

The Real Summer

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The Real Summer is a fictional story loosely based on the experiences of the Martin Handcart Company as they crossed the plains in 1856. I have often wondered what those faithful pioneers would think of the modern conveniences that we take for granted and what impact a real knowledge of their faith would have on us.

Through journals and narratives I have attempted to learn as much as possible about the actual experiences of the handcart pioneers. I chose to follow the Martin Company because my great, great grandmother was a member of that company. However, I have combined the experiences from many companies into this story. In other words, some of the experiences included here may never have happened to the Martin Handcart Company. I either pulled them from the experiences of another company or I made them up. I love fiction! I will have succeeded if you feel a desire to go and learn what really happened.

Please feel free to share with your friends and let me know what you think at <http://ctrstories.com/node/1> or by email at dave@thefrees.com.

Enjoy!

Chapter 01

October 19, 1856, Somewhere in Wyoming--

I write because I'm too cold to sleep and too tired to keep remembering. I used to think it was a dream. If it is, I'm on the verge of never waking up. My brain hurts. Memories of my "past life" disappear now as fast as the cup of flour that I eat each day. I'm done struggling with the memories; there is too much to struggle with here and now. So I write. If I don't survive, I hope someone will find what I have written and benefit. If I do survive, maybe in a warmer more comfortable time, it will all make sense.

Very cold tonight. There is little to keep us warm. We burned most of our heavy blankets on the trail a few days back to lighten our loads.

Those times that I was warm still burn the brightest in my memory. The names and faces of those that were closest are all that remains.

"Twenty-one to twenty," gasped Steve "My favor. Game point." He crouched low dropped the little blue ball with his left hand, took two quick steps forward and smashed it towards the front left corner of the racquetball court. It hit the front of the court a few feet from the side wall, ricocheted

off the wall and shot diagonally back towards the corner. Steve moved to the middle of the court and kept his eyes glued on the front wall. The ball bounced off the floor and then hit the right wall just inches from the back of the court. It came off the wall at a right angle, perfectly parallel to the rear wall. Hank slammed it up against the back of the court with a backhand and hoped for a friendly bounce.

"Wimp Shot!" yelled Steve as he moved towards the back of the court to receive the high bouncing ball.

"Better a wimp than a loser." replied Hank taking his position in the middle of the court. Steve launched the ball high towards the front wall and Hank backpedaled to get to it.

"Now who's the wimp?" Hank yelled as he shot for the top of the front wall himself. He wasn't as lucky with this shot and knew he was a goner as soon as it came off his racquet. Not nearly high enough and going much too fast, the ball hit the front wall, bounced on the floor near the back, and then ricocheted off the back wall in a nice high arch.

Steve was in perfect position. He had Hank trapped against the back wall and the ball was heading straight towards him and the front wall. Looking backwards, he waited for it to reach him, took a quick step and then smashed

the ball into the front corner opposite Hank. The perfect shot--it literally rolled out of the corner without even a bounce. It left Hank standing flat-footed.

Steve dropped to his knees with his arms stretched up and his fists clenched in the Wimbledon Champion position. "Yes! Yes! Yes! The superior athlete dominates once again. I ask you: will there ever be another with such natural talent, extensive knowledge, and rugged good looks?"

"I hope not." replied Hank, crumpling to the floor against the back wall.

"These courts aren't big enough for two heads the size of yours."

"Aw, don't be sore Hank. You shouldn't feel bad when you lose to the best racquetball player in the world. In fact, you should feel privileged to be learning from me. I've been thinking about charging you for the opportunity to be whipped by me."

"That's what I like about you Steve," replied Hank between gasps, the sweat dripping from his face to his chest, "You're such a gracious winner. It's a good thing you only win once a year or it would really get to me."

"Once a year?" exclaimed Steve pretending to be exasperated "I've whipped you three times this week alone!"

"In your dreams buddy, in your dreams. Come on, let's go see if we can get that big head of yours through the door to the jacuzzi." Hank pulled open the door and ducked out into the hall just before Steve could hit him with the ball.

The two friends gathered up their equipment and walked down the hall towards the locker room. Hank was the older by almost a year, but at six feet two Steve was taller by a good four inches and never let Hank forget it.

What Hank gave away in height, he made up for in bulk. For the past ten months, since his graduation from high school, he had been working as the supply-hauling member of a construction crew. This constant physical exertion combined with the four to five hours a week he and Steve spent in the weight room had worked wonders on his five foot, ten inch physique.

"Yeow! I swear this smudge pot gets hotter every day." Steve shouted over the laughter of the children playing in the swimming pool as he dipped his toe into the jacuzzi.

"You're such a baby!" Hank called back stepping down into the bubbling waters. "Does your mom, still fill the tub for you?"

"No, but she washes behind my ears, why do ask?" replied Steve with a sarcastic grin. Hank laughed as he sat down in the jacuzzi, laid his head

back, and closed his eyes.

Despite the teasing, Steve couldn't bring himself to get down into the hot water so he sat on the edge with only his feet in. A few years ago, he never would have dreamed of sitting out on the deck without a shirt on--too many girls around and his arms were too thin--but the hours he had spent in the weight room had had their effect. Now he kind of enjoyed showing off. Clearly, he wasn't ready for the cover of Muscle and Fitness--like Hank--but he had long since lost his lankiness and was well-defined through the chest and shoulders. He amused himself for a few moments flexing his pectorals and watching the water drops run down his chest before Hank interrupted his thoughts.

"Bill took a sick day yesterday and went skiing. Said it was great. Skied without his shirt all afternoon. I'm thinking we oughta go tomorrow."

Steve shrugged. "I've got school."

"I know you have school!" Hank tried to sound exasperated to help Steve realize that ditching school was a normal and common thing to do. "Don't go to school, go skiing!"

Steve shrugged again. "It's not that easy, dude."

Hank sat up, opened his eyes and looked at Steve. "Dude, sooner or later you're going to have to start living your own life and making your own decisions. Don't get me wrong--I like your parents, I really do. I've told you a hundred times I used to dream of having the 'perfect' family like you. I mean your Dad is pretty cool and he's a big-wig in the ward and all, and your mom, she's always smiling and we both know she's the best cook in town, but sometimes I get the feeling they think you're still a 'scrub' scout."

"It's not that bad, man." Steve looked up from the water drops he had been pretending to study. "They don't make me go to Pack meeting anymore."

Hank didn't even smile, he was determined to make his point. "It's like the missionary thing, dude. Have you told 'em yet that you're not going?"

The smile left Steve's face as he shook his head. "See, that's what I mean!" Hank took his hand out the water long enough to point it at Steve. "You've got to be your own man and tell them how you really feel! You're the one that's going to be sent who-knows-where preaching something you don't even believe in, not them!"

Steve had heard this sermon a number of times before, he couldn't argue with the philosophy, but it bugged him when Hank acted so high and mighty telling him what to do. "Yeah, you're right. If my mom hung at the bowling

alley on Sundays and I'd never met my dad, it would probably be just as easy for me to tell my parents as it was for you to tell yours."

Even before the words were completely past his lips, Steve wished he had them back. Hank pretended not to mind and mumbled something about it not mattering what his parents thought he still had to tell them, but Steve could see the hurt in his eyes. The conversation died and Hank laid back and closed his eyes again.

The heat of the jacuzzi combined with the discomfort at having offended Hank, made Steve feel more and more like a lobster in a huge pot of water slowly cooking to death. The silence grew heavier and heavier as the two friends showered, dressed and climbed in Hank's jeep for the ride home. By the time they pulled up in front of his house, Steve couldn't take it any more. "Better pick me up at eight if we want to get up there by the time the lifts open."

Hank looked at Steve with a smile and nodded. "Ok dude. Eight o'clock." Steve climbed out and Hank pulled away like he was late for his own funeral. Gravel sprayed everywhere and Steve watched in glowing admiration as the little four-wheeler leaned to one side under the torque of the 304 and then shot away into traffic. For a moment he forgot about telling his parents anything. Someday he'd have a machine like that himself. He had about

\$3,000 in his mission fund already--mission!--the word yanked him back to reality.

Maybe Hank was right. Maybe he should just have it out with his parents and get it over with. The thoughts sloshed around in his mind as he picked his way through the slush puddles to the back door. His little sister Jessica greeted him as he dropped his bag on the washroom floor.

"Hey Stevie! What'd you bring me?" Steve smiled at the five year old toe-head--the only one in the world allowed to call him Stevie. He bent over and unzipped his bag.

"Let's see, I know I've got something in here for you." He pretended to be searching in his bag. "Come over here and help me look, would you?"

"No way, Jose!"

"Why not? Don't you want to see what I brought you?" Steve straightened up hiding his sweaty socks behind him.

"I don't want to get socked!"

"Socked? Have I ever socked you?" Before Jess could answer, he jumped over the bag, and stuck his smelly socks in her face. Squealing, she ran for

the kitchen like a stuck pig. Steve smiled and tossed the socks on top of the hamper. They'd played that little game almost every day for the last six months and Jess never seemed to get tired of it. In fact, she seemed to enjoy it more every day.

Steve found the rest of his sisters and his brother watching TV in the family room. "Hey, does anyone know where mom and dad are?"

Brian, his younger brother by 3 years, responded without taking his eyes off the set. "They went to the temple. Your dinner is in the microwave. Mom said to tell you it's your turn to do the dishes."

"My turn? I just did 'em on Monday!"

"Sorry dude. I'm just telling you what mom said. I'm taking care of the girls and you have to do the dishes." Brian's eyes still hadn't left the TV.

"Watching TV with the girls, that's a pretty big job for you Bry. Are you sure you can handle it?"

Brian just grunted and Steve walked back into the kitchen.

After consuming the feast his mom had left for him in the microwave--no doubt about it, his mom was an excellent cook--Steve started on the dishes

in the sink. He'd never admit it to anyone, but he kind of enjoyed doing the dishes. He seemed to think best when he was working on something with his hands. As he loaded the cups in the top rack of the dishwasher his mind returned to his parents and the mission.

It wasn't that he wanted to hurt his parents. He didn't. He'd got over the rebellious thing a few years ago. It wasn't that he was scared either. Oh sure, going off to some strange place for a few years made him a little nervous, but he knew he could handle that part. The real problem was that he didn't believe there was any need to try to convince the world to think the way he thought. No--not the way he thought--what the church taught.

When it came right down to it, he didn't completely believe everything the church taught and even if he did, he didn't think it was right to impose those views on the rest of the world. With that thought in mind, he slid the racks back into the dishwasher, poured soap into the little box, and shut the door.

As the sink filled with soapy water, Steve thought of his parents commitment to the church. A lot like Jessica and their little game, he thought, they go through the same routine week after week after week just because that's what they've always done. But is it really necessary? Sure, he believed in God and that it was wrong to be unkind to others. But organized religion and the need to get people to join, somehow it didn't seem necessary or even

right. Surely God wouldn't reject a person that had never hurt anyone and was always kind to others just because he wasn't a Mormon, or a Methodist, or even a Catholic for that matter. Steve rinsed the last casserole dish and laid it on the drying rack. Hank was right, he needed to tell his parents he wasn't going to go and why. Maybe if he explained it logically, the way he had just thought about it they would understand.

Chapter 02

Steve woke early but rolled over and pulled the covers up over his head to keep the light out. He hoped his parents would sleep late this morning and not have enough time for the family scripture reading session. It would be much easier to get out of the house with his ski gear if everyone was running late and scurrying about in a last minute frenzy than if everyone was ready to go on time and had nothing better to do than ask him questions.

He had almost dozed off again, when the clank of pans from the kitchen jolted him back to reality. “So much for plan A.” he mumbled to himself as he rolled back over and pulled the blankets down off his head. “I guess we’ll have to move to plan B.” He rolled over again and this time covered his head with his heavy down pillow. Maybe they’d forget to wake him up.

Steve’s dad stuck his head in the door. “Rise and shine tiger! Get your feet on the floor! The cereal is on!” Steve groaned, rolled over and slowly climbed out of bed. “I guess that leaves plan C,” he mumbled to himself.

“What’d you say Steve?” Brian, his hair wet and slicked straight back, stuck his head in the door.

“Oh nothing. Did you leave me any hot water?”

“Hey, it was half gone when I got in. Dad showered this morning and I think mom is filling the tub for the girls right now.” Steve groaned again, grabbed his towel off the hook on the back of his door and ran for the bathroom.

Steve’s mom was in a good mood. She’d been concerned lately about her oldest son. He was a good kid, she knew that. He was a great big brother and was always willing to help out around the house, but he didn’t seem to have any interest in, or commitment to, the gospel. He never refused to go to church or anything like that, but she could tell he was just going through the motions. He was much more concerned about building muscles and wearing the right clothes than he was about strengthening his testimony. Her biggest concern was that he would be nineteen in just a few months, but he refused to carry on any kind of conversation about going on a mission. Every time she brought it up, he would just grunt and change the subject. Having Hank as a friend also concerned her. He wasn’t a bad kid, but he wasn’t doing anything with his life and Steve seemed perfectly content to follow his lead--or lack thereof.

Her prayers on the situation had gone unanswered until last night. While at the temple, she had received the clear and distinct impression that everything would work out. Having complete faith the impression was accurate

and was from a divine source, her spirit and mood were brighter and lighter than they had been for some time. As she mixed up the blueberry muffin mix, a treat usually saved for Christmas and General Conference Sundays, she hummed her favorite hymn.

Brian was the first to make an appearance in the kitchen. “Mom, did you wash my new jeans?” And then, before his mom could answer, “What’s with the muffins? Is it conference again already?”

His mom smiled as she bent over to put the tin into the oven. Turning, she curtsied holding her bathrobe on each side and bending quickly at the knees. “And good morning to you my second son! I slept very well, thank you so much for asking. Would you please inform your illustrious siblings and your noble father that ‘le muffins de blueberry’ will be served shortly?”

Brian rolled his eyes and said with a certain amount of exasperation, “Mom, the jeans?”

His mom smiled and turned to stir the hot cereal cooking on the stove top. “Your new jeans are in the basket of clean clothes on the dryer and the special occasion is we are all alive and well.”

Brian passed his dad on the way out of the kitchen. “Better keep a close eye on her dad, I think she’s really lost it this time.”

His dad laughed and walked over to the kitchen phone. Picking it up he pretended to dial and then to carry on a conversation. “Hello, State Hospital? Yes, I have a middle aged house-wife who’s really ‘lost it.’ I’m wondering if you could send some one right over?” His imaginary conversation ended abruptly as his wife jabbed him in the ribs with the end of the spoon and took the phone from his hands. “Ouch! Better bring a straight jacket too!” he yelled into the receiver before she could hang it up. She jabbed him again and he grabbed her and hugged her tight so she couldn’t move her arms. They both laughed. She was the first to speak.

“Oh sweetie, I’ve been so worried about Steve lately. It feels so good to know that everything is going to be ok.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. I’ve been really concerned too. I feel like I have to walk on egg shells whenever I talk to him about a mission, but we really need to start getting him ready to go. How much money has he saved? It seems like he’s wearing a new shirt every time I see him.”

“I think there’s about \$3,000 in his mission account. Remember? When he set up his account at the bank years ago, he was too young to have his own account so it required our signatures to withdraw anything.” She pulled out of his arms as she spoke and moved to the stove to stir the cereal again and check on the muffins.

“Well, I think we need to have a council with him and see if we can’t help him lay down some plans for the next six months. If he works it right, he could put away another \$3,000 this summer. I thought I’d pick up a copy of *Preach My Gospel* for him as well. It wouldn’t hurt him to start studying it now.

“That’s a good idea. Why don’t we see if we can talk to him tonight? Maybe the three of us could go out to dinner or something.”

“Sounds good. I’ll give him a ride to school today and talk to him about it then. Hey, are those blueberry muffins I smell?”

“Yes, those are blueberry muffins you smell! Now would you please go gather your offspring so that we can read our scriptures before they burn?”

Fifteen minutes later the entire family was gathered around the table and had already finished their scripture reading. As they dove into the warm muffins, Steve’s dad offered him a ride to school.

Steve was taken back by the offer. Typically when he asked for a ride to school he got the “I walked to school in the snow every morning--uphill both ways” story. He was so surprised he didn’t have time to think up an excuse for saying no and just told the truth. “Thanks dad, but I’m not going to school today. I’m going skiing.”

His dad’s eyebrows went up so high Steve wondered if he’d ever get them back down. “You’re going where?” he asked.

“Skiing. You know, swoosh!, swoosh! Long straight things? Big boots?”

“I know what skiing is son. What I don’t understand is why you are going today. Is there some kind of day off or something?”

Steve shook his head. “We heard that the spring skiing was great right now, so we just decided to go.”

“We?” Steve’s mother entered the conversation.

“Yeah, me and Hank. One of his buddies at work went a few days ago and said it was great.”

His dad jumped back in. “Is he ditching work like you’re ditching school?”

“He’s taking a sick day.”

“Steve,” his mother tried to use her most understanding tone, “You’ve already got four absences this term. You really can’t afford any more and I really wish you wouldn’t spend so much time with Hank. I don’t think he’s a good influence on you.”

Steve could feel the hair on the back of his neck beginning to stand up.

“Mom, I’m not five years old playing in the sand box anymore. You can’t pick my friends. Besides, Hank’s not a bad influence on me. This really isn’t that big a deal! Everybody misses school once in a while to go skiing!”

“But son,” his dad tagged in, “you’re not everybody else. You’re different and you need to start standing up and acting differently. Hank doesn’t seem to have any direction in life. I’m worried that ten years from now, he’ll still be doing exactly what he’s doing now--whatever that is. Your mom and I have been talking about your mission. You only have a few more months to get ready. You really don’t have the time, or the money, to waste on skiing. I think you should rethink today and I agree with your mom: Hank is not a good influence.”

Steve was now on “anger” auto pilot. He hadn’t wanted to get into the mission discussion this morning, but there was no choice now. He might just as well get this whole thing out in the open once and for all. “Dad, you want me to be different? You want me to act different and stand up for what I believe?” Steve stood up from the table abruptly and his chair crashed to the floor behind him. The entire family watched in amazement.

“Ok, here’s different: I’m not going on a mission.” His dad tried to interrupt and he didn’t dare look at his mom’s face to see the reaction, he just

kept right on going. “I don’t believe in forcing one’s beliefs on another and I think this whole organized religion thing is a big crock. I can’t believe God will reject a good person just because they didn’t happen to meet up with the right religion. And as long as I believe that, it’s a waste of two years of my life to go on a mission. I won’t smoke, I won’t drink, I won’t steal, and I’ll even go to church with you if that’s what you want, but I am not going on a mission, I am going skiing today, and I will pick my own friends!” Not waiting for a response, he turned and went out the back door.

No one at the table said a word. The happy mood that had made the kitchen brighter than the fluorescent lights on the ceiling ever could, was now gone. Steve’s mom stood up and went to her bedroom. Brian, Jessica, and the other two girls sensed the gravity of the moment and didn’t budge. After several minutes, their dad looked up and said, “Please finish eating and get out the door. Your bus will be here in five minutes.”

Chapter 03

As Steve climbed from the jeep, the cold mountain air took his breath away. “Brrrr! I thought you said we were supposed to be able to ski without our shirts on!”

Hank rolled his eyes. “You really are a baby, you know that? It will be plenty warm when the sun gets up. Put on your coat and let’s go get our passes before the line gets any longer.”

Steve unzipped the inside pocket of his parka and dug out some money. Handing it to Hank he said, “No you go get the passes. I’ll meet you in the lodge. I’m going to get some hot chocolate and check out the female situation.”

Hank considered arguing but thought better of it, “Whatever you say. ‘U da man’ today.” He turned and trudged off to the ticket booth.

Steve pulled his jacket on, checked his hair in the rearview mirror, then put on his new sunglasses. The sun wouldn’t be up for another thirty minutes or so, but the hundred dollar glasses were too nice to leave stuffed in a pocket somewhere. As he walked to the lodge, he began to feel better about the prospects for the day. He had felt some remorse for his outburst at the kitchen table this morning, but after talking with Hank he felt much better.

