's days, of petty squabbles and gossip, the last months of a life: This lulled him, not to sleep, but to the feeling that he could become anything.