He really hadn’t meant to get that angry but, as Hank suggested, it was probably the only way to get his point across. He smiled as he thought about the chair crashing to the ground. It was purely accidental, but it sure added emphasis to his speech.

As he reached the door of the lodge Steve looked up at the surrounding mountains. The sun was just reaching the snow-covered peaks and the crystal blue sky provided a brilliant backdrop. “This is what it is all about.” Steve thought to himself. “Freedom, beautiful surroundings, good friends. This is life.”

The quest for available females didn’t turn out as Steve had hoped. He ordered two hot chocolates from a “lunch lady”--hair net and all--and took a seat next to a window with a good view of the mountain. The chocolate was scorching hot, but the heat of the cup felt good on his hands. It was just getting cool enough to sip when Hank walked in and took the seat across the table.

“Any luck with the women folk?”

Steve shook his head and grimaced. “Not unless you’re into lunch ladies.”

Hank smiled. “Cheer-up man. The skiing is going to be hot. I saw some babes in the ticket line. New shades?” Hank pointed at the glasses on the

table next to Steve.

“Yeah, a hundred big ones. Nice uh?” Steve picked them up and handed them to Hank for his inspection.

“Not bad, not bad at all. Are they x-ray?”

“What?” Steve replied incredulously.

“X-ray. You know like those glasses they used to advertise in Boy’s Life. Seems like they were \$5.99. Heck, for a hundred bucks you ought to be able to see through mountains!”

Steve chuckled. “Don’t be so jealous dude!”

Hank smiled in return. “Me jealous? I don’t think so. I’m just glad you got them when you did, you’re going to need all the help you can get to keep up with me on the slopes today.”

“Listen to you! I’m the one that’s always waiting at the bottom for you. A thousand dollars worth of skis and you’re still snow-plowing.”

Hank smiled calmly. “You know, there’s one way to find out who’s the better skier.”

“I’m listening.” Steve replied.

Hank continued, “From now until lunch, every run is a race. We’ll alternate choosing the course. We ride the lift together and the first one back to the bottom wins that race. Whoever has the most wins by twelve noon is the better skier.”

Steve smiled, this is what he liked about Hank, the competition, the challenge, always squeezing everything he could out of life. But this morning, just racing wasn’t enough. They’d raced plenty of times. This morning it had to mean something. Steve had declared his liberty and know he was going to exercise it. “Sounds good to me,” he replied, “but I think we should make it more interesting.” Hank looked up from his hot chocolate and Steve went on, “If I win, I drive your jeep like it was mine for a month.”

“And if I win?” Hank asked.

“If you win, the glasses are yours.” Hank smiled and nodded. “You got yourself a deal big man.” He went to hand the glasses back to Steve and then thought better of it. “I don’t think I want you wearing these today. You might scratch them or something.”

Steve gave him a sarcastic smile, stood up and took the glasses out of his hand. “You better go drive your jeep one last time. I’ll be driving

home.”

Hank rolled his eyes, took one more sip of his hot chocolate, and followed Steve out the door.

By eleven thirty the shirts were off and the score was even. Steve was more at home on the moguls and had won every time the course included a number of them. Hank was like a banshee on the straight-aways.

“Dude, last run before twelve.” said Hank checking his watch as they settled onto the chair lift. “You've picked the course three times and I've picked the course three times. It's my turn again, but I was thinking we ought to do anything goes. First one to the bottom by any course wins. What'd ya say?”

“Henry you are a gentleman and a scholar. But that's not going to keep me from thrashing you. It starts as soon as the skis hit the snow.” The conversation died and they both sat in silence for several minutes as the lift took them higher and higher up the mountain. Competition had been a part of their friendship from the beginning, but this was the first time Steve could remember having actually bet something on it. Somehow it felt different. It was definitely challenging and exciting, but it did nothing for the friendship. Right now, more than anything, Steve wanted Hank to lose. “Well, too late

to go back now.” He thought to himself as the shack at the top of the lift came into view. As soon as his tips hit the snow he jumped off the seat and dug with both poles. “I'll order lunch for you at the bottom!” He yelled over his shoulder at Hank as he dropped off the catwalk into a steep set of moguls.

Hank stayed on the catwalk and tucked himself low with his poles in tight. Steve might be faster down the moguls, but Hank knew he could beat him, even if he had to go farther, by staying on the straight aways and just plain flying.

By the time Steve reached midway, where the steep mogul course and the smoother trail came back together, he was winded but confident that he had built a sizable lead. He had never done the moguls faster and he knew Hank would take the longer course to avoid the bumps. His biggest concern was that the lower half of the slope wasn't nearly as steep as the top. If Hank was even close to him at this point, Steve would have a hard time holding him off to the bottom. Just as that thought crossed his mind, he caught a flash of movement out of the corner of his right eye. It was Hank! He was in his tuck position and didn't even slow down as he shot past Steve.

“Shoot!” Steve jammed his poles into the snow and pulled himself forward, “There's got to be another way down. I'll never catch him if I stay on the

trail.” In a split second, Steve made the decision of a life time. Instead of following Hank on the marked trail, he went straight across it and into the trees. He’d rode the lift once with a guy who swore it was possible to ski straight down the mountain rather than following the trail. The shortest course was straight down, and right now that is exactly what Steve needed.

The ungroomed snow and fallen trees made for rough going. Steve figured it was near the end of the season and he needed new skis anyway so he wasn’t too concerned about rocks or other scrapes. Despite the rough terrain, he did pretty well and managed to avoid any serious falls. By the time his straight downhill course crossed paths with the winding, groomed trail again he felt sure he had passed Hank. He hesitated for just a moment to catch his breath while his eye focused on the trail above. Still no Hank, but Steve knew he couldn’t be far behind. If he stayed on the trail now, it would all depend on how far back Hank was. Steve wasn’t left to ponder for long. Hank’s bent-over figure appeared on the trail above him and Steve could see he was booking. “Well, I guess that decides it.” He jammed his poles into the ground, skated across the trail and dropped off into the trees on the other side.

Having successfully skied the ungroomed run above, Steve threw all caution to the wind and went at it with everything he had. He was a naturally gifted

athlete and his body was in the best condition it had ever been. The challenge of the bet combined with the risk of being off the beaten path added further adrenalin to his system and for a few glorious moments he felt unstoppable. Every turn was picture perfect, every jump video-worthy. It wasn’t but a few moments before Steve could see a clearing through the trees. “Boy, that was even faster than I expected,” he thought as he made the last few cuts and came out from under the trees. “Why do runs like this only happen when no one else is around?” was his last thought before the world dropped out from under him.

The clearing Steve saw through the trees, and assumed was the trail, was actually formed by a very deep and rugged ravine with a small, partially iced-over creek running down the bottom. Where Steve came upon the ravine, the opposite side was forty to fifty feet away. Both sides were so steep they might have well have been vertical. From Steve’s perspective, it was just like shooting off the top of a thirty foot cliff with nothing but rocks and ice cold water at the bottom.

His first thought as he went airborne was to reach the opposite side. He realized in an instant he would never make it and began waving his arms wildly trying to keep from going down head first. The involuntary scream that started as he went over the edge ended abruptly with a crash as he hit

the stream.

Chapter 04

CLANK! CLANK! CLANK! CLANK! The pounding in Steve's head would not stop. It got louder and louder and louder until he was sure his head would burst. Finally, in desperation he put both hands to his ears and screamed, "Ahhhhhh!"

"Elder! Elder! Wake up, Elder! You've had a bad dream! Wake up!" Someone was shaking Steve by the shoulders and yelling in his ear, but even the shouting didn't drown out the constant CLANK! CLANK! CLANK! in his head. With some struggle, he managed to open his eyes and then immediately slammed them shut again to avoid the bright sunlight.

"Elder, are you Ok? Shall I get the captain?" Whoever had been shaking and yelling at Steve was again talking to him and rubbing his hand. Very slowly and cautiously, Steve opened his eyes just a crack and looked in the direction of the voice. Expecting to see a member of the ski patrol, or a paramedic, or a nurse, or even a doctor, Steve jumped to his feet when his eyes focused on a young girl about his age wearing a long-sleeved, white blouse and a long, woolen skirt. Jumping up so quickly, he failed to see the shelf above his head and smashed directly into it. Involuntarily, he slumped back down in his seat holding his head with both hands.

"Oh baby, that hurt like a monster!" he moaned.

"Baby? What baby, Elder?" The young girl sitting next to Steve looked at him with a truly perplexed look on her face.

Steve looked back at her with an equally puzzled look and she ventured a weak smile. He couldn't bring himself to smile, he was too confused and his head hurt too much. "Why do you keep calling me Elder, who are you, and where are we?" he asked in a demanding tone.

The smile on the girl's face quickly turned to surprise and then terror. She stood quickly and said, "I better get the captain, you're not well." Before Steve could stop her, she turned and almost ran away. Steve groaned again and took in his surroundings. Though he had never been on a train before, he'd seen enough movies to know he was now on one. From the looks of it, it was a pretty old one. The clanking in his head was at least partially caused by the constant clickety-clack of the train. The seat he sat on was wooden and not at all comfortable. The glass in the windows gave plenty of light but had many irregularities which distorted the green countryside that was quickly slipping by. Looking up to see where he had brained himself, Steve found the overhead luggage shelf. It was stacked high on both sides

with all kinds of old-fashioned bundles: Mary Poppins type carpet bags, burlap bags, wooden chests, round hat boxes. Steve shook his head in amazement and as he lowered his gaze he quickly became aware that he wasn't alone. In fact he was the center of attention.

All of the seats in the car were full and every eye seemed to be focused on him. On the bench directly across from him sat what appeared to be an entire family: mother, father, two sons and a daughter. Their clothes were as old fashioned as the rest of the train. The little girl was wearing a bonnet tied tightly below her chin. She sat on her mother's lap and stared with wide eyes at Steve. Feeling suddenly self-conscious, Steve looked down at himself to make sure he wasn't covered with blood. He was so surprised to see what he was wearing he again jumped to his feet and smashed his head into the overhead shelf. The little girl giggled as Steve frantically searched through the pockets of the broad cloth suit he was wearing. Nothing! His wallet, his glasses, his money--everything was gone. And this suit! Where had this suit come from? It looked just like the clothes all the rest of the people were wearing. A "Joseph Smith" suit that's what it was. The shirt collar came up high on both sides, nearly touching Steve's chin. The tie was as white as the shirt and was tied in more of a bow than the traditional tie knots that Steve had learned as a deacon. Steve had to admit that the jacket was much more comfortable than his blazer at home. It was cut high in the

front at about the waist, but was long in the back with tails.

He was just bending over to examine the old-fashioned boots that had replaced his ski boots when a commotion began at the front end of the car. The young girl that had been sitting next to Steve had reentered the car with a man. They were working their way down the center isle toward Steve, greeting everyone along the way.

While they were still a couple of rows away the young lady called out to Steve, "I'm back, Elder, and I've brought the captain." She motioned to the man that followed her and Steve's eyes opened wide as he took in the man she called the captain. He was shorter than Steve and rather stocky. His suit was almost identical to Steve's, but his tie was black rather than white and was tied in a neat square knot. He had very little beard on the front of his face, but rather thick growth down both sides and under the chin. His hair was fairly long, about jaw level, and easily covered both ears. It was combed straight down on the sides and seemed to naturally curl under at the ends.

By this time, Steve was convinced he had died and this train was taking him to spirit prison or paradise (though he hadn't decided which yet). Seeing who he believed to be Brigham Young added evidence to his death theory and so without guile he stuck out his hand to the man called the captain and

said with awe, “Brigham Young! I wanted to meet you my whole life. Is Joseph Smith on this train as well?”

The two boys on the bench across from Steve began to giggle and the young girl who had gone for the captain slumped down on Steve’s bench her face suddenly white with worry. A grin almost as wide as his beard spread across the captain’s face as he took Steve’s hand. “Sorry Elder, you’ll have to walk fifteen hundred miles before you can take President Young by the hand and I suppose you’ll have to wait to get to heaven to meet the Prophet Joseph. But, in the mean time, I’m Captain Edward Martin and I’m very pleased to make your acquaintance.” He laughed a hearty laugh and shook Steve’s hand vigorously. Steve was now totally confused.

“You, you mean I’m not dead?” he muttered out weakly.

“Dead? My no lad! You’re nearly to Iowa City with the rest of these good saints.” He motioned to the others sitting in the car and continued, “In a few months you’ll be in Zion with your family.”

“Iowa City? I was just skiing in Utah this morning. Did I fly out here? What day is it?” Steve was now getting frantic and the Captain took him by the arms and gently pushed him back down onto the bench seat. The captain’s smile had left his face.

“Today is July 8th, 1856. To my knowledge you’ve been on a mission in England with the rest of us for the last three years. I do believe in miracles Elder, but I have never seen a man fly and so I very much doubt that you were in Utah this morning.”

“No that can’t be!” Steve pushed away the captain’s arms and jumped to his feet, smashing his head for the third and final time into the overhead rack. The impact this time was more than Steve’s already very confused and very bruised head could take and he fainted out cold. The young girl gasped and the captain quickly grabbed him and lowered him back onto the train seat. As soon as he had settled him on the bench, he put his ear to Steve’s mouth to listen for breathing and loosened his tie.

“Somebody open a window! Give the poor lad some air!” There was a moment of shuffling and bustling and then nearly every window on the car was open.

“He’s going to be alright!” The captain had to shout to be heard over the rushing air and the clickety-clack of the train. “His heart is still beating and he’s still breathing.” Turning to the father of the family that sat across from Steve, he continued “Brother O’Malley, would you and your family mind keeping an eye on him until we get to Iowa City? We’ll find a doctor for him there.”

“Aye, we’d be happy to do that fer ya, Captain.” the father replied with a thick Irish brogue. “Mum here twill care fer ‘im as one of ‘er own.” The captain seemed about to reply but was interrupted by a shout from the car door.

“Next stop Iowa City! End of the Line!” A cheer rose from the passengers and Brother O’Malley shouted to the captain. “Be off with ya now. The lad’ll be fine wit us.” The captain gave Brother O’Malley’s hand a final shake, smiled his appreciation, and made his way through the cheering saints to the front of the train.

Steve woke lying flat on his back looking up at a white plaster ceiling with more cracks than he could count. A kerosene lamp hung from the ceiling directly over him. His head throbbed with pain and it took some time before he could focus his mind on anything more than the cracks and the lamp. Slowly, through the mist that seemed to have settled over his mind, he began to realize that someone was carrying on a conversation in the room.

“He clearly has congestion of the brain and that has caused him to forget who he is.” The first voice was saying.

The second voice, which had a foreign accent, replied, “And with what would ye be curin’ him, doctor?”

“Drill through the skull and let the liquid drain. Otherwise he’ll go mad for sure.”

The foreign voice sighed. “In the old country a pint of the strong stuff would cure ‘im sure. Well, if ye must drill him, how long till he be up and about again?”

“Hard to say.” The first voice replied, “It’s still an experimental technique. But, I’ve had good success on a few dogs and a horse. Your friend would be the first human--but it may be his only chance.”

Steve’s brain was now as clear as a bell--nobody was going to drill a hole in his skull in a room lit by a kerosene lamp. He sat up and grimaced at the pain but forced a smile onto his face. He almost fainted again as he looked around the room and saw bottle after bottle filled with what he recognized as human organs on the shelves and counters. Another bed or table, like the one he sat on, was within touching distance. That patient apparently hadn’t fared as well as Steve. He, or she, was covered by a white sheet except for the arm that protruded from under the sheet on Steve’s side. The arm had apparently been dissected and Steve could see clear to the bone. Involuntarily, Steve had to cough and turn his head. The two men conversing heard his cough and came quickly to his side.

Steve recognized the one with the foreign accent as the father of the family on the train. The other one, who Steve gathered considered himself a doctor, was fondling an auger bit big enough to drill an oil well. Not waiting for a word from either of them Steve looked directly at the father from the train and said, “What are we doing here Brother St. Patrick? (the only name that Steve could think of that fit the accent) Where are the wagons? Zion’s waiting! Let’s get going!” Steve jumped down off the table he had been laying on and put his arm around the man’s shoulders.

“Aye, Elder, ye be back! Bless yer soul and tank the Lord!” The father smiled a huge smile and put his strong arm around Steve’s back. Turning to the doctor he said, “We’ll not be needing yer services professor. A miracle it is!” He gave Steve a firm squeeze and with their arms around each other, the two of them walked toward the door.

The doctor, seeing his first opportunity to perform brain surgery walking out the door, tried to stop them. “No wait! He still has fluid on his brain. I’m a professor of medicine and a doctor! I must insist that we operate!”

O’Malley smiled but kept walking with his arm firmly around Steve’s waist. “Not today, Doctor! As fit as a fiddle, he is! Top of the mornin’ to you sir!” He opened the door and they both stepped out into the lobby of the building. Steve breathed a sigh of relief, but neither of them slowed their pace as

they headed to the light of day coming through the glass in the doors at the end of the lobby.

It took Steve’s eyes several seconds to adjust to the bright sunlight. He stumbled as he stepped out the door and had to steady himself on one of the massive pillars that were positioned at the top of the broad stairs leading down to the street. His new friend supported him by the arm and whispered in his ear. “Keep walking lad, keep walking! That butcher’ll get ya yet! A fine buildin’ for a university ‘tis, but they’ve got a wee bit o’ learnin’ to do ‘bout medicine.” Steve glanced back and saw the doctor in the lobby coming toward them. He still carried his drill bit in his hand.

Mustering all his strength, Steve stood upright. “I’m fine, really I am. I just lost my balance.” The two started down the stairs.

“Aye, and your memory too!” replied the Irishman, “Me name is O’Malley, lad--not St. Patrick.”

Chapter 05

Steve stopped walking and looked down into O'Malley's face with sudden terror. He thought he'd gotten away with his little St. Patrick trick. For an instant he considered running. He didn't know where, but maybe if he ran long enough he would wake up from this crazy dream. O'Malley pulled him from his thoughts.

"Right. Keep walkin' laddie, and don't worry so. I would not be turning ye over to be drilled if ye were the dark one hisself! Can ye really not remember a ting?" Steve turned and looked into O'Malley's face for a moment and considered how much he should say. The Irishman's eyes twinkled.

Steve shrugged his shoulders. "I remember--just not what people think I should. I sure as heck don't remember being on a mission in England."

"No worries, lad. I visited England once meself. Wished now I could forget the place. That's the fact. Not much to look at. What do ye remember then, lad? Yer family. Certainly ye remember yer family?"

"Sure, I remember them. I saw them just this morning--no, not *this* morning--a spring morning in the year 2006."

"2006? Aye, laddie, do not toy with me." O'Malley continued walking

down the street mumbling to himself. "'2006' the Elder says. 'A spring mornin in 2006.' I never should have given up the drink. Could use a pint or two now, I could." Turning back to Steve who remained in the middle of the street, he yelled, "Are ye sure it was spring, Elder? I'd feel much better had it been the winter of 2006!" He chuckled at his own joke and turned and continued mumbling to himself as he walked down the dusty street.

Thoughts of running again entered Steve's mind. He was convinced now that he wasn't sleeping and he wasn't dead. But it was going to take some time to figure out where he was and why. In the meantime, he was going to need a place to sleep and food to eat and right now O'Malley was his best option.

"Wait! Brother St. Patrick--I mean O'Malley--wait!" Steve ran and caught him by the arm. "Hey, wait up! I need your help! I can't remember the past. I need you to help me remember." O'Malley stopped and considered Steve for a moment.

"Aye Elder, I don't know what to make of ya. For a minute me thinks you're a crazy bloke what I should take back and have drilled. But this little voice, it whispers in me ear, 'O'Malley' it says, 'O'Malley, this be a good lad, a servant of the Lord, what needs yer help.' So, says I, if that's what's to be then that's what's to be. I'll help ye, laddie. But no more talk about

the future. Do ye understand?" The Irishman wiggled his forefinger in Steve's face.

"Yes, yes, I understand." Steve replied shaking O'Malley's hand like he was jacking up Hank's jeep. "Thanks O'Malley. Thanks!"

O'Malley finally managed to get his hand away from Steve. "Yah, yah, yah. Come, we've much work to do at camp. The handcarts have yet to be finished." He turned and started down the road again.

"Handcarts! You're--I mean--we're going to Zion in handcarts?" Steve stood frozen in the middle of the road.

O'Malley turned around again. "A very long trip it is going to be if ye insist on questioning everything I say. Yes! We're goin' in handcarts, Brother Brigham's glorious plan to bring the saints to Zion and escape the tyranny of the old world."

"But O'Malley, I've heard of the handcart pioneers. They die!"

"Nonsense, lad! I'm warning ye, if ye keep this up, I'll take ye back and have ye drilled, I will!"

"But you don't understand! I know what is going to happen!"

"I'll not be listenin' to any more of this Elder. Not a wee bit more! Ye can either come to camp with me and keep this nonsense to yerself or ye can go back to the doctor."

Steve tried again, "Don't you see? Your family, they might--"

"Enough!" O'Malley spoke with such force and command Steve took a step backward. The Irishman continued, the twinkle in his eyes had now turned to a fire brighter than the red of his hair, "The Lord, through his living prophet, has called us all to come to Zion. I'll not be dissuaded by ye nor any other mortal. If ye'll not be traveling with us, then be off with ye!"

Steve stood for a moment staring into O'Malley's face. The sudden power and determination of this short man with the red hair and fiery eyes surprised him. To say anything more was useless. To turn and leave him--well, Steve had already been through that--there was no place to go. Besides, despite his stubbornness, Steve had already grown to like this Irishman. Maybe if he stuck around he could help him and his family survive. With a resigned look and a quiet determination of his own Steve quietly said, "Let's go to camp. I won't say another word."

As they walked silently down the street, Steve suddenly realized he was sweating like he'd just played three games of racquetball. He peeled off his

jacket, unbuttoned his vest, and took off his tie. The white shirt he wore reminded him of his mother's white blouses. The sleeves were full and puffy and it took several rolls before he could get them to stay up above his elbows. The shirt collar rubbing up against his jaw and chin annoyed him, so he undid the top two or three buttons and folded the collar down on his shoulders. Even without the jacket, vest, and tie, Steve felt little relief from the heat. There were no breezes and the humidity was thick.

The street they walked on was a combination of dirt and cobblestone. It was wide enough for two wagons to pass and not much more. Both sides of the street were lined with wooden and brick buildings. Some of the wooden buildings had false fronts that made them look bigger than they really were. Steve's eyes had a hard time keeping up with all the amazing sights and sounds. The signs on the buildings were ornately painted in an old-fashioned script. There was the Iowa City Mercantile, two or three banks, and more lawyers than Steve could count. The street was alive with folks in old fashioned clothing bustling from one store to the next. Steve even saw a man with a tin badge and a six-shooter tied down on his leg.

As they made their way out of the center of town--and it only took a few minutes--the false front buildings and businesses gave way to homes and churches. The churches, and they passed several, were all fine brick struc-

tures. A few of the homes were also built of brick. Others appeared to be made of mud bricks or adobe, while still others looked just like the log cabin on the syrup bottle Steve had used at breakfast so often. Split rail fencing surrounded most of the homes. A few of the nicer homes had neat little picket fences. Several homes were still under construction.

At the outskirts of the little town, just passed a plow factory, the road climbed slightly to the top of a small bluff. O'Malley puffed and panted as they climbed. Steve wondered how a man that puffed and panted so, at such an easy walk, was planning to pull a handcart across the entire country, but decided now wasn't the time to bring it up. Instead he turned and looked back at the city. The big building with the massive pillars from which he had so narrowly escaped, was clearly visible in the center of the city with the many other structures surrounding it.

"What is that big building we were in O'Malley? It seems so out of place out here."

O'Malley was glad for the excuse to rest and turned and looked back at the city as well. "They say it was built to be the capital of the state of Iowa. The capital moved west a year or so ago and now they're trying to make a university of it." O'Malley had to pause to catch his breath before continuing, "Now don't get me wrong laddie. I'm as lucky as a leprechaun to be in

this new world and glad of it I am, but Trinity it's not."

"Trinity? Never heard of it." Steve replied.

"The College of Trinity in Dublin!"

"Oh." Steve nodded and thought for a few moments "Well, give this Iowa school a chance. I'll bet someday they have a pretty good football team."

"Football? Aye Elder, I fear for your head I do." The Irishman turned and continued up the road.

As they reached the top of the bluff, they found themselves looking down on the flood plain of what was to Steve a massive river.

"Is that the Mississippi?" he asked.

"No lad, we crossed the Mississippi a day or so ago. This is the Iowa, and that," O'Malley pointed to a city of tents nestled between the bluff and the river almost directly below them, "that is our home for the next few weeks while we build our carts."

Steve's gaze followed O'Malley's hand to the city of tents below them. The tents were round and very light in color making a sharp contrast to the deep green foliage which surrounded them. Steve didn't take time to count, but

there appeared to be forty or fifty tents and each of them looked two to three times bigger than the eight-man tent that Steve's family used for family camp outs.

"How many people are there?" Steve asked without taking his eyes off the camp.

"Aye, a wee bit more than a thousand. The passengers of the good ship Thornton arrived a few weeks ago and combined with our company from the Horizon we're more than a thousand."

"And they're--er, we're all going by handcart?" Steve asked, still amazed at the size of the encampment.

"Fer the most part. There be three hundred or so plannin' to go by wagon train. A wee bit more money is what it takes." O'Malley replied with a bit of a sigh. "C'mon lad, let's be on our way."

The two started down the road toward the camp, but Steve continued to talk. "There's one thing I don't understand--well actually there's a lot of things I don't understand--but anyway, we were on a train earlier right?"

"Good laddie good! See there yer memory is returning. A train it was indeed."

“Well I never knew the pioneers rode on trains. And you--we were on boats too? I thought the pioneers got chased out of Nauvoo or someplace in the middle of the winter and had to cross a river on the ice.”

“Ah that’s been a few years Elder. The saints have na lived in Nauvoo for goin’ on ten years now. Taken over by the mob they say. And as far as the boats, t’would be mighty difficult to get here from England without one, me thinks.”

Steve thought for a few minutes. “What year did you say it was again?”

“1856.”

“That’s right, the first pioneers were in 1847--Days of ‘47 parade.” Steve started putting the pieces together. O’Malley gave him a funny look but said nothing. “And you--I mean we--all came straight from England?” Steve continued to question.

“Aye, the ship sailed from Liverpool, but we’re not all Englishmen. I’m as Irish as the grass is green and I know of Welsh, German and others.”

Steve and O’Malley were now making their way through the tent city. Children were running and playing among the tents. The women tending the cooking fires chatted happily. Despite the number of people and the sheer

size of the camp, Steve was amazed at the general cleanliness and organization. Most of the people seemed to be busily working at something. Several called out greetings to Steve and O’Malley as they passed.

Somewhere near the center of the camp, O’Malley guided Steve to the flap door of one of the tents. “Let’s see what the missus has got for us to eat Elder, then we’ll be gettin’ down to the buildin’ o’ the carts.” Before O’Malley could pull back the flap a young girl shot out of the tent and wrapped her arms around his wide waste.

“Papa! Papa!”

“Maeve, me darlin!” O’Malley scooped up the little girl in his arms and spun her around laughing as he turned. Steve stood and watched, a huge smile across his face. The little girl reminded him of his sister Jessica. O’Malley put his daughter down and sent her back into the tent to find her mom. She ran off calling, “Mum! Mum!” O’Malley settled down on a log under the shade of a nearby tree and Steve joined him.

“How many children do ye have Elder?” O’Malley asked Steve casually.

“Me?” Steve almost fell off the log, “I don’t have any children, I’m not even married. Heck, I’m only eighteen!”

“Too bad Elder, too bad! The light of me life that little girl is. Me little Queen Maeve.”

“I have a little sister about Maeve’s age.” Steve offered, “Jessica. Maeve reminds me of her.”

“Well does she now? That’s a good thing Elder! You’re getting your memory back. That’s a good thing.”

Steve thought about telling O’Malley he’d never lost his memory, but forgot the idea as his mind reflected on the auger-bit doctor. He asked a question instead, “How many other children do you have?”

“Two lads. Desmond with fourteen years and Noel with twelve. Good lads they are, but as stubborn as their Pappi I fear.” He seemed about to continue when the tent flap opened again and a short little woman with auburn hair appeared. She was wearing a long gingham dress with a white apron and had her hair pulled back tightly in a pony tail. A few wisps of hair had escaped the pony tail and now hung down on her perspiring forehead. She carried a white towel or rag (which Steve was later to learn rarely left her hand). O’Malley and Steve both jumped to their feet as she appeared. She was the first to speak.

“Elder! Ye’re well! I knew the good Lord’d care for his servants. Yer mem-

ory has returned then?” She flipped the towel over her shoulder and reached out to shake Steve’s hand. Steve took her hand but hesitated not knowing quite what to say. O’Malley rescued him.

“It will take some time mum. He’s had quite a bump, but he remembers Zion and wants to go with us, and that’s all that is important right now.” She looked up at Steve with concern in her eyes for a few moments and patted the back of his hand.

“Ye’ll be fine Elder. The Lord cares for his own. And in the mean time, we’ll care for ye as one of our own, won’t we papa?” Steve was just about to express his gratitude, when she spoke again, this time with a mock anger in her voice. “Now be off with the both of ya and get yerselfs washed and out of those travel clothes! The whole day’s been wasted! No time for resting in the shade Patrick O’Malley! Captain Martin has called a meeting of the entire company, and those brethren what worked today will be in for their meals shortly!” She emphasized the word work.

“You’re a hard woman, Mary me girl.” O’Malley replied with a glint in his eye. “Come along Elder, we’ll get no rest till we’ve done as she says.” He gave his wife a quick peck on the cheek and then a whack on the behind. Quick as a striking snake she pulled the towel off her shoulder and whacked his arm with it.

“Aye, you’re an evil one Patrick O’Malley,” she mocked anger, “just as me dear father said, evil as the day is long! Now be off with you!” O’Malley laughed and Steve was sure he saw Sister O’Malley smiling as she went back into the tent.

Chapter 06

“Ohhhhh!” Steve groaned as he bent over to wash his face in the spring.

The quick motion reminded him instantly how much his head still hurt.

“Still a wee bit sore, eh elder?” O’Malley had his shirt off and was splashing water on his chest and under his arms.

Steve gingerly splashed some water on his face. “Ah, that feels great!” He splashed his face several more times. The cool water was welcome relief from the stifling heat. “Think anyone would mind if I went for a swim?” He turned and asked O’Malley who was now buttoning up a clean shirt.

“A swim, is it? If ye’re sure your fit for it, Elder. I’m not a swimmer meself and if ye got in a bad way I’d not be able to help.”

“I’ll be fine.” Steve already had his boots and his shirt off and was working on his pants. As soon as they hit the ground he was in the water. It felt wonderful. For the first time since the skiing accident he began to feel normal again. The cool water was invigorating, but even more than that, Steve loved the physical exercise. He had experienced so many strange things in the last few hours, but swimming and exercise were things he knew and loved. He swam the length of the spring and back three times before he stopped for a rest.

“I can see ye’ll na be needin’ me to fish ye out Elder! A fine swimmer ye are.” O’Malley called. He had finished dressing and had his travel clothes under his arm. “I’ll be on me way now. Mum will be looking for me sure. Yer bag of clothes is there, under the tree.” O’Malley pointed to the base of a large oak growing near the edge of the water. “Don’t be long now, dinner does na last with this crowd.” With a wave, he turned and followed the path through the thick foliage back to the city of tents.

Steve watched O’Malley go and then dove back into his laps with a vengeance. The thought occurred to him that maybe if he swam hard enough and long enough he’d wake up at home again. He’d been skiing and ended up here, maybe swimming was the door back. At any rate, swimming was something he felt comfortable doing so he swam and swam and swam and swam. At fifteen he lost count of the laps, but swam a few more just for good measure and then, when his lungs felt like they were going to burst, he quit and rolled over onto his back. Still in Iowa. The few wispy clouds in the sky had a pinkish hue from the sun that was now setting, but other than that it looked just like it had before he started. He let himself float for a few minutes, and then decided he had better get dressed before it got any darker. Diving to the bottom he pulled himself toward the shore and didn’t surface again until he had reached it.

“EEEEK!” The voice was so loud and shrill, Steve jumped backwards, lost his footing in the mud on the bottom of the spring, and fell completely into the water. Flailing his arms and scrambling with his legs, he finally managed to regain his balance and stand up.

On the shore stood a young girl with a large pot in her hand. For some reason she was looking off to the right of Steve but even without seeing her whole face, he could tell that he had given her quite a scare. For a moment he just stood there, not sure what he should do. Then a rather large mosquito on his hind side reminded him that he wasn't dressed for a casual conversation with a member of the opposite sex. He took a few steps backward and bent his knees so that the water covered him up to his neck.

“I, er, I, I'm sorry I didn't mean to scare you.” He said from the relative safety of deeper water.

“I must say, I didn't expect to find a naked man in the drinking water!” She said curtly still looking away from Steve.

“Oh sorry, O'Malley--Brother O'Malley said it would be ok if I took a swim. I didn't know this was drinking water.” Steve turned and looked where the young girl was looking. “What are you looking at over there anyway?” He asked.

“I'm not looking at anything! I'm trying to protect my eyes and my mind from you and your condition!”

Steve might have blushed but he was too amused. “Well you can quit worrying, I'm covered now so hurry and get your water so I can get out. The mosquitoes are eating me alive.”

Now it was the girl's turn to be amused. “Maybe leaving you to the mosquitoes for the night would teach you not to bath in the drinking water. Maybe I'll just stay right where I am.” She sat down on the shore but continued to look off to the right.

“Fine with me.” Steve replied, “I'm coming out either way.” He stood up and began walking toward the shore. Hearing the splash, she turned quickly and looked at him long enough to see he was really coming. Convinced, she jumped to her feet and ran for the trail, fuming all the way.

“Hey, you forgot your drinking water!” Steve called after her and then chuckled as he climbed up onto the shore.

The sun had now set and the light remaining was fading fast. Digging through the canvas bag that O'Malley had assured him was his, Steve found a pair of brown trousers and a tan shirt. The shirt was in the same pattern as the white one he had taken off but not nearly as frilly or baggy. Steve was

glad for the long sleeves of the shirt, the mosquitoes were as big as horse flies. The pants were a little stranger. Rather than one zipper or set of buttons in the center, they had two sets of buttons on the front but spread to the two sides. They also had suspenders instead of a belt. Steve quickly pulled them on and, not finding another pair of boots in the bag, put the old pair back on. He ran his fingers through his hair a few times in a vain attempt to straighten it then gathered up the bag and headed for camp.

When Steve reached the tent where the O'Malley family was living, only sister O'Malley was still there. She was bent over a large cast iron kettle, scraping it out with wooden spoon. Her towel hung down from her shoulder. She looked up as Steve drew near. "Aye Elder it's you! I was beginnin' to think maybe you'd drowned and I could eat your food!"

Steve laughed. "Sorry, I tried."

She looked up to see if he was serious. Steve smiled again and said, "I didn't really."

She smiled back at him. "Good. What's left of the food is there by the fire, then ye ought to get down to the wagon yard. The captain said he wanted all the brethren at the meetin'." She returned to her scraping.

Steve bent over the pot by the fire and scraped what was left of the thick

soup with dumplings into a tin dish. The long day and swim had taken their toll on him and he was famished. The last thing he could remember eating was the blueberry muffins this morning with his family.

"Is this dish microwave safe?" He turned and asked Sister O'Malley and then laughed at his own joke. She looked up at him with almost a sad look on her face and shook her head a few times as she mumbled to herself, "So much of life yet ahead him. What a shame. What a shame." Standing up she walked over and touched Steve on the shoulder. "I've not seen a *wave* since we left the ship Elder, and I'd not care to see another for some time." Steve looked up into her sad eyes and immediately felt bad for teasing her.

"No not a wave--a microwave. It's a kind of oven, that warms up food really fast and doesn't use heat." Sister O'Malley's face seemed to look even sadder. Steve gave up. "You're right, I 'd just as soon never see another wave myself."

The soup tasted good. It was a little bland and mushy from being overcooked, but it hit the spot just right. Within three minutes, the tin dish was empty and Steve was on his way to the company meeting. It wasn't hard to find. Nearly all five hundred members of the Martin company had gathered

in a large clearing on the outskirts of the tent city and were now singing
“Come, Come Ye Saints.”

Steve looked for O’Malley briefly but had a hard time making out faces in the dark so he gave up and settled down on a rock at the back of the gathering. The singing concluded as he sat down and, taking a clue from those sitting around him, he bowed his head for the prayer. The prayer was hardly audible and Steve began to wonder if he should try to find a seat a little closer to the front. He needn’t have worried. As soon as the prayer was over a man rose to his feet next to the large bonfire and spoke with a loud booming voice. Steve recognized him as Captain Martin, the man he had mistaken for Brigham Young.

“Brothers and sisters,” he said, “welcome to Iowa and our final stop before crossing the plains to Zion. This is the Lord’s work brothers and sisters and He is with us, just as President Young promised He would be. Today we received news from the first two companies of handcart saints that left this very spot just a few short weeks ago. Their progress on the trail is wonderful. Let me read a few short lines from this correspondence. This is from a newspaper called the Council Bluffs Bugle.”

The captain moved a little closer to the fire to get better light on the paper from which he was about to read and then read the following:

We visited Florence, Nebraska Territory and there found encamped about 500 of the ‘faithful,’ all in good health and spirits...we learned that the train had been but three weeks in coming from Iowa City, and that all were healthy, cheerful and contented.

Having seen several handcart trains pass through this city and cross the ferries at Elkhorn and Loup Fork, we could not help but remark the enthusiasm which animated all classes and ages.

It may seem to some that these people endure great hardships in traveling hundreds of miles on foot, drawing carts behind them. This is a mistake, for many informed me that after the first three days travel, it requires little effort for two or three men or women to draw the light handcart with its moderate load of cooking utensils and baggage.

It is, also, a fact, that they can travel farther in a day and with less fatigue than the ox teams.

This is enthusiasm--this is heroism indeed. Though we cannot coincide with them in their belief, it is impossible to restrain our admiration of their self-sacrificing devotion to the principles of their faith.

The encampment cheered as the captain finished reading. When they had quieted, he spoke again. “Brothers and sisters, if we are faithful in remembering the covenants we have made and in obeying counsel, we have no need to hope for any less than those good saints that have proceeded us. But the Lord will not carry us unless we do our part--and we must begin now!” The captain said it with such force that Steve had to look up to see if he was really mad. Whether he was mad or not, Steve couldn’t tell, but he was surely serious about what he was saying.

“The Lord’s house is a house of order, and His camp must be as well. The following brethren have been called to serve as captains of one hundred” Captain Martin listed off five names, the final one being Patrick O’Malley. He then called for a sustaining vote which passed without any objection. Steve sat and listened attentively wondering what would happen next. It was vaguely like a sacrament meeting but a lot more exciting. Following the sustaining of the five new captains, Captain Martin proceeded.

“Each of you captains, go to your tents tonight and pray. In the morning, under inspiration from the Almighty, call a president for each of the five tents for which you have responsibility. The tent presidents will then be responsible for the twenty people in their respective tents.

“Now, turning to another matter, as most of you now know, our handcarts are not complete. There is much work yet to be done on them. I expect every able-bodied brother that has any experience at all working with wood--no, I don’t care if you have never worked with wood. I expect every able bodied brother to be at the wagon yard every day, all day, until all of our carts are complete. Brother Webb is in charge of handcart construction. Take your orders from him as if he were me. The sisters still have a few tents to complete and covers for the family carts that need to be made. They are already better organized in their efforts than we brethren so we’ll leave

them to carry on.

“Finally, I remind each of you, with all the vigor that my soul can muster, that every day we are here working on carts, winter comes closer. The Lord will protect us, but we must do our part! I have called Brother John Watkins to serve as our company bugler. The bugle will sound each morning at four thirty. Please retire to your tents in an early and orderly fashion that we might all get the rest we will need to carry on this great work. Brothers and sisters remember that it is the Lord that has delivered us from the Gentile chains and taskmasters. Let us be grateful and diligent to the end! “

The captain then bore a fervent personal testimony. Steve missed most of what he said. He was still thinking about waking up at four-thirty. “No wonder, these handcart pioneers had so many problems,” he thought to himself. “They never got any sleep.”

His attention returned to the captain as he finished his testimony. “Before Brother Woodcock offers a prayer and we retire,” he was saying, “I have one more matter of business. It has been brought to my attention that someone has been swimming in the drinking spring south of camp.” A murmur rose from the gathered pioneers, but the captain charged on in his loudest tone. “We have no time for swimming! Please tend to your duties! I cannot say that enough!” He then sat down and an older gentleman stood up and of-

ferred a prayer, thanking his Heavenly Father for the opportunity to be going to Zion.

Steve's embarrassment at having been the swimmer in the drinking water turned his face bright red. Despite the fact that it was dark and everyone had their head bowed and their eyes closed, he felt like every eye in the state of Iowa was on him at that moment. For once, a prayer ended sooner than Steve wished it would and the saints began milling past him as they made their way back to their tents. Rather than join the crowd, he bent over and pretended to be tying the laces on his boots hoping they would all pass without taking notice of him. His plan worked and within a few minutes he was sitting alone on his rock in the clearing.

The sky was clear and the moon shone brightly though it was only three-quarters full. At that moment Steve felt smaller and less significant than he had ever felt in his life. Every thing that had been familiar to him was now gone. It was just him. Him and this huge outdoors and these pioneers from the past. What if he died? Would anyone miss him? Maybe he already was dead and so were the rest of these people. Would he ever see his parents and family again? The pit in the bottom of his stomach grew till he felt like it would overwhelm him. Finally in desperation he fell onto his knees and prayed, "Heavenly Father, where am I? Please let me see my family again,

please!" He knelt silently for several moments until he could no longer stand the mosquitoes and then stood and walked toward his tent.

Chapter 07

Steve dreamed that night of the things he had dreamed of every other night of his life. He dreamed about his family, his friends, the jeep he would own someday, scoring the winning basket, going out with the cutest girl, eating the biggest steak. When he woke to the sound of a bugle, the smell of a musty canvas tent, and the snore of Patrick O'Malley, the blow was almost as painful as the one he'd received on the train the day before.

Despite the darkness, others in the tent were already up and beginning to move about. Not wanting to be the topic of Captain Martin's next sermon, Steve rolled out from under his blankets, pulled on his pants and boots and found the flap of the tent door. The eastern sky line was just beginning to turn gray as Steve trudged down the trail to the spring. Despite the early hour, the air was thick with humidity and there were none of the cool early morning breezes that Steve took for granted growing up among the mountains. The pit in the bottom of his stomach began to grow again.

By the time he returned to the tent, the fire had been lit and breakfast prepared. It consisted of a good sized slice of the saltiest bacon Steve had ever tasted and a couple of biscuits that had been fried rather than baked. Steve gulped it all down, not knowing when the next meal would come and then joined the group of brethren that were headed for the wagon yard.

As the sun cleared the eastern horizon, the building superintendent, Brother Webb, gave assignments to the brethren for the day. He'd look at the list in his hands of the tasks that needed to be completed and then turn to the group of men waiting for assignments and pick two, three, or more, depending on the task, and send them off to their assigned area.

Steve hadn't noticed it the night before because of the darkness and the other things on his mind, but at six foot two he literally towered over most of the other brethren in the company. In the growing day light, he was also a little surprised to discover that most of these pioneers were not very strong looking. As a matter of fact, many of them looked rather frail and, very white and pasty--not at all as Steve had imagined pioneers to look.

Steve, O'Malley, and O'Malley's boys, Des and Noel, were assigned to the ticking operation. Steve wasn't sure what the assignment meant, but he had some serious misgivings about the sound of it. The O'Malley boys' reaction to the assignment added to his fears.

"Aye ticking! The work of women it is." complained Noel, the twelve year old.

Des, the fourteen year old, was a little more determined, "I'll not do it! Not for a day, not for a bloody minute!"

O'Malley's reaction was immediate and sharp. "Watch your language lads! This is the Lord's work. If it's ticking he wants, it's ticking we do. If he asks us to clean up after the oxen, we clean up after the oxen--with our bare hands if need be!" Turning directly to Des with a seriousness that sent shivers down Steve's spine, O'Malley continued. "Don't ever let me hear ye use such language again lad. I'll not stand for it in me family." Both boys seemed to grasp the fact that arguing at this point was probably useless and nodded sullenly.

"Come along then, we've work to be done." O'Malley turned and headed the direction that the building supervisor had directed them. Steve felt a little sorry for the boys and hung back to walk with them and let them know he wasn't very happy about it either.

"So how do we get the ticks out?" he asked as they walked.

"What?" Both boys asked in unison.

"The ticks! We're ticking aren't we? How do we get the ticks out and who do we take them out of?" At this, both boys began to laugh.

"Papa! Papa!" Des called to their father who was walking ahead of them.

"Papa, the Elder wants to know who we are going to take the ticks out of!"

He began to laugh again and a huge smile spread across O'Malley's face.

He stopped and waited for the others to catch up, laughing as they came.

Steve was glad that the family was happy again, but wasn't too tickled to be laughed at without knowing why.

"Okay, Okay, you've had your little laugh. Now will one of you please tell me what we are going to be doing today?"

"Right, now do not be gettin' all hot and bothered Elder!" O'Malley replied.

"We mean ye no harm. A wee joke is all. Come, come, I'll show ye what we'll be about today."

They walked over to the line of nearly completed carts. Each cart consisted of two large wheels, four to five feet high. The wheels were mounted on an axle about five feet across. Two long shafts, six to seven feet long, were mounted on the axle and parallel to the wheels. Between these two shafts and beginning at the back, four cross pieces had been put in place at about one foot intervals. The front two to three feet of the shaft length was left without any cross pieces except for one at the very front. Steve gathered that this was where the puller, or pullers, stood and could then push against the front cross piece.

As Steve finished examining the carts, O'Malley pulled a canvas cover off a stack of material nearby and brought a swath of it over to where Steve stood.

“This is ticking, Elder.” He held the material up for Steve to examine. It was a heavy, coarse material, very nearly canvas. “And with this ticking, we make a bed on these carts to hold the saints material possessions and the food that will sustain them on their long trek.”

He took two of the corners of the swath he had handed to Steve and pulled it out wide. Steve did the same with his two corners and then they moved it over the top of one of the carts and let it settle onto the flat area formed by the shafts and the cross pieces.

“That’s it?” Steve asked incredulously. “Everything just sits on this material? What if it rips?”

“Me little seamstresses here,” O’Malley pointed to his two sons who were now busy with needle and thread, “will sew the the edges tight around the cross pieces. Twenty to thirty stone twill carry with out tearing.”

“But aren’t these things supposed to have sides and a wooden bottom?”

“Aye, those are the bigger carts, the family carts what some calls them.”

O’Malley pointed further down the line to some already completed carts with six to eight inch wooden sides, some of them had hoops over them, like a covered wagon.

“So if the families use those carts, who’s going to use these?” Steve asked as they unfolded another swath of ticking.

“Aye, Elder, tis always a question with ye!” O’Malley complained, but answered anyway. “Many there be traveling without their families. The young lass on the train next to ye yesterday is traveling alone and there be many others just like her.”

For the first time since he had been on the train, Steve remembered that there had been a young girl sitting next to him.

“Who is she, O’Malley?”

“Eh?”

“The girl sitting next to me. I don’t know her name and I doubt I could recognize her, but I remember she seemed to know me. Who is she?”

“I’m afraid I don’t her name Elder. From England she is, but I don’t know her name. Now come along, too much talk will make us weak before tea.”

O’Malley began singing an Irish folk tune and Steve turned to his own thoughts. The work was not physically demanding but very monotonous. As the sun rose higher the mugginess became stifling. Sweat dripped freely from all of them. Steve was tempted to take off his shirt, but the mosquitoes

were still so thick that he didn't want to give them any more of a target.

Just after the mid morning break that O'Malley called tea, Brother Webb, the building superintendent came by. He chatted for a few minutes with O'Malley while Steve and the boys continued to work then he called to Steve. "Elder, would you mind coming with me for a few hours? I've got to go into town and pick up some freshly cut lumber. I need a strong back to help me get it loaded in the wagon."

Steve agreed readily. The O'Malley boys volunteered as well, flexing their muscles for the superintendent, but he insisted that they stay and help their father.

The wagon ride back into Iowa city was a whole new experience for Steve. One summer his family had vacationed in New York City and he and Brian had convinced their dad that a ride through Central Park on a horse drawn carriage was critical to the success of the vacation. It turned out to be anything but exciting. But this, this was a whole different experience. The wagon was drawn by two huge horses. It had the big hoops ready for the covering canvas, but there was no canvas this morning. There was also zero suspension. Steve felt every bump and rut in the road. A few times he almost lost his grip and bounced right out of the wagon.

Brother Webb didn't offer any conversation. With the rattle and bang of the empty wagon, Steve couldn't have heard it even if he had. The horses strained some as they pulled the wagon up out of the river bottom, but once they cleared the bluff, Brother Webb had to strain some to keep them at a walk the rest of the way into town. They drove through the center of town and right past the university building, where Steve had nearly had his skull drilled the day before, and then on to the outskirts of town on the opposite side. Brother Webb pulled the team up in front of a large barn with a sign nailed to the wall which read Conrad Lumber Yard.

"Wait here with the team." He said to Steve, handing him the reins as he jumped down.

"Mind if I turn on the radio?" Steve asked with a chuckle. Brother Webb looked at him a little confused but continued on into the lumber yard. Steve smiled and laid down across the bench seat at the front of the wagon. Despite the heat, he probably would have dozed off had the horses not decided to move a little closer to the adjoining fence in search of greener grass. With a jolt the wagon pulled forward and Steve sat bolt upright.

"Whoa!" He shouted too suddenly. The horses pricked their ears and jumped a little. Steve grabbed the reins which he had dropped and gave them a jerk. "Whoa!" He yelled again. This time the horses reared back,

and as Steve continued to pull back on the reigns they began to back up. A loaded wagon was now coming out of the barn and heading for the road behind Steve's wagon. Given a few more seconds, the wagon coming out of the barn would have cleared Steve's wagon without a problem. As it was, the right rear corner of Steve's wagon caught the side of the other wagon and there was a loud screech as wood scraped against wood. This was too much for Steve's already nervous team and they reared up again and would have bolted had the barn not been directly in front of them.

Brother Webb came out of the barn and ran quickly to the team to quiet them. The driver of the other wagon came running toward Steve, cursing and yelling.

"Are ya daft, man? Purty near wrecked ma rig and sent ma team boltin'-- lucky they's not dead in a ravine somewheres!" Steve dropped the reins when he saw Brother Webb calming the animals and turned to his accuser.

"I'm sorry sir. I didn't mean to. I've never driven a team before."

"Never driven a team before?" The man spat a big brown tobacco loogey at the wheel of Steve's wagon. "What kinda man has never driven a team before? Must be one of them damm mormons! Get down here, where I can whup you or I'll come up there after ya."

By now the workers in the lumber yard had come out to see what all the commotion was about. Brother Webb had quieted the horses and came around to where the driver was yelling at Steve. He tried to quiet the matter.

"Sir, we want no fight with you. If we've damaged your wagon, we'll pay to have it repaired. Please tell us what we owe you and we'll be on our way."

The man spat again, this time on Brother Webb's boots. "I'll tell ya whatcha owe me! Ya owe me a new wagon and a new team. I like the looks of this one right here." He pointed to the wagon Steve sat on. "So ya'll jump down, and both of you start walking or I'ma gonna beat you to a bloody pulp!"

Brother Webb backed up a step, not sure what to do next. Steve had heard all he wanted to hear from this joker. Sure he'd scraped his wagon a little, but this was ridiculous. He was sure he could whip the driver but he wasn't sure about the others. Looking around quickly, Steve guessed they'd like to see a good fight but would just as soon not get involved. He hoped his guess was accurate as he stood to his full height in the bed of the wagon. All eyes turned to him. He slowly began to speak in a loud clear voice, unbuttoning his shirt as he spoke.

“I want you all to look at this man’s wagon. See the scrape there on the side, near the back?” Heads nodded and Steve continued, “I did that and I’m willing to pay to have it fixed. But you’ve heard this man say he wants more. I know the laws of this country, they don’t require me to give him more and I’m not going to. Instead I’m going to climb down off this wagon and beat some manners into him.” By now Steve had his shirt off and it became very clear to those watching that he had the build to back up his threat. Steve continued, “Before I do that, I need each of you to stand as a witness of the things I have just said. I don’t want this mean little man,” he pointed to the wagon driver who had become suddenly silent, “twisting the truth after I’m done with him.” Each of the lumber yard workers stood quietly, none of them moved. “Do I have your word?” Steve asked again.

One by one each of them nodded their heads. The wagon driver spat and turned back to his wagon. “Damm mormons,” he muttered “don’t ever cross my path again or I’ll ‘ave ya horse-whipped!” He climbed into his wagon, yelled to his team and drove off in a cloud of dust and cuss words.

Steve sat down on the wagon bench and held his hand out in front of him. It was shaking like an aspen leaf in the breeze. The lumber yard workers went back to their work and Brother Webb climbed up into the wagon next to Steve. Without a word, he pulled the team around and headed them onto the

road back towards town.

“What about the lumber?” Steve asked as he pulled his shirt back on.

“They didn’t have any. New houses are being built so fast they can’t keep up. Your friend took the last load.”

“Now what?” Steve replied.

“There are four other lumber yards in town. We’ll try them all if we have to.”

“Listen, I’m sorry about the horses and the fight back there. I really never have driven a team before.”

Brother Webb turned and looked at Steve to see if he was serious. “O’Malley told me that you’d had a bump on your head, but I’d no idea it was this serious. I’m sorry.”

“Yeah me too.” Steve replied.

“Well, don’t feel bad about the horses son, you obviously already know how to handle a jackass, a good team of horses is much easier than that.” They both laughed and then rode on in silence to the next lumber yard.

The third lumber yard they tried had part of what they were looking for and they found the remainder at the last. At each of the yards, Brother Webb tied up the team and Steve accompanied him inside. They purchased a variety of hickory, elm, white oak and ash. Steve did most of the loading and was amazed at the weight of the wood. Most of it was wet, and very recently cut. With the wagon fully loaded, brother Webb was worried about the horses' ability to pull the load so he and Steve walked beside them rather than riding.

"Boy that's some heavy wood." Steve noted as he watched the horses lean into their harnesses.

"Too heavy." Replied brother Webb. "It's green and still full of moisture, that's what makes it so heavy."

Steve had taken wood shop for a few years and knew that building anything with green wood was not a good idea. "Shouldn't we be using dry wood?" He asked.

Brother Webb nodded. "We should, but we don't have any choice. We were lucky to get what we have here."

"But if we build with it now, when it dries and shrinks, won't the carts fall apart?"

Brother Webb took a deep breath before replying. "Some of them might. But like I said, we have no choice." Steve started to speak, but brother Webb continued in his calm, consistent voice. "In May and June we built over a hundred and sixty carts and sent the first three companies on their way. We thought we were done for the season, but three days after we sent off Captain Bunker's company, Captain Willie and his five hundred came into town. We've worked like beavers since they arrived two weeks ago and we were just beginning to think we might make it, but then yesterday your good captain and his five hundred came into camp." He stopped talking for a few moments to cluck to the horses, before continuing.

"Well we're doing everything we can, we've bought up all the dry lumber in the area and hired every available worker. But it's just not enough. There are over a thousand saints in that camp determined to get to Zion this year. Every day we wait for the wood to dry, winter gets closer. We have to build with green wood and depend on the Lord for the rest."

Steve could see that the superintendent was very weighed down by the whole matter and felt sorry for him, but he had to ask the next question. "Why don't the saints just wait here until next spring?"

"That's not my decision to make."

“You, better than anyone, know that carts made out of green wood are going to fall apart!” After saying it Steve wished he hadn’t, but it didn’t seem to bother the construction superintendent.

“I’m a carpenter Elder. I know wood. Each time I build something I select the wood to use based on the qualities that I know that type of wood exhibits. Hickory for the axle because its almost as straight and strong as iron. Elm for the hubs, oak for the spokes and rims, and ash for the shafts. Each type of wood has a particular characteristic that suits it for its duty. If I ignore those characteristics when I build, the results are disastrous.” Steve began to wonder if this little woodworking lesson was going to go anywhere but held his tongue.

“I believe,” Brother Webb continued, “that the Lord is a great carpenter himself. But he doesn’t work with wood, he works with men. We all have our abilities and our aptitudes and the Lord knows them better than we know ourselves. With that knowledge he calls us to a particular work to further his kingdom here on earth. Our duty is not only to perform the work we are called to, but to support others in the work to which they are called. The ash of the shaft has no business telling the hickory of the axle how to do its job, nor could the ash do the hickory’s job.”

“So,” Steve cut in, “what you’re trying to say is that we should be blindly

obedient.”

“No, that’s not what I’m trying to say. I have talked with the brethren leading this migration. I have told them my concerns and my opinions. Now that they have made their decision, I will support them because that is what I have covenanted to do. To do anything less would cause me to fail in the work I’ve been called to do and perhaps cause others to fail as well. Elder, if they have been called of God, and I believe they have, then I will do what they ask me to do, with the faith that the Lord is leading them to a greater purpose--a purpose that I am not aware of.”

Steve fell silent as they walked the last few yards to the top of the bluff at the edge of town. One thing was sure, Brother Webb was solid in his support of his leaders. Steve liked the man, he was quiet, yet confident and determined. Still, Steve had some lingering doubts. His thoughts were cut short when they reached the top of the bluff. Brother Webb halted the horses and climbed into the wagon.

“Climb in Elder. We’ll have to ride the brake down into camp or this load will roll right over the team.” He showed Steve how to work the brake lever then took the reigns and started the horses down the hill. Within ten minutes they’d skidded their way back into the camp.

Chapter 08

The wagon yard was empty by the time Steve and Brother Webb returned.

“Must be lunch time.” Brother Webb remarked. “You go ahead and have your lunch. I’ll get the horses unhitched and we can unload the lumber after lunch.”

“Why don’t I help you with the horses?” Steve replied, “If I’m going to learn how to handle a team, I may as well get started now--if you don’t mind teaching me that is.”

“No, not at all.” Brother Webb replied with a smile.

When Steve finally got back to his tent, only a few of the brethren still remained. Most had finished eating and were back at work. Sister O’Malley saw him coming, “Elder if ye keep up these hours, ye’ll starve to death before this journey is over! Have ye forgotten what time we eat with the rest of yer memory?”

Steve grinned. “Have you ever considered that it might be your cooking that keeps me away mother O’Malley?” Steve thought he was quick, but before he could react she had the towel off her shoulder and whacked him up the side of the head.

“Aye, you’re a wicked one Elder! As bad as me Patrick ye are! Now get yerself washed at the spring and back ‘ere for yer food before I cook more of it for ye!” Steve laughed again and headed for the spring. When he returned, mother O’Malley had dished him what was left of the lunch and left it sitting on the log in the shade. Steve sat down and began eating.

He hadn’t taken very many bites when O’Malley’s four year old daughter came racing into camp screaming at the top of her lungs.

“Mum! Mum! Help Mum! Help!”

Steve jumped to his feet and the little girl ran around behind him just as a boy about her age came running into the camp. He had a big bullfrog in his hands and a grin from ear to ear on his face.

“Make him go away Elder! Make him go away! He’s going to touch me with it!” She had both her arms wrapped around Steve’s legs so that he could barely move.

Steve held out his arms to stop the boy. “Ok, Ok, nobody move and nobody gets hurt!”

The boy came to a sudden stop, not sure just how serious this tall stranger was. Steve pointed at him and feigned anger, “You. Sit over there!” He

pointed at a log. “And you, miss Maeve,” he turned around and pulled her from his legs, “you sit here by me.” He sat her down on the log where he had been sitting.

“Now, what’s going on here?” He asked, once he was seated again. Both children began to speak at once. Steve held up his hands. “Whoa! Whoa! We need to take turns here and I think, since Freddy the Frog might be a prince in disguise, we should let him have the first turn.” The children began to giggle.

“Frogs can’t talk Elder!” Maeve said indignantly.

“Ah, that’s where you’re wrong. Frogs talk alright, they just have their own language. In order to understand them, you have to know FrogSpeak and I just happen to know it. Now young man,” said Steve referring to the young boy, “What is your name?”

“Arthur.”

“Right, Arthur, hold up Freddy the Frog so that I can hear him clearly.”

The little boy lifted up the frog with both hands, and held him out toward Steve. Steve pretended to carry on a conversation with the frog. “What has been going on here Freddy?” he asked. “Uh huh, I see. Yes, yes well I be-

lieve you’re right about that. No, no that just wouldn’t do. Well, I’m very sorry but these things do happen you know.”

“What did he say Elder? What did he say?” Both children asked at once.

“Well it’s not a very pretty sight I’m afraid.” Steve sighed. “Are you sure you really want to know?”

“Yes! Yes!” Both children exclaimed,

“Well ok, he said the gubug--I mean the boy, sorry that’s a FrogSpeak word-- he said the boy holding him really liked the little girl that he was chasing.

But, as these things happen, the little gubag--that’s a girl and would be you Maeve--the little girl never wanted to play with the little boy so the little boy was using him to get the girl’s attention.”

“Ewww sick!” said Arthur, “I don’t like her!”

“Now, now, Arthur, one thing about frogs, they never lie. Oh I almost forgot, he also said that he is indeed a prince that has been trapped in the body of a frog by a wicked witch. He said that if princess Maeve would kiss him it would release him from the spell.”

“Ewww Elder, I won’t kiss a frog.”

“No, no, I didn’t think so. Well, that leaves us with just two options. Arthur here can be the great King Arthur and protect the fair maiden Maeve from the wart-faced Freddy by putting Freddy back in his pond. Or, I can cut off Freddy’s legs and fry them up for dinner!”

“Ewww Elder!” Both children exclaimed in unison. “You can’t eat a frog!”

“Watch me!” Steve stood up and started to walk toward Arthur.

Maeve bolted around him and grabbed Arthur by the hand. “Come on! We’ve got to save Freddy from the Elder!” The two ran out of the camp screaming.

“Very clever Elder.” A voice from behind Steve took him by surprise.

“Oh, it was nothing. I have three little sisters and a brother at home. I--” Steve stopped short as he turned around and recognized the owner of the voice as the young girl from the spring.

“What is it Elder?” The girl asked, “What’s the matter.”

“Well, I just, I just didn’t know it was you. It took me by surprise. You’re not still mad at me?”

“Mad at you? Why would I be mad you? You scared me when you didn’t recognize me after you banged your head on the train, but I’ve been worried about you, not mad.”

“The train? You mean you’re the one that was sitting next to me on the train?”

A disappointed look came over the young girl’s face. “Oh Elder, you still don’t remember me?”

“Well I remember some things, like the spring. You’re not mad anymore about that?” As soon as he’d said it, Steve wished he hadn’t.

“The spring?”

“Oh it’s nothing, must have been someone different. Say, you wouldn’t believe the size of the bumps on my head. Do you want to feel them?” Steve began back pedaling for all he was worth.

“The spring! Elder was that you swimming in the spring?” She placed her hands on her hips and shouted it loud enough for half the state of Iowa to hear.

“Uh yeah. Well yeah I guess it was. I--I’m sorry. I thought you already

recognized me.” Steve looked at the ground.

“Recognized you? Don’t you remember Elder? I never even looked at you!”

“No you’re right, you never did look at me--but that’s not my fault I did give you a chance.” Steve smiled trying to lighten the moment. It didn’t work.

“Oh Elder! You’re impossible!” She turned and began to stalk off.

“Wait, wait, don’t go! I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to--hey wait, I don’t know your name!”

“That be Annie, Elder and ye are a fool!” Mother O’Malley had come out of the tent. “Ye don’t tell a lass ye don’t remember her name!”

“But I don’t!”

“That’s neither here nor there Elder! Ye’ve offended her good now, and a fine lass she is. Tis a pity.”

“I’ll go find her and apologize.” Steve stepped over the log and began to follow.

“Not now, Elder. There’s work to be done. Twill be plenty of time for

apologies before the journey is through.”

Steve muttered something about women under his breath as he turned and headed back to the wagon yard. “I heard that Elder! I heard that! Twill be no supper for you tonight!” Mother O’Malley called after him.

After helping unload the wood that afternoon, Brother Webb assigned Steve to help the blacksmith put iron rims on the wheels. An outdoor fireplace that reminded Steve of the brick barbecue in his backyard, had been constructed in the wagon yard. Steve’s duty was to keep the coals red hot. This included adding coal as needed, stoking the fire, and running the bellows. In the mugginess of the Iowa summer, the additional heat from the blacksmith’s fire was nearly unbearable. Within five minutes, Steve had his shirt off and looked as if he had just stepped out of a shower.

At first, he found the blacksmith work very interesting. It was amazing to see the thin iron rims turn red hot in the coals. Steve would then help hold the hot rim in place over the wooden wheel and watch while the strong arms of the blacksmith banged it into place. The sizzling of the finished rimmed wheel being dunked in the trough to cool gave the completed process an air of finality.

The first two or three times it was interesting. But gradually, the heat of the

fire, the physical exertion of pumping the bellows, and the constant banging of metal on metal wore Steve down. By the time the blacksmith called a drink break in the mid-afternoon he wasn't sure how much longer he could keep it up. He wished his dad could see him now. He'd always said a little physical labor would be good for him.

Steve caught a second wind after the drink break and managed to finish out the day--barely. As he was leaving, the blacksmith thanked him for his help and asked him if he'd mind helping again the next day. Steve managed a smile, "Hardest work I've ever done. How many carts still need rims?"

"Not sure." The smithy replied, "Only the family carts are getting the iron rims, but there's probably fifty or so of those yet to go. You've been the only lad I've found so far that could stick with it for an entire afternoon."

Steve wanted to say "Now I wish I hadn't," but instead replied, "Sure, I'll be back tomorrow." He managed another weak smile and stumbled back toward the tents.

Dinner was uneventful that evening. Steve was so tired and sore he didn't pay much attention to what was going on around him. The food at every meal was beginning to look much the same. A slab of fried meat, some fried potatoes, some coarse bread. Steve consoled himself with the fact that at

least there was plenty of it. The mosquitoes were also a constant. He got good at balancing his plate on his legs, eating with his left hand and whacking mosquitoes with his right.

Steve was just rising from dinner to go fall into bed, when Patrick announced a general meeting for all of his company of one hundred. Steve grimaced but followed the others to the appointed meeting place in the clearing near the wagon yard. He found a comfortable place to lay down at the back and was just drifting off when he heard Patrick yelling at him.

"Elder! Elder! Stand up man, ye've just been called to be the president of a tent!"

Steve climbed groggily to his feet and never fully realized what was happening as the sustaining vote was taken. In fact, it wasn't till the next morning at breakfast that he realized anything had happened. O'Malley sat down next to him as he was finishing off his bacon.

"Be quick with the grub lad. Ye've got to get over to the supply wagon before five, or yer tent will not be eatin today."

"What?" replied Steve, completely confused and more than a little sore from the prior day's work.

“The supply wagon man! Ye’ve got to pick up the food for yer tent or they’ll all be starvin!”

Steve looked at the stack of supplies near the cooking fire that mother O’Malley was working from and then back at O’Malley. “It looks like we have plenty of supplies.” He replied trying to remain calm.

“Have ye lost yer memory again lad? This is not yer tent. Ye were called to be the captain of another tent last night!”

“What!? Who did that?”

“Twas the Lord lad, and the people what sustained ye last night.”

Steve’s mind was beginning to clear. “You did this to me O’Malley!” He jumped to his feet. “You’re the one that called the tent presidents and you called me. I won’t do it! I can’t do it! I don’t know anyone, I’ve lost my memory, and with any luck I’ll find a way to get back home before this trip even gets started!”

“Aye Elder! Settle down man! Get a grip on yerself. Do ye think I wanted to call ye? The little spirit it whispers in me ear: ‘O’Malley,’ it says, ‘the young Elder is to be a tent president.’ But meself I says, ‘No, not the Elder, anyone but the Elder.’ But the spirit it whispers again and again, till its

nearly shouting in me one good ear.” O’Malley stood and looked squarely at Steve then continued. “No Elder, I’ve not called ye. The Lord has called ye. If ye want to reject the Lord, tis your decision, but twill be a long trip without him by yerside.” O’Malley turned and walked out of the camp.

Still standing, Steve looked around at the other pioneers eating their breakfasts. They all pretended not to notice him except mother O’Malley who looked him in the eye and then shook her head sadly.

It was too much for Steve. “Ok! Ok! I’ll be the tent president!” He said with exasperation. “At least in another tent I won’t have to eat your cooking anymore!” He grinned at mother O’Malley and jumped the log before she could get him with her towel.

It didn’t take much effort to catch up with O’Malley. Steve had a feeling O’Malley was expecting him.

“So ye’ve come to yer senses have ye lad?”

“No actually, I’ve probably lost them for good. Which tent is mine and what exactly am I supposed to do?”

“Come along.” Was all O’Malley said as he led the way through the early morning darkness back toward the tent city. Steve’s new tent was not far

from the one he had been sleeping in. It had a cooking fire and logs to sit on much like the other tent. In fact, with the exception of a lack of shade, the two were almost indiscernible. Several saints were sitting on the logs, though none of them were eating.

“Brothers and Sisters,” O’Malley said as they entered the circle, “this is the Elder 'at will be your president. Please look to him fer all yer needs in the way of provisions and sustenance. He it is that’s responsible to see that all the work is done in an orderly fashion. He will also look out fer each and every one of ye when we begin our journey. He’s a wee bit rough around the edges, but its the Lord whats called him. Support him and sustain him and the good Lord will take care of ye all.” O’Malley then turned and left. Steve began to follow.

“Where is it that ye think yer goin’ laddie?” O’Malley stopped and asked when he realized Steve was following.

“I’m going with you. I’ve got to go get my things.” Steve replied.

“This is yer home now Elder. I’ll send Des with yer things. Go on now, take care of yer people.”

“But--” Steve tried to object but O’Malley gave him a push back toward the tent. To object any further would just cause greater embarrassment, so Steve

turned and faced “his” people. All eyes were on him and there wasn’t a smile in the bunch.

“I--er--I’ve never been the president of a tent before.” Steve began, “I don’t really know what I’m supposed to do.” Still no smiles on any of the faces.

“Maybe it would be best if we introduced ourselves first.” Steve was stalling now, trying to buy time to think of what to do next. His mind stretched trying to remember the countless Deacon and Teacher Quorum presidency meetings he had sat through. How he wished he had paid more attention.

“My name is Steve. Please just call me Steve. If you call me brother or elder I’ll think you’re talking to my dad.” A slight grin passed briefly over a few faces. Steve pointed to a young boy of six or seven at his left, “Let’s start right here. Tell us what your name is and how old you are.”

Before the young boy could answer, a young girl stepped out of the tent flap and spoke up. “Elder, perhaps these good people would be more anxious to get acquainted if they’d had a bite to eat.” Steve looked up. It was Annie.

“Of course, go ahead and eat. I can learn your names later.” Steve replied, grateful for the help.

“We’d like to eat, Elder Steve,” another sister with a young child on her lap spoke up, “but we’ve no food.”

“Oh!” Steve smacked his forehead with the flat of his hand. “The supplies! I forgot all about them! I’m sorry, I’ll be right back!” Steve turned and ran out of the circle of logs, then stopped and returned. “Does anyone know where the supply wagon is?” he asked sheepishly. A young man, about Steve’s age though much smaller in size, stood up. “I do.”

“Come with me.” Steve ordered and together they ran off to get the supplies.

Chapter 09

Steve adjusted to the physical demands of the blacksmith shop long before he felt comfortable being the president of his tent. Physical effort was something he was used to. Sure, running the bellows and swinging the sledge were things he'd never done before, but when he started thinking about them in terms of sets and repetitions it wasn't that much different than being in the weight room all day. One thing was very different, it was a lot hotter than the air-conditioned room at the rec center. Steve figured he drank a couple of gallons of water a day, just to replace the sweat that constantly poured off his body.

Being the president, on the other hand, was something he might not ever get used to. Being responsible for a quorum of deacons or teachers was easy compared to this. Now he was responsible not only for boys his age, but for adults and little children as well. And he wasn't just responsible to make sacrament assignments and plan an activity for Wednesday night--he was responsible for their very lives. Some of the folks in his tent had such thick accents Steve had to ask them to repeat what they were saying two and three times. He was also surprised to find that most of them didn't know anything about camping. He'd always assumed pioneers knew how to camp, but these folks were lost. Most of them had never been out of the cities they'd

grown up in. Steve had to hand it to them though, they were determined and they were faithful. And that is exactly what made it most difficult for Steve.

Steve lacked the conviction that they all possessed and he knew it. Sure he wanted to help--he had no choice, deep inside he knew it was the right thing to do--but this wasn't his journey. In fact, he felt the journey was a mistake. Zion would be there next year. Heck, it would be there in a hundred and fifty years! No, Steve was not anxious to get on the trail like those for whom he had responsibility. First and foremost, he was anxious to find a way home and, if he failed at that, then he would try to convince the leaders of this company to postpone the trip until the following spring. In the meantime, common decency and an inner drive, which Steve more often than not tried to repress, required that he do all he could to help "his" people.

The first evening of his presidency, after the work was done for the day and the evening meal was finished, he called his first tent meeting around the cooking fire and met all those for whom he had responsibility. There were only two other brethren in the tent. John, age twenty-two, was traveling with his wife, Margaret, and their two children Elizabeth, age four, and John who was only eighteen months. Margaret was also very pregnant. Steve later found out that John was the company bugler.

Aaron was the other father in the tent. He was in his early thirties and had

three children, Martha age seven, Mary age four, and Aaron age two. His wife's name was Elizabeth. There was one other family in the tent, though they had no father. The mother, Elizabeth, appeared to Steve to be about the same age as his own mother. She had four children. Samuel was her oldest at seventeen (he was the one that helped Steve get the supplies earlier that morning). Robert was the second eldest son at eleven, Isabella was ten and little Richard was six years old.

In addition to the families, there were four single sisters assigned to Steve's tent. These of course included Annie who introduced herself as being nineteen years old. Sara was the youngest of the bunch at eighteen. There was another Elizabeth who was twenty-seven and finally Lydia who was forty-five.

Steve's first executive decision as the tent president came the morning after he first slept in the tent. When he awoke, he found himself on top of Samuel who was in turn on top of his younger brother Robert who was half out of the tent having rolled under the tent wall. The tent was set up on a slight, but persistent, incline.

That morning, before he'd had any breakfast, Steve scouted out a new spot for the tent which was somewhat separate from the rest of the tents but was on level ground and was surrounded by good shade trees. He announced his

decision at breakfast and asked Samuel and Robert to help him make the move that morning. There were a few grumbles but no outright complaints and so the move was made before lunch.

Steve was also worried about the rain. He'd camped enough to know that preparing for the rain was what setting up a tent was all about. The canvas tents the pioneers made and were now using had no bottoms, just a roof and sides. There was also no such thing as plastic that could be laid on the ground to protect the sleepers from the ground moisture. Most just laid down a few blankets and then covered themselves with a few more.

To keep any rain water from coming in under the tent walls, Steve and Samuel borrowed a shovel and dug a trench about six inches deep and a foot wide around the entire tent. With the dirt from the trench they buried the bottom edge of the tent walls to give them a little more resistance against any wind that might blow. Steve also taught the saints in his tent how to make a bed out of young tree branches and dried leaves to get their blankets up off the ground.

In the sweltering heat of the Iowa summer, with the cloudless sky overhead, Steve's tent preparations were seen by most of the camp as a waste of energy. Steve didn't much care what they thought. From his work in the wagon yard and his discussions with Brother Webb, it was clear they were

going to be here for several weeks and as long as he was responsible for all these people he'd set up the tent the best way he knew how.

The Martin Company had arrived in the Iowa City camp on July 8th, a Tuesday. The 13th was their first Sunday and it brought welcome relief from the wagon building tasks. Steve had no idea what day of the week it was. For the first time since he arrived, he woke by himself--not the sound of the bugle. Raising up on one arm, he looked over and saw that John and his family were still asleep. Not sure what time it was, he pulled back the tent door and was surprised to see that it was nearly light.

"John! John! Wakeup! The sun's nearly up! You forgot to blow your bugle!" He hissed across the tent. John rolled over and smiled at him.

"Go back to sleep Elder. It's Sunday, the meeting's not till half of ten."

"Oh." Steve replied and laid back down. Though he had dreamed of sleeping in many times over the past few days, now that he had his chance he couldn't get back to sleep. "I guess that's what going to bed when the sun goes down will do to you." He thought to himself as he pulled on his pants and stepped out of the tent. There were a couple of people up and about, but for the most part the camp was still quiet. Steve sat on a stump for a few minutes and watched the camp slowly come to life. It was times like these

that always brought back that awful pit in his stomach. Times when he could just sit and think, those were the worst because he had no answers. Not wanting the pit to grow any bigger he went back into the tent for his bag of clothes and a brick of soap, then he headed down to the river.

After walking up the river several hundred yards, he found a nice inlet and proceeded to bath. The water felt wonderful--not as nice as the spring, but wonderful. After washing himself, he turned to his work clothes. He'd never learned to wash his clothes at home, but that wouldn't have helped him here anyway. There was no "delicate" cycle on this machine and no fabric softener or static guard to remember. He held his shirt in one hand and the brick of soap (it felt more like sandstone than soap) in the other and rubbed the two together until he was convinced the shirt was clean. Then he rinsed it in the river, hung it on a nearby branch and repeated the process with his pants, socks, and underclothes. After finishing his laundry, Steve gave in to the temptation and went for a swim out in the deeper water. He was very careful to watch for other swimmers and to not get swept down the river toward the camp. The swim was wonderfully refreshing and by the time he was finished dressing in the suit he had been wearing on the train, Steve felt like a new man.

His work clothes were not yet completely dry so he decided to leave them

hanging right where they were and come back for them later. He also decided to leave his canvas bag so that he would have something to bring them back in. As he picked it up to toss under the bushes, two books and a small pocket knife fell out. Steve thought he had searched the bag thoroughly that first day at the spring, but somehow he had missed these things. Now with all the clothes out of the bag, he turned it inside out and discovered a separate inner pocket he had failed to notice before. Besides the books and the pocket knife, Steve also found an old fashioned razor blade and two U.S. dollar coins minted in 1850.

Steve felt his face. It was getting a little scruffy. With the soap and a little water he made a very thin, coarse lather and spread it over his face. Then carefully, very carefully he started scraping it off with the razor blade.

Three nicks later, he was satisfied with his job and rinsed off the remainder of the soap scum. Now doubly satisfied that he was a new man, he tossed the dollars and the books back in the bag, tossed the bag under the bushes where no else could find it, put the knife in his pocket, and headed back for camp.

After breakfast and while waiting for the meetings to begin, Steve visited the O'Malley's tent. He'd not seen mother O'Malley and little Maeve since he moved, and because he worked with the blacksmith, he rarely saw

O'Malley or the boys during the day in the wagon yard. He went back down by the river and picked some wild flowers that he had seen while bathing and then headed for the O'Malley's.

"Top o' the mornin' to ya lads!" He called as he approached the tent.

O'Malley and the boys were sitting on the logs in the shade. They wore their traveling clothes and their cheeks had been scrubbed to a bright pink. They smiled as they looked up and recognized Steve.

"Elder! I'd not recognized ya all gussied up as ye are! A bloomin' gentleman is what ye've gone an made of yerself."

Steve smiled. "It's going to take more than a suit to make a gentleman out of me. I can't wait to get out of this thing. It's so danged hot and humid. How long does church last anyway?"

"That would be up to the spirit, now wouldn't it Elder?"

"You mean, there's no set ending time?"

"Not in me experience. Say, have ye been to talk to the captain today?"

"No." Steve replied.

"He was around earlier, asking to speak with ye."

“Me? Why would he want to speak with me?”

“Maybe he heard ye was diggin’ a moat around yer tent!” Mother O’Malley had come out the tent and stood with her hands on her hips and a smile on her face. “Ah Elder! Ye’ve missed me cookin’ and come back fer more!”

Steve smiled back. “I picked some flowers for you, but I think I’ll give them to Maeve instead. Where is the little queen?”

“A wee bit sick with a touch of the fever. She’s sleeping.”

“Oh. I’m sorry to hear that.” Steve replied.

Mother O’Malley sat down by her husband. “So Elder,” she began, “how’s Annie?”

“Now mum! Don’t pester the poor lad with yer match making. He’s off to talk with Captain Martin.”

“She’s avoiding me.” Steve cut in before mother O’Malley’s towel came out.

“Avoids you does she?” Mother O’Malley said pretending to be deep in thought.

“Like the plague.” Steve replied. “I haven’t been able to talk to her alone since the day I told her that I didn’t remember her name.”

“Tis a pity indeed.” Mother O’Malley shook her head.

“Bah! Tis a sorry sight for a grown woman to fiddle with the lives of others.” O’Malley interrupted the conversation. “Elder, there’s talk you backed down one of the old mob in town. Is there any truth to the talk?”

“A wee bit.” Steve replied with a smile.

“Could be that’s what the captain would like to talk about.”

Steve smiled again. “Could be. I’ve got a few things of my own I want to talk about.” He turned to leave and then turned back around and handed the flowers to mother O’Malley. “To a beautiful lady.” He said with a flourish.

“Why thank ye Elder!”

“Please make sure Maeve gets them--” Even though he knew it was coming, the towel caught him on the backside as he bolted away.

Steve found the captain’s tent easily and the captain very approachable.

Though he’d seen him up close on the train, so many things were going on at the time Steve had misjudged his age. The beard also made him look

older from a distance. Now, up close, Steve guessed his age to be not much more than thirty. The conversation began casually.

“Ah, Elder! I’ve been meaning to talk with you since we arrived here in camp. How are you feeling? How is your head?”

“My head?” Steve put his hand on his head. “Oh you mean from the train. It’s fine thanks, my head is just fine.”

“Good! You had us worried there. You thought I was Brigham Young! Do you remember?”

“Yes--I mean, No. Did I say that?” Steve kicked himself for not telling the truth but didn’t say anything.

“Well, it’s good to have you back.” The captain was saying. “I’ve heard good reports of your work since we’ve been here. Brother Webb mentioned something about an incident in town and I understand you’ve been called to be a tent president.”

“Hard to believe isn’t it?” Steve replied.

The captain didn’t seem to hear what Steve had said. “Elder,” he said, “I’d like you to talk in the worship services today. Your work has been exem-

plary, and I’d like you to encourage the saints in their efforts.”

“I can’t do that sir.” Steve replied after a moment’s hesitation.

“Why not Elder? Is it your head?” The captain inquired.

“Yes--I mean No. No, it’s not my head. It’s something I’ve been meaning to talk to you about ever since we got here.” Steve hesitated again, but the captain encouraged him to go on so he blurted it out.

“I can’t encourage these people on to their deaths!”

The captain maintained his calm composure, though it was clear he was surprised. He slowly sat down on a nearby log and motioned for Steve to do the same. “Tell me what you mean, Elder.” He asked once Steve had taken a seat.

Steve took a deep breath and tried to think about what he was saying. “It’s not right to be building the carts out of green wood. These people don’t know the first thing about surviving in the wilderness. If you take them out on the plains now, with carts made of green wood, hundreds of them are going to die!”

“How do you know Elder?” The calmness of the captain was beginning to

frustrate Steve.

“How do I know? It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure it out!”

“A what?” The captain asked.

“A rocket--oh never mind. The point is that anyone who’s ever lived in the mountains knows that when the snow falls you can die--especially outfitted like this group. And, if the handcarts are falling apart all along the way, it’s just going to take that much longer to get to Salt Lake.”

“But how do you know?” The captain asked again.

“I just told you.” Steve replied a little frustrated that the captain didn’t seem to be listening to what he was saying.

“No, you told me what could happen, which I’m well aware of. You didn’t tell me how you know.”

“What difference does it make?” Steve asked with exasperation. “What matters is that people are going to die if you don’t call this thing off.”

“It matters because I know that I’m not supposed to ‘call this thing off’ as you say. I know because I’ve prayed about it. Believe me, your very concerns have weighed heavily on my mind. But, the answer I keep getting is

to continue. I had hoped that the answer meant that the Lord would calm the elements and we would pass through to Zion without incident. But if you’ve received revelation of death to come then perhaps my hope was vain. So I ask again, how do you know?”

Steve was taken back by the Captain’s reply. He wasn’t sure whether to be angry at the captain’s willingness to lead the people into known danger or relieved that the captain was a man of inspiration and was willing to believe that Steve had received some revelation. Without directly answering the question, Steve responded.

“I’ve seen the future. A lot of these handcart pioneers are going to die before they get to Zion. I don’t know who and I don’t know where, but I know it will happen.”

“I see.” The captain sighed and sat silently for a few moments. Steve began to feel like he might be getting through.

“Elder,” The captain spoke again. “Your vision does not change the answer to my prayers. We must continue.”

“But you’ll be leading these people to their graves!” Steve jumped up.

“You can’t do it!”

“Elder!” The captain now spoke sternly. “I have covenanted to do whatever it is the Lord commands me and I will not be dissuaded. I don’t know if, or why, the Lord will require many of these good saints to die. But I do know that he know’s things that I don’t know and there must be a purpose and if he wants me to lead them to Zion now, that is exactly what I will do!”

“But--” Steve tried to cut in, but the captain cut him off.

“I believe you’re right Elder. You shouldn’t be talking to the saints in our services today.” The captain turned and looked directly into Steve’s eyes.

“Will you continue with us?”

Steve sat and thought for several moments. He wasn’t sure if he was being invited to leave or encouraged to stay. An ant carried a leaf ten times its size up onto the log and then down the opposite side. Steve replied slowly, “I don’t have any choice. I have no where else to go and, well, I have to help these people.”

The captain reached over and put his arm around Steve’s shoulder. “We are glad you are with us and we appreciate your help Elder. Your heart is right. As I said, I share your concerns about the safety of this company, but I have to ask that if you stay with us you keep your concerns to yourself.” Steve looked up and the captain continued quickly. “By all means prepare the

people for what may come, but do not undermine their faith by speaking poorly of the Lord’s anointed and the decisions that they are making. If you cannot live within these bounds, I must ask that you leave our company.”

Steve took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Like I said, I have no where else to go. If you are determined to continue, then I’ll go and do everything I can to help these people survive.”

“Thanks Elder. Now if you’ll excuse me I’ve got to go find someone to speak in our services.” The captain stood and walked off towards the other tents.

Both Captain Martin and Captain Willie ended up speaking at the meetings that day. They spent a good portion of the time reminding the saints to be faithful and to remember their covenants. Steve probably would have dozed off or daydreamed through the whole meeting if it hadn’t been for the direct and demanding tones that were used by the captains. There were no “mights” or “maybes” and there were plenty of “damns” and “hells.” No one could leave the meetings with any doubt of what was expected of them. Steve rather enjoyed it and actually learned a few things about some of the covenants he had made in his life.

A special session for the tent presidents and captains of the Martin company

was held directly after the general session. Steve and O'Malley sat together. Captain Martin spoke again. He commended the brethren for the way in which the camp had been organized and encouraged them to carry on. He warned of the temptations of slothfulness and of the gentiles that were anxious to thwart the Lord's work. He concluded by asking each of the tent presidents to hold morning and evening singing and prayer sessions with their people.

Chapter 10

It took Steve a couple of days before he could remember the names of all the people in his tent. It took the others until Sunday evening before they accepted him as their president. That was when the storm hit.

The day had dawned clear and hot, just like every other day, but by late afternoon a slight breeze began blowing. Steve had spent most of Sunday afternoon with the O'Malley's. Maeve's fever had not improved at all, but she seemed happy to have Steve around and he felt comfortable with "his" family. Towards late afternoon, Steve decided he had better return to the river for his work clothes and bag before it got dark. As he returned from the river he noticed that the weather was beginning to change.

It was a nice change. The heat had broken and a brisk breeze was beginning to blow. Steve felt good to be out of the suit and back into the more comfortable, and now clean, work clothes. Whistling a tune his dad used to whistle, he made his way to the corrals to see if Brother Webb needed any help feeding the horses.

He found the corral area empty except for a young boy sitting on the top rail of the makeshift fence watching the animals intently. Steve walked up and leaned on the rail next to him. "Where's brother Webb?" he asked.

"Stock's nervous." was the boy's reply.

Steve looked up at the horses running back and forth in the small corral. The fresh hay in the corner crib was untouched.

"Why?"

"Storm." the boy replied.

"Do they always get this nervous when a storm is coming?" Steve asked with curiosity.

"Nope. Just the big ones." The boy replied calmly.

"So where's brother Webb?" Steve asked again.

"Gone to warn the others."

The breeze had now become a wind and as Steve looked out across the camp toward the south. He gasped at the site. A huge wall of black clouds had formed and was moving toward the camp. Dust and other debris blown up by the wind in front of the storm formed a grayish brown cloud on the ground just in front of the storm. The sun illuminated the dust cloud giving it an eerie, incandescent appearance.

Steve left the boy on the rail and ran toward his tent. A few pioneers were busily scurrying around their tents gathering up clothes that had been left out to dry. Steve began shouting at the top of his lungs. "Storm! Storm! A big storm's coming!"

When he reached his tent, Steve took a quick head count and was relieved to find that all of his people were there. He quickly assigned Samuel and Robert to help him check the tie lines outside and asked the two adult brethren, Aaron and John, to make sure all the supplies were inside the tent.

The wind that preceded the storm had now reached the camp and the canvas of the tent was snapping back and forth under its force. Though the sun was still high in the sky, it became dark as night as the storm came over them. Steve was the last one inside the tent and tied the door flap shut behind him. The darkness made it almost impossible to see inside the tent, and the flapping of the canvas made it as equally difficult to hear. Steve fumbled his way to the supplies and finally found a lantern. He searched a few more minutes for matches before remembering that there probably wasn't any such thing.

"Can somebody help me light the lantern?" He called at the top of his lungs to be heard over the commotion of the storm. In a few minutes, the men of the tent had created a few sparks with some flint and steel and created

enough of a flame to light the lantern.

Steve held it aloft so he could see how everyone was doing. Nineteen terrified faces looked back at him. "Why is everyone so quiet?" Steve yelled, "This is the best part of camping, sitting inside a nice secure tent while the storm rages on outside." Steve grabbed the center pole and gave it a good shake to prove how sturdy it was. Just as he shook the pole, lightning flashed and thunder cracked almost instantaneously. Steve jumped in surprise and the terrified look on the faces grew even worse.

"Maybe we should pray, Elder!" Annie shouted from where she was huddled with the other single sisters.

"Pray. Yeah, that's a good idea. Let's pray. Annie will you lead us?" Steve dropped to his knees and motioned to the other saints to do the same. After the prayer someone started singing and slowly the rest of them joined in. The storm continued to rage outside, but inside the spirits began to lighten.

The rest of the company didn't fare so well. The initial gusts of the storm brought many of the tents to the ground. Others never fell but the canvas walls which weren't anchored blew freely in the wind providing no protection from the rain. As the storm continued through the evening and into the night, new streams and rivers formed and flowed through the camp--many

directly under the tents that had been set up on lower ground.

Steve, and the members of his tent, had no idea what the rest of the company was going through until Des, O'Malley's son, stuck his head through the flap of the door. Water was dripping from his face and hair and he was gasping for breath.

"Elder! Come quick! Maeve is worse and our tent is down!" Without waiting for a reply, he pulled his head from the tent and disappeared into the storm.

Steve and the other men and boys in the tent jumped to their feet in unison and headed for the flap of the tent. Steve turned to Annie as he went, "You're in charge! Come get me if anything goes wrong." She nodded and he followed the others out in to the storm.

The regular bursts of lightening provided ample and eerie light to view the destruction of the ongoing storm. Steve ran straight for O'Malley's tent. The tent had completely collapsed. Someone was under the canvas apparently trying to put the center pole back in place and many others were holding on around the edges fighting the wind to hold the tent in place. Steve found Des among those holding on around the edge.

"Where's your mom and Maeve?" He had to shout to be heard over the

storm. Des continued to hold onto the canvas with both hands as it was pulled and tugged by the wind but nodded to the log under the tree.

"Over there!"

Steve turned and ran the direction Des nodded. A new blast of lightning revealed several women with blankets and shawls held over their heads and those of their children huddled together under the tree. Steve picked out sister O'Malley and ran to her. She held Maeve tightly in her arms like an oversize baby doll trying to protect her from the rain. Steve grabbed her by the arm.

"How's Maeve?"

Sister O'Malley just shook her head.

"Come on, our tent is still standing. You'll be dry there!" Steve bent over, took Maeve from her mother's arms and motioned for the other women and children to follow. At first he tried to go slow enough for the others to follow but when he felt Maeve's body shudder with the chills, he forgot about the others and raced for the tent.

"Quick, she needs dry clothes and some warm blankets!" Steve shouted as he burst through the tent flap. Annie and Lydia jumped to their feet and took

Maeve from his arms.

“Others are coming, we need to make space for them!” Even as the words left Steve’s mouth the tent flap was pulled back and Sister O’Malley and the others looked in with hope and question on their faces. The sisters of Steve’s tent quickly moved closer together and made room for the newcomers.

“Come in! Come in!” Steve went to the flap and took Sister O’Malley by the arm pulling her into the tent. The others quickly followed.

“Get you and your children out of their wet things.” Steve ordered. “You can use our blankets to cover yourselves.” He then turned back to Maeve who was being tenderly undressed by her mother, Annie and Lydia. Steve put his hand on her head.

“She’s burning up! Have you given her any Tylenol?” then caught himself and added, “No, of course not.”

The women ignored him as they quickly dried her off and wrapped her in a borrowed night gown and then a blanket. Lydia took her in her arms and rocked back and forth while sister O’Malley began to dry herself off. Annie touched Steve on the sleeve and motioned for him to follow her. They stepped over and through the many wet pioneers and made their way to the

flap. Annie pulled it back and was greeted by a blast of wind and rain. She quickly pulled it shut again. Steve made his way to her side.

“I’ve got to go back out and help get the tents set back up.”

Annie nodded but replied, “There is a Sister Reed in the company. You need to find her and bring her here first. She’s the nearest thing we have to a doctor.”

“Is Maeve that bad?” Steve asked with sudden concern.

“I don’t know.” Annie replied, “It’s Margaret I’m worried about. She’s having regular pains, I think her baby will come tonight.”

“What?” Steve scanned the faces of the sisters and found Margaret laying on her side near the pole. She looked calm enough but Steve could see beads of sweat on her forehead. He turned back to Annie. “How much longer?”

“I don’t know.” Annie replied, “not long. You better see if you can find John as well.”

Steve nodded. “Sister Reed and John. I’ll be right back!” He turned and ran into the night, grateful to be the one out looking rather than one waiting

and wondering in the tent. He quickly found John helping with the O'Malley's tent, which was now tethered securely in place.

"Go back to the tent! Your wife is having her baby! Do you know which tent Sister Reed is in?" John was gone before Steve finished the last question. Seven tents later, Steve finally found Sister Reed, the doctor lady. Upon hearing the situation, she wrapped a shawl around her shoulders, grabbed her bag, and followed Steve out into the storm.

By the time they got back to the tent, Margaret's labor was well advanced. She was now laying on her back on a bed of pine boughs covered with a blanket. John was kneeling on one side of her holding her hand and Annie was on the other side. The other occupants of the tent were huddled on the opposite side of the tent. The mothers were attempting to sooth and distract their children who looked with wide eyes toward Margaret.

Sister Reed went straight to Margaret and began to make preparations for the birth. Steve turned toward the children and on an impulse began to sing a song his little sister Jessica used to sing.

"Willabee, wallabee, woo, an elephant sat on you!" He pointed at one of the little boys and a few of the children giggled. Steve continued, "Willabee, wallabee, wave, an elephant sat on Maeve!" He walked over and put his

hand on Maeve's forehead as he sang. Her skin was hot to his touch, but her eyes flickered open and smiled at Steve. Steve's thoughts of concern were interrupted by Margaret's groans of pain. He started singing again, this time louder.

"Willabee, wallabee, wizabeth, an elephant sat on Elizabeth!" He scooped up Elizabeth, Margaret's four year old daughter and held her head to his chest until Margaret's groaning past. He handed little Elizabeth to Lydia and motioned to the others to join in singing, "Willabee, wallabee, wash, and elephant sat on Josh!"

"Elder, I need more light." Sister Reed called out.

Steve took the lantern off it's hanger on the center pole and took it over and set it down on the ground next to Sister Reed.

"That won't do, you've got to hold it up!" Margaret began to groan again.

"This is it! This is the one! Push sister, push!--Elder hold up the lantern!" Sister Reed barked out instructions and Margaret and Steve obeyed.

"It's a boy!" Sister Reed announced as she pulled the little infant clear of its mother and gently wrapped him in a blanket before handing him to his weakened but peaceful mother. "A beautiful, healthy little boy."

Steve slowly returned the lantern to its hanger on the center pole. Somehow the other children in the tent sensed the miracle that had just occurred and they all sat quietly as the baby took his first gulps of air and let out a cry.

Steve had never been so close to a new little spirit coming through the veil to this world and the miracle of it was overwhelming. He was to have two experiences with the veil that night. The first was the arrival of Margaret's new infant, the second was the passing of little Maeve to the world beyond.

Chapter 11

Monday morning dawned clear and bright. The harshness of the cleansing storm left the greens of the countryside varied and bright. The sky was a brilliant blue with only a few jet-white puffy clouds as reminders of the ominous black fury that had filled the skies the previous night.

While the camp began to pick up the pieces and get on with the work of preparing for their trek, a small group gathered in a little grove of trees not far from the activity. A prayer was given, the grave dedicated, and a small pine box made from wood that might have carried pioneer possessions to Zion was slowly lowered into its resting place.

It was all Steve could do to help with the process of shoveling the dirt back into the grave. With every scoop his mind was filled with images of Maeve and his little sister Jessica. The giggles, the screaming, the hugs and especially the sweet little smiles. Maeve had looked up and given her mom and dad a smile he would never forget just before she slipped off.

“How could all that be gone?” he asked himself the same question over and over. “It was just a fever for crying out loud! How could someone die from a fever? He and his brother and sisters had had tons of fevers. Take a few aspirin, maybe some antibiotics and you could be well the next day. But not

in this world. It wasn’t right, none of this was right. He shouldn’t be here, none of these people should be here, and Maeve shouldn’t have died!” The thoughts tumbled over and over in his mind.

The grave was filled with silence. O’Malley pushed a crude marker into the ground at the head of the mound and whispered softly, “Sleep well me little queen, sleep well.” Then he turned to his sons and said, “Come along lads, work to be done.”

“Work!?” Steve turned towards O’Malley with a look of exasperation and began to blurt out his feelings. “Work? Now? How can you think about working now? How can you even think about continuing on with this journey? What can be worth losing your daughter? Who’s it going to be next? Have you thought of that? One of your sons maybe? Or your wife?”

O’Malley listened quietly without emotion. Sister O’Malley who had been wiping away her tears all morning now sobbed openly. Steve instantly felt miserable for his outburst and wished he could have called the words back.

“O’Malley, I’m--” O’Malley cut him off with a brief and curt response.

“Elder, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Me little queen is now with the Lord and I’ll be obeying His commands to go to Zion so that I can be with her again some day.” Steve tried to apologize again, but O’Malley

held up his hand and cut him off.

“I’ll be thanking ye not to say another word to me or me family about this journey.” He turned, took his wife by the arm and headed back to camp.

His two sons slowly followed.

Steve turned the opposite direction and walked into the woods fully intending never to return to the handcart camp. He didn’t know where he would go, but feeling the way he did now it didn’t really matter. He was ready to just curl up and die. The pit in his stomach was huge. He missed his family, he missed Maeve and now he had deeply offended his only real friends in this strange world. The weight of it all was unbearable. He tripped over a fallen log and lay where he fell, sobbing into the ground. He wasn’t sure how long he had been there when a female voice startled him.

“They call it the American fever. Maeve is the third child to die of it in our company.”

Steve rolled over quickly and tried to wipe the tears from his cheeks but only managed to smear them into mud. The voice belonged to Annie. She was sitting on the log which Steve had tripped over. From the way she was sitting it appeared that she had been there for some time.

“Well go ahead and say it!” Steve said as he stood up brushing the leaves

from the front of his shirt and pants.

“Say what?” Annie replied innocently.

“Tell me what a jerk I am.”

“A jerk? I’m sure I didn’t see you jerk on anything Elder, but I do think you are selfish and inconsiderate of the feelings of others. Here use this on your face.” She produced a hanky from the sleeve of her dress and handed it to Steve. Steve took the hanky and wiped his face with it as he took a seat on a rock.

“Thanks.” He handed the hanky back to Annie. “Inconsiderate and selfish is pretty much the definition of a jerk and you’re right--I never should have said what I did, but it hurts so much.”

“Ah, and the O’Malleys Elder? Were they not hurting at all?”

“No that’s not it. I know they are hurting. But it’s not just Maeve dying that bothers me, it’s my family too.”

“Your family?”

“I don’t know if I’ll ever see them again. Just like I’ll never see Maeve again, I’ll never see them again.” The pit in Steve’s stomach suddenly

opened up again and he took a deep breath and looked up at the blue sky through the leaves to keep from crying.

“I know the feeling Elder, but you’ll see Maeve again.” Annie replied quietly.

“Well thanks for trying to comfort me, but I don’t think you have any idea what I’m feeling.” Steve replied, disgusted with himself for getting so emotional. “What can be so important to give up your family? I’ve lost my family through no choice of my own and I have no idea how to get them back. I don’t know if they are alive or dead. Heck, I don’t even know if I’m alive or dead. How can you possibly know how I feel?”

Annie thought for a minute. “What was that word you used again Elder, ‘jerk?’” Steve began to reply but Annie kept talking. “I’m still not sure what happened to you on that train, but it is obvious that something did. Since you didn’t remember my name, I’m assuming you don’t remember anything else about me?” Steve nodded and she proceeded.

“I first heard the gospel preached about a year ago. I knew it was true as soon as I heard it and was baptized soon after. My baptism was on a Friday and I was scheduled to be confirmed a member of the church on Sunday. My parents heard of my baptism on Saturday and were not at all pleased.

They told me some of the vilest stories about the Mormons. They said if I joined the Mormons I would be ruined for life. That night I prayed with all my heart to know the truth. I prayed, ‘Dear Lord, do not let me do wrong. Let me know tonight, Dear Father, let me know tonight.’ I immediately was comforted by a wonderful dream. A book was opened to me and the leaves were turned in rapid succession until the page with my record was found. On the page was my name without a mar or blemish against it. A loud clear voice spoke to me saying, ‘This is the way, walk ye in it.’ When I woke the next morning, I laughed for joy to think that I had been heard and answered. I told my folks that it had been made known to me that Mormonism was right, and I would follow it. My parents disowned me that day and I have not seen them since, nor do I think I ever will again. Elder, you asked what could be worth losing your family--the truth. The truth is worth losing your family.”

Steve closed his eyes and took another deep breath. The pit in his stomach had been replaced by a warm and peaceful feeling. He looked down at the ground and spoke slowly. “I’m sorry. I had no idea. When it hurts so bad you just don’t think about anyone else’s problems--at least I don’t.” He paused for a minute before looking over at Annie. “Selfish and inconsiderate right?” Annie smiled back at him.

“Oh don’t be too hard on yourself Elder, you’re not all yank!”

“Jerk. Not all jerk.” Steve corrected her, “and thanks for the compliment--I think.”

“You’re welcome.” Annie replied with another smile, oblivious to the intended sarcasm. “If you were all jerk you wouldn’t take such good care of those you are responsible for in the tent and you wouldn’t be hurting so much right now.”

“Well thanks again. Thanks for the compliment and thanks for following me out here. I probably would have just laid there until I died.”

“Oh Elder don’t say that! I don’t think you would have. I think after some time you would have started wondering how baby Steve was doing, and who was getting the food from the supply wagon, and--”

“Baby Steve?” Steve interrupted. “Did they really name him Steve?”

Annie nodded and replied with an impish grin. “We tried to convince Margaret that the poor little thing would be teased his entire life with such an odd name, but she insisted Steve was the name for her boy.”

Steve chuckled, “They named him after me! I can’t believe it. They actu-

ally named their baby after me!” For a few moments the weight of Maeve’s death, O’Malley’s feelings, and his own loneliness were lifted from Steve’s shoulders and he smiled both within himself and at Annie. She smiled right back and for the first time Steve noticed the depth and brightness of her blue eyes. Eyes that were usually set like stone in determination, were now bright and crystal clear in the light that filtered through the leaves. Steve stared a moment too long before awkwardly forcing himself to look away and think again about his problems.

“What am I going to do?” He asked outloud. “What am I going to do?”

“Well you could lay here and die.” Annie replied matter of factly. Steve glanced at Annie. This time there was a twinkle in her eye.

“No, I’m too big a wimp to do that. I’m starving already.”

“Is a wimp the same as a jerk Elder?”

“No a wimp is--well it doesn’t matter. I’m not going to lay here and die, but I don’t know what to do about O’Malley. I’m afraid he’s never going to forgive me. I don’t know what to do about this trip. Should I stay here or should I go on to Utah? Somehow I ended up on that train next to you. I’ve been thinking maybe I need to go back to that train to get back to my family. I just don’t know.”

They both sat in silence for a few moments. Annie was the first to speak again.

“O’Malley is a good man Elder. He’ll forgive you, but he’s Irish--it may take some time. As for the train, I watched you climb on it with the rest of us in Boston. You carried my bags. If you go back to the train, it will only take you back to Boston.”

“You may be right about ending up in Boston, but that wasn’t me that carried your bags. I wasn’t on that train until just outside Iowa City.”

“Elder, I know you hit your head pretty hard and that’s done something to your memory. But please believe me when I tell you that you were on the train sitting right next to me from Boston to Iowa.”

“Nope. Wasn’t me. You still don’t get it do you? Someone was sitting next to you on that train but it wasn’t me. I was skiing in Utah that morning and the next thing I knew I was sitting next to you on a train arriving in Iowa City.” Annie was now struggling to maintain her composure. She phrased her next question very slowly.

“If that wasn’t you sitting next to me, who was it and where did he go? Did he go out the window? Did you come in the window? Because I’m sure I didn’t see you step over me and I know I was sitting there the whole time, or

was that not me either Elder?” By the time she finished her questions Annie, had given up on composure and was clearly exasperated.

“I don’t know. But I can prove to you it wasn’t me. I’m from the future. A few days ago I was in 2006. Go ahead, ask me any question about the future.”

Annie hesitated, still exasperated at what she saw as pure foolishness and stubbornness on the part of Steve, but her curiosity got the better of her.

“OK, when does the Lord come the second time?”

“I don’t know that!”

“Just as I thought Elder. Why don’t you stop this foolishness. It’s not proper I tell you, it’s not and I’ll not be a part of it any longer.” She turned to leave, but Steve grabbed her by the arm.

“No, c’mon ask me something I can answer. The second coming hasn’t happened by the year 2006. Some thought it was going to be the year 2000, but it wasn’t. Now ask me something else. Something about Utah or the church or something like that.” Annie was still not convinced and continued to walk away. Steve wasn’t going to give up.

“Here’s something, how about this: Utah becomes a state in the year 1896,

we celebrated its centennial in 1996. How could I know that unless I was from the future?” Annie kept walking and Steve continued to shout facts from the future at her.

“Almost everyone has a computer in their home! We drive cars with more than one hundred horsepower! We get over a hundred channels on our TV! The Olympics were in Utah in 2002! The church has more than twelve million members! There are sixty thousand missionaries in the field! Look, do you think I like not knowing how I got on that train? Do you think I like being stuck in Iowa in the middle of the dark ages with a bunch of--a bunch of wanna-be pioneers that don’t know the first thing about camping or about the trip they’re about to make?” Steve quit shouting, and turned and sat back down mumbling to himself, “Half of ‘em are going to die, just like Maeve.”

He chuckled a chuckle devoid of feeling and was crushed by an overwhelming sense of loneliness. Involuntarily, he slipped to his knees and sobbed a heartfelt prayer. When he arose there were no bright lights, in fact the sun had set and only the stars were visible up through the trees, but Steve had no doubts as to what he should do. He turned and walked back towards camp.

Chapter 12

The next morning, Steve tried to lose himself in his work and forget about Maeve, the O'Malley family, and Annie. Along about mid-morning, Captain Martin stopped by the foundry where Steve was working.

"Elder, could I talk to you for a minute?" The captain had to yell to be heard over the clanking of the blacksmith. Grateful for the break, Steve left his place at the bellows, wiped the sweat from his brow and followed the captain to the shade of a nearby tree.

"Elder I wanted to personally thank you for your help during the storm. Your wise preparations probably saved several lives."

Steve shrugged it off. "Not that big a deal. I just set up the tent the way I was taught."

"Yes, well, I am grateful to you. I have asked all the tent captains to secure their tents in the same way."

"Well let me know if anyone needs help." Steve wiped the sweat from his brow and turned to head back to the foundry.

"Wait Elder, there is one other thing."

"Yes?" Steve returned his attention to the Captain who hesitated for a few moments.

"I've decided to put all the single women in a tent of their own rather than dispersing them among the families--better privacy, much more appropriate. You have single women in your tent don't you?"

"Yeah I sure do. Three of them: Lydia, Elizabeth and Annie."

"Fine. Please make them aware of the change and let them know that their new tent has been set up over by the corrals. They should sleep there tonight."

Steve nodded knowingly. "Okay, I'll do it. Anything else?"

The captain hesitated again before replying. "Yes, just one other thing. Do you still think many of these good saints are going to die?"

Now it was Steve's turn to hesitate. He looked at the captain's face to try to determine how serious the request was. The eyes were sincere.

Steve shrugged, "I'm not sure what I think anymore. I know, that a lot of handcart pioneers died, or will die--I don't know which. I hope it's not these saints, I really do. One thing I do know is that for some reason I'm sup-

posed to be here. The only time I feel at all peaceful is when I think that thought. Maybe it's to help a few less die."

The captain put his hand on Steve's shoulder and looked him in the eye. "I'm happy to hear that you are with us. Your help has proved invaluable already. The Lord willing, we'll all make it together." He gave Steve a firm pat on the back as he continued, "Well, carry on! Don't forget to let the single sisters know about the new tent." With that, he turned and walked away.

By the time the Captain left morning break was called and Steve headed for the sewing area where the single sisters were usually busy sewing tents and covers for the family carts. With a little searching he found Lydia, Elizabeth and Annie working on a tent under the shade of a tree. Sarah Ann, the twenty year old sister of Samuel, was also working with them. She and Annie had become quite good friends since the trip began.

"Excuse me sisters." Steve addressed himself to Lydia the oldest of the three single sisters. He hadn't talked to Annie since their argument in the woods the day before. He had thought about trying a few times but she had never given him the opportunity and had clearly been avoiding him. In fact, Steve was pretty sure he knew where the Captain got the idea to put all the single sisters in a tent or their own.

"Yes?" Lydia, Elizabeth and the other sisters looked up at him and smiled. Annie continued to work as if she hadn't heard.

"Uh, the Captain just informed me that he wants all the single sisters to move into a tent of their own. He wants to make sure you have your privacy." Steve emphasized the word privacy and said it while looking at Annie. She glanced up at him quickly and then looked away.

"When will this happen Elder?" Lydia spoke up and cut into Annie and Steve's silent jousting match.

"What? Oh, today. If you can get your things packed up during the morning break, Samuel and I will carry them over to the new tents at lunch."

"Can they choose to stay in our tent if they want Elder?" Asked Sarah Ann.

"I don't think so. The captain sounded pretty adamant that all single sisters were to be in a separate tent. It shouldn't be too bad, in fact I have a feeling some sisters are probably very excited about it." He emphasized the word "some" and again stared at Annie. She continued to work, but Steve could see the red rising in her cheeks.

"Ok Elder, you've been a wonderful tent captain and we'll hate to leave, but we'll be doing as Captain Martin asks. Come along sisters." Lydia stood up

and turned to go to the tent. Annie followed with the rest of the sisters without so much as a word or a glance in Steve's direction.

The next two weeks passed in a blur. On July 15th, the Tuesday after the big storm, five hundred of the saints that had sailed on the Thornton started for Zion in a company led by Captain Willie. With more than one hundred and twenty carts they made quite a procession and quite an impression on the saints left in camp. Spirits were lifted and the urgency of the preparations yet to be made increased.

As noted, Steve threw himself into his work attempting to forget about his problems. With Annie no longer in his tent, he would have had to go out of his way to see her and he had no intention of doing that. Most evenings after the others were settling down for the night, he would sneak away to the river for a late night swim. By the time he hit the sack, he was so physically exhausted his mind had no time to think before it drifted off to dreams about the reality he used to know.

For the most part, the O'Malley's had also become strangers. From time to time Steve saw O'Malley in the wagon yards, but other than a nod of the head they had not spoken to each other since Steve's outburst. Des and Noel, the O'Malley boys, were slightly more quiet than they had been before. They did participate in the baseball game that Steve organized until

the Captain called the game in the third inning (something about it not being an appropriate activity for a Sunday afternoon), but other than that Steve hadn't talked with them. Mother O'Malley was perhaps the most distant. Steve had seen her coming back to camp from the direction of Maeve's grave early on several mornings, but it had always been from a distance. He hurt for her, and the entire family, but didn't know how to help. In the past he'd offended too many times with his words so he thought it best not to even talk until he knew exactly what to say.

The work in the wagon yards proceeded slowly but surely. Each day a few more carts were finished and added to the growing cart "parking lot." Only the larger "family" carts came through the foundry where the blacksmith and Steve worked. Steve worked mostly on the thin iron rims that were mounted on the wooden wheels, while the blacksmith made the iron axles and oversaw the mounting of the axles and wheels on the carts. In addition to the iron rims and axles, the family carts were also mounted with a wagon box three or four feet long and about eight inches high. The smaller carts had no wagon box, no iron rims, and no iron axle. Everything was made of wood except the cloth ticking which was spread over the cross pieces to support the pioneer's possessions.

Finally, on Sunday morning the twenty-seventh of July, twenty days after

arriving in the sweltering Iowa heat, Captain Martin announced that enough carts had been completed for the entire company. The pioneers received the news with a resounding cheer. The captain proceeded to inform them that the company would start the trek first thing the next morning. Among many other things he mentioned that the company would split into two separate parties for the first leg of the trek. One company would be led by himself and the other by a Brother Haven. He then listed the tent captains that would belong to each of the two parties. Steve noted that his tent was to proceed with Captain Martin. He also noted with some surprise that the single sisters' tent was in the Martin company with his tent but O'Malley, and the rest of his company of one hundred, were part of the Haven party.

The captain assigned each of the tents a specific time to show up at the wagon yard that afternoon to take ownership of their carts. He reminded the pioneers of the seventeen pound limit on personal items and indicated that he and a few of the brethren would be around to each of the tents that evening to do a "weigh in." After a few parting words of preaching and encouraging, the Captain excused the saints to prepare for the journey.

The mood in the camp following the Captain's announcement was electric. To finally be starting the great journey they had set out on more than two months earlier, was almost too much excitement. Despite his continued

uncertainty about the trip, Steve too was excited to be moving on. There were a few bad memories tied up in this place and he was tired of thinking about them and worrying about how many would die before the trek was finished. It was time to actually deal with it rather than just worry about it.

Steve's tent had been assigned one of the earliest times at the wagon yard. Following the Sunday services, he went straight back to his tent without changing. Then, together with John, Aaron, and Elizabeth (the leaders of each of the families in his tent) he headed to the wagon yard. The captain himself was handling the assignment of the carts. Steve and his crew only had to wait a few minutes before the captain finished with the tent before them and turned his attention to them.

"Ah Elder Steve! Glad to see you! Isn't it great we're on our way?"

Steve had to agree that yes it was pretty great.

"Well let's see which carts we've got assigned to your tent." The captain referred to a ledger book he had been holding under his arm. "Here we are. Let's see, one of the family carts for Elizabeth and her family and smaller carts each for John and Aaron and their families." The captain motioned to a few brethren that were assisting him and the carts were brought forward.

"Before we take ownership, mind if we look under the hood, kick a few

tires, and take ‘em out for a test drive?” Steve asked as he began to walk around the carts. The captain looked at him confused. Steve didn’t leave him time to linger in the confusion long but quickly added to it.

“No? Well then I suppose you’re going to tell me a little old lady drove them to church on Sunday, right? Now, how many horsepower we talking here? Hmmm, better make that human power--kinda like Fred Flintstone--well never mind, we’ll take ‘em. You offer any kind of financing?” Steve completed his inspection and returned to the captain and the others.

The captain was truly perplexed but the folks from Steve’s tent just shrugged their shoulders. They were used to these incomprehensible babblings.

“So where do we sign?” Steve asked innocently, jolting the captain from his perplexity.

“Sign? Oh no need to sign Elder. I’ve got you checked off in the book.”

“Great, then we’ll be on our way! Saddle up!” Steve took hold of the front cross piece of the family cart and was about to help Elizabeth pull it back to the tent when the Captain interrupted him.

“Steve--I mean Elder, there is something else I’d like to talk to you about.”

“Oh sure. Carry on folks, I’ll catch up to you in a minute.” Steve walked back over to the captain.

“Elder, I’d like to ask your help with the single sisters.”

Steve gulped, “Uh, exactly what kind of help did you have in mind?”

“Well, they’ll need help with their carts and setting up their tent in the evenings. I plan to ask some of the young men in the company to help as well, but I’d like you to be in charge of the effort.”

“What about my tent?” Steve asked weakly.

“I’d like you to continue on as captain there, but there are only three carts and each of the families seem pretty independent. I know Elizabeth doesn’t have a husband, but her oldest son--I forget his name--”

“Samuel.” Steve interjected.

“Right. Samuel, is a strapping young man who can carry that load. If the responsibilities get to be too much for you, we can ask either John or Aaron to take over your other duties but I would like your help with the sisters.”

Steve thought for a moment before answering. “Sure. Whatever you want me to do. Just one question: do they know you’re asking me to do this?”

“Well no. I told them I’d arrange for someone to help them but at the time I didn’t know it would be you. Why?”

“Oh, no reason. It’s just that some--or at least one--of them may not be too keen on the idea.”

“Keen?”

“Uh, sorry. One of them won’t like me helping them.”

The captain smiled a knowing smile. “Don’t worry about that Elder. There will be plenty of more important things to worry about before this trip is over. Now--” The captain referred to his ledger book again, “I’m scheduled to do the weigh-in at the single sisters’ tent this evening directly following yours. Why don’t you accompany me at that time and we’ll let them know?”

“Yeah, ok.” Steve nodded his approval and the captain turned to assign carts to the next group of pioneers.

Chapter 13

“Twenty-four pounds? Why I’m sure there’s not an ounce more than seventeen pounds there.”

“My apologies sister,” replied the captain patiently, “but I calibrated the scales at noon when I started the weigh-in and have checked them two or three times since then. I’m afraid if the scale reads twenty-four pounds, then it’s twenty-four pounds that you’ve got. You’ll have to figure out which seven pounds you don’t need.”

Lydia looked truly crushed. “But Captain, how can I? These are my only possessions in the world! My Sunday dress and shoes, my extra work dress, two blankets for bedding, my plate, cup, and utensils, my Bible and Book of Mormon. What shall I leave? I need all these things!”

“What about the teapot, sister?” the Captain asked.

“That was my grandmother’s teapot sir. It has been in my family for ages, I couldn’t bear to leave it.”

“I’m sorry, you’ll have to--” the captain’s reply was cut short by Steve.

“Is the seventeen pound limit what one can take, or what one can put on the

cart?” he asked.

“Well, I guess it is what one can put on the cart.” the captain replied.

“So if Lydia wanted to, she could tie the teapot to her apron string and never put it on the cart all the way to Utah?”

“Yes, I guess if she wanted to do that, she could. But she needs to remember that she will be expected to pull her share of the cart, no matter how many things she has tied to her apron string.” the captain replied sternly.

“Oh I will, I will!” Lydia exclaimed, the light returning to her face.

“And,” the captain cut in, “I don’t think that teapot weighs seven pounds so you’ll have to figure out something else to leave behind--another three or four pounds should do it.”

Lydia nodded her head in agreement, gathered up her things and returned to her tent to make the agonizing decision. Elizabeth was next in line and she was in even worse shape than Lydia. Her material possessions tipped the scale at thirty pounds. Steve felt sorry for all the pioneers, but these single sisters especially. Seventeen pounds wasn’t much. Last summer Steve’s Priest Quorum had gone backpacking in the Uintas for four days. Steve’s pack weighed forty pounds and was one of the lighter ones in the quorum.

He'd had to work at it to get it that light, but he had modern technology like plastic on his side. True, the seventeen pounds these saints were allowed didn't include their food, but it did include their bedding, utensils, clothes and all their personal possessions for the rest of their lives.

Steve's tent didn't have much problem meeting the limit. Steve only had his bagful of clothes and a few utensils he had scraped together. The families in the tent were able to spread their limits around. Each of them had young children that didn't need a full seventeen pounds so the older members of the family had some flexibility. But the single sisters, had no leeway. They had to limit their possessions to seventeen pounds.

"Sorry, sister" the captain was saying to Elizabeth, "you have thirty pounds here. You'll have to leave some of these things."

Steve scanned her possessions quickly looking for things she could tie to her apron. His eyes fell on a big round hat box, brightly painted with floral arrangements. A wide strap handle was attached at each side and crossed the top of the box.

"Sister, is there a hat in that box?" Steve asked.

"No," the sister replied somewhat embarrassed, "the hat was ruined during the storm on the ship, but the box was a gift and I didn't want to leave it."

"That's fine sister. Pick out some of your heavier items and put them in the hat box. Then tie the hat box to your apron string and carry it that way."

"Oh, can I do that?" Elizabeth asked the captain anxiously.

"Yes sister, you can do that." The captain replied, giving Steve a side ward glance. "Just remember that you will still have to pull your fair share of the cart." Then looking directly at Steve he continued, "Also remember that this good Elder will be there to help you sisters when you become exhausted from having so many things tied around your waists."

Steve smiled. "It's ok sister we'll make it. You go repack your things into your hat box and then come back to be weighed again."

"Oh thank you Elder, thank you very much." Elizabeth gathered her things and made her way back to the tent.

As other single sisters made their way over to the scales to have their articles weighed in, Steve began to notice that most were bundled up quite warmly despite the oppressive heat of the late summer afternoon. Some of the sisters actually looked like they were wearing two, maybe even three dresses! He was about to ask the captain why they were all dressed that way when it dawned on him--the weight! Whatever they were wearing didn't have to be weighed so they were wearing everything their bodies could carry without

being too obvious. Steve wasn't sure if the captain had noticed how his single sisters were bulking up, but if he did, he didn't mention anything about it.

The last single sister to be weighed in was Annie. She avoided eye contact and conversation with Steve throughout the process and passed the weight limit without any problems. Without being too obvious, Steve tried to determine if she was wearing more than one dress. It didn't look like she was, but he couldn't tell for sure. Very slowly and gradually he shifted around the edge of the table to the side of Annie while she and the captain were conversing. With the toe of his left foot he gently tried to brush the hem of her skirts to one side hoping to reveal different color skirts below the first. As he did so, the captain and Annie finished their conversation and the captain said something to or about Steve. Steve didn't know which it was but he did hear his name and quickly put his foot down and looked up. Both Annie and the captain were looking expectantly at him.

"I, er, I'm sorry, what did you say?" He managed to blurt out.

"Just commenting that Annie was the last sister and we could get back to our tents and get ourselves ready to go now." The captain replied with a broad smile on his face.

"Oh yeah, right!" Steve began to recover, "Can't wait to get on the trail!"

Annie gave Steve a strange look, said her goodbyes to the captain and turned to leave, but she didn't get very far. Steve's left foot was planted firmly on the hem of her skirt, right where he had put a few seconds earlier. There was a loud rip as the dress tore and a brief scream as Annie fell to the ground along with all her personal belongings.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Steve rushed to help her up and gather her things. In his rush, his feet got further tangled in the tresses of her skirt and he fell head-long over the top of her, ending up on the ground next to her. As they both struggled to right themselves again they got further tangled and ended up collapsing on the ground in another heap.

At this point, Steve would have been very embarrassed if he hadn't felt so bad for Annie. He had hoped to get back on speaking terms with her again, but now, other than the scolding he was sure he was about to get, she would probably never talk to him again. Despite his desire to jump up and run, he forced himself to lay perfectly still so that she could stand without getting tangled. He waited for what seemed like an eternity. Those who gathered around the commotion also seemed to be waiting expectantly. But she didn't move, at least not to get up. Steve cautiously raised his head up off the ground and looked over at her. Her whole body was shaking.

“Dang! I’ve made her cry!” He thought to himself. Gently he reached over and put his hand on her back.

“Annie? Annie are you OK?” Annie rolled over and looked at Steve with a huge smile on her face and laughed out loud.

“You, you’re laughing?” Steve asked, not sure if he could really believe what he was seeing.

“What else could I do Elder? We must look pretty funny rolling around on the ground together. You with more of my skirt on than me!” As soon as those who had gathered could see that no one was hurt they let out a collective sigh of relief and a few snickers of their own before returning to their own activities.

Steve still wasn’t convinced, “But your dress, I heard it rip and your things--”

“Just things Elder. Just things.” She stood up and brushed the leaves and twigs from her tattered skirt.

“Well I’m sorry. I’m sorry for everything.” Steve stood and held his hand out to her. She took it and they shook good naturedly and a little longer than most handshakes usually last.

“You know,” Steve lowered his voice and moved closer to Annie. “I am really sorry about your skirt, but I happen to know that most of these good sisters have two or three on right now. Surely, one of them will let you borrow a spare.”

“You know?” Annie asked, surprised. Steve nodded.

“What about the captain? Does he know too?” She asked.

“I don’t know. He didn’t say anything to me and I didn’t tell him about it.”

“Thanks Elder. I heard what you did for Elizabeth and Lydia. That was very nice.”

“Hey, I didn’t do anything. They’re the ones that are going to have to carry those things. And all these sisters that look like they’ve been on steroids are going to have to carry, push, or pull those extra dresses.”

“Steroids?” Annie asked.

“Drugs, you know, that make you look buff.” Steve flexed his muscles in a Mr. Universe pose and Annie looked even more confused.

“Forget it. Anyway it wasn’t that big a deal.” Steve shrugged off her thanks.

“I thought about putting on both my dresses.” Annie replied matter of factly. “I guess it’s a good thing I didn’t. You’d have ripped them both!”

They both laughed. Steve was the first to speak again. “Well, I better get back to my tent and make sure...” Annie looked up at him and he lost his train of thought. “Make sure all the pags are backed, er, I mean all the bags are packed.”

Annie nodded her head. “Yes, we are in for a big day tomorrow and I’ve still got some sewing to do.” She winked at Steve and he smiled back.

“See you in the morning.” He said as he turned and started to walk away.

“Elder!” Annie called after him and he turned back quickly.

“Yes?”

“I’m glad the captain asked you to help us.” She smiled at him again.

“Yeah, me too. Good night.” He turned and walked back to his tent.

Steve found all well at the tent. Samuel’s family was all set to go. Steve had to hand it to Elizabeth, Samuel’s mother, it took real courage to bring five children on a trek like this without a husband. The weigh in had been particularly difficult for her. Even with the weight limits for her five chil-

dren and herself, her family had been well over the weight limit. They all had several changes of clothes and personal belongings. Her response to the limit had been quick and without second thought. She asked each of her children to choose just two changes of clothing--at least one appropriate for Sunday worship--and personal belongings weighing no more than five pounds. Once the choosing was done, she loaded the excess on the family cart and together with her children they made their way through camp bestowing gifts to others who had a need.

Now as Steve returned to camp, Elizabeth and her youngest son Richard, who was six, were sitting on the log talking quietly to each other. Steve gathered from the tidbits of the conversation that he overheard that she was comforting him in the loss of his tin soldiers which had fought their last battle under his command.

Inside the tent, Steve found John and Margaret trying to finish their packing. Weigh in had been pretty easy for them. With three children so young, most of their belongings were bedding and small children's clothes. It was apparent to Steve from their limited personal belongings, that life back in England had not been too prosperous for them. Since John was the company bugler, captain Martin had excluded his horn from the weigh in. Though they had few things, they were now struggling to get them organized and packed

away. Margaret held two week old Steve in one arm and was attempting to fold a small dress with the other free hand. John T., the eighteen month old was whining at John's side pulling utensils out of a bag as fast as his father could put them in.

"Can I hold the baby while you finish packing?" Steve offered as his eyes adjusted to the dim light inside the tent.

"Oh many thanks Elder! That would be most helpful. There you go Stevie, go see Elder Steve." She handed the baby toward Steve, but his mind was suddenly racing. He hadn't heard "Stevie" since he'd left his family and hearing it now brought back a rush of memories.

"Elder?" Margaret asked, still extending the baby towards him. "Are you Ok?"

"Oh yeah, just fine. Just thinking about my family. Come here little guy." He took the baby and settled it in the crook of his arm.

"Say where's Lizzy?" Steve asked as Margaret returned to her work.

"She's off with Mary and her mum and dad to do some visiting." Margaret had to shout to be heard over the giggling and laughter from the two Johns who were now wrestling over a spoon.

"Ah" Steve nodded his head. Mary was the four year old daughter of Aaron and Elizabeth the other family in his tent. She and Lizzy, John and Margaret's four year old daughter had become inseparable in their two weeks together in the tent.

"Well, we'll be outside!" Steve shouted to Margaret as he turned and headed for the tent door. She nodded her approval and went on with her work.

The late afternoon was now becoming a beautiful, but very warm, summer evening. Steve took a seat on a log and rocked baby Steve back and forth as he watched the sunset begin to develop. Despite the peaceful surroundings and little bundle in his arms, Steve's mind continued to race. Margaret's use of the name Stevie had thrown him back into his reality. He'd almost forgotten how much he liked and missed his life. He missed the simple things the most: a toilet to sit on, a shower with warm water, toothpaste that tastes good, soap that lathers and of course mint toothpaste.

He thought of Jessica and their sock game. He thought of his mom and dad and his brother and sisters. He missed them all. He missed his life! What would they be doing now--a nice peaceful Sunday evening? Mom had probably made some popcorn, dad would have cut up an apple or two and the entire family would be lounging in the family room. Brian was probably

reading the Sunday funnies or devouring the sports section. The girls might be coloring or picking out a primary song note by note on the piano. His parents would be reading a church magazine or book. Steve could almost place himself there. Hank might drop by--there was nothing to do at his house--and they'd go in to the front room and hang out. Or maybe dad would call family night because of some schedule conflict on Monday and they'd all gather in the family room and sing "Popcorn Popping" with more hand motions than singing. Or maybe they'd sing mom's favorite "A House Becomes a Home." Steve began to hum the tune to himself.

"Elder? Elder I can take baby now. I've finished with the packing." It was Margaret. Steve looked down at his name sake who was now fast asleep before handing him back to his mother with a weak smile.

"Is everything alright Elder?" Margaret asked as she took the infant.

"Yeah, it's fine. Just thinking about my family again."

"Fond memories, I hope." Margaret replied with concern in her voice.

"What--I mean yeah, very good memories. I wish I was with them now."

"You will be soon Elder! We start tomorrow and it's only a matter of time till we'll be in Utah with your family."

Steve looked up again with a smile. "Thanks Margaret, I'm fine really. You better get some sleep, it's going to be a long day tomorrow." Margaret nodded and headed for the tent flap.

"Good night Elder!" she called over her shoulder.

"Good night sister!" Steve called back as he stood up and stretched. Despite Margaret's comforting words, the old familiar feelings of loneliness were beginning to overwhelm him again. He'd been doing pretty well over the last couple of weeks. He'd stayed so busy and tired there had been no time for loneliness, but with thoughts of his family whirling through his head, all the doubts and fears were returning. What was he doing here? Would he ever escape? Was he really going to start walking across the country tomorrow? The last time he'd felt this way a prayer in the woods had saved him. So, while the rest of the camp settled in for their last sleep in the tent city, Steve turned and headed for the woods.

Chapter 14

In the dusk, Steve made his way through the tents and then out into the grassy area which separated the tents from the woods. He spent a few minutes looking for and picking some wildflowers, then entered the darkness beneath the foliage of the trees. He paused for a few moments to let his eyes adjust to the darkness, but still had to go slowly as he picked his way between trees and over deadfalls. A few minutes later he entered the trees he came out into the little clearing where Maeve had been buried. The stars were now out in all their glory and a half moon provided enough light for Steve to find the mound of dirt and the little wooden cross which marked it.

He knelt and laid his flowers on the mound. After a few seconds he took a deep breath and began to pray outloud.

“Dear Heavenly Father. I need thy help again. I don’t know why I’m here and I miss my family. Please bless them. Please bless little Maeve. Keep her happy. Please bless her family that they can be happy without her.”

Steve took another deep breath and let it out slowly.

“Father please help me to get home! I miss my family so much. I don’t know if I can go on with these pioneers. Please bless them Father. Please don’t let these good people die. Please Father help me get home.” Steve

paused for a moment and then closed his prayer.

Slowly he opened his eyes. Still dark. Still a mound of dirt marking a small grave. But the emptiness he’d felt just moments ago was leaving.

“T’was a nice prayer Elder.”

Steve jumped to his feet and looked quickly toward the sound of the voice. He recognized it almost immediately as O’Malley’s but the initial shock of hearing a voice out of the dark had caught him completely by surprise.

“How long have you been here?” Steve asked as O’Malley came closer to the grave. Steve continued to try to shake off the jitters.

“Long enough me lad. Long enough.”

“Listen, O’Malley, I’m sorry about the other day. I really am.”

“I know ye are lad. We’ve all been hurtin’ we ‘ave. An me little Queen, why she’s safe with the angels. She’d be wantin’ us to be ‘appy, I’m thinking.” He paused and looked at Steve. “Tis ‘appy we’ll be Elder, tis ‘appy we’ll be.”

He extended his hand to Steve who took it in a firm shake, followed by a heartfelt embrace. Steve was the first to speak as they stepped back.

“How’s mother O’Malley?”

“Not well Elder, not well at all. Oh, she cares for the lads and I, but me senses tell me she’s dying inside.” O’Malley slowly settled down on a rock with a sigh. “Two and three times a day she comes here to be with her Maeve. Every step toward Zion will be one step further from her little one.”

Steve nodded, “But she must know this isn’t Maeve. Maeve is in paradise!”

“I know Elder and me good wife knows. But tis a difficult thing for a mother to leave the remains of her little one in a strange land.”

“Does she not want to go west now?” Steve asked.

“A strong woman is the mother of me children. She’s a hurtin’, but she’ll go. She’ll go. And yerself, Elder? To Zion you’ll be travelin’ wit the rest of us?”

Steve thought for several moments before answering. The crickets and the bullfrogs filled the night air with a cacophony of sound. “I don’t know what I’m doing O’Malley. That’s why I came out here to pray. Whether you or Annie or any one else believes me, I came from the future and somehow I’ve got to figure out how to get back there.”

Steve couldn’t see O’Malley’s expression in the darkness and so continued, “I’ve thought about going back into town and getting on the train for Boston. Maybe if I bang my head good on that train, I’ll wake up in 2006. But every time I get serious about trying it, I can’t bring myself to leave my--the people in my tent, or you, or any of these crazy pioneers. The only time I don’t feel like I’m about to be swallowed by loneliness is when I’m praying or working so hard I can’t think.”

“Whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.” O’Malley replied simply.

“What?” Steve asked, not sure if he heard what he thought he heard.

“Luke 9 lad. Ye’ve lost yer life in the service of us ‘crazy’ pioneers.”

“Well you’re right about one thing, I’ve lost my life.”

O’Malley sighed thoughtfully. “Are ye really from the future, Elder?”

“It’s one of the few things I am sure of.” Steve replied.

“And the handcart pioneers, a lot of them die in the future?” O’Malley asked.

“I’m afraid so. Every Pioneer Day I can remember, I’ve been told stories

about the handcart pioneers--how much they suffer and how many die.”

“Our company, Elder?”

“Don’t know. Until I got here, I didn’t know there was any more than one company of handcarts. But I don’t think it looks good.”

“Why?”

“It’s pretty late to start this trek. I don’t remember all the details, but I know it usually takes pioneers the whole summer to cross the plains. What day is it today?”

“The twenty -seventh of July.”

“Right, the summer is more than half over. Besides that, you know as well as I do that the carts are made of green wood. As the wood dries it shrinks and warps and those carts are going to fall apart.”

“Aye, but a cart falling apart doesn’t kill people, Elder!”

“No, but the cold does and the longer it takes us to stop and repair carts, the bigger the chance that we’re going to get caught in the snow.”

“Ummm.” O’Malley seemed to be grasping Steve’s point. “Might be that

what’s brought you to us.”

“Uh?”

“To help us survive Elder. Maybe yer here to help us survive.”

“I haven’t done too well so far have I?” Steve said quietly looking over at the little grave.

“Aye Elder, surely ye don’t blame yerself fer that now do ye?

“I could have helped you set your tent up so it wouldn’t blow down or insisted you get her to a doctor, or something!”

“Tis true, ye could have tried, but I’m sure I’d not 'ave been a listenin’.”

“Will you listen to me now?”

“How’s that?”

“Will you listen to me when I tell you to keep your family here? You can get a job in town, wait for next spring and then come to Utah. I guarantee you there will still be plenty of land left! Mother O’Malley will be here with Maeve a little longer, and with an early spring start the journey will be a breeze.”

“ And yerself Elder? Ye’d be stayin' with us?”

Steve caught himself and let out a sigh. “I can’t. It’s like I said before, I can’t leave my people. But I don’t have a wife and children O’Malley! Think of them!”

“Tis the very reason we’ll be walking with the rest of the company first thing in the morning Elder. Just like yer feeling that ye must go, I’ve the same feeling. If I pay it no mind, then what ‘ave I got to offer me family? I’ve certainly no worldly possessions to give ‘em and if I ignore the promptings I feel, there’ll be no eternal rewards either. No Elder, I’ll be planting me crops in Utah next spring. Mark me words, Elder, mark me words.”

Chapter 15

By the time the sun appeared on Monday the 28th of July, 1856 the five hundred and seventy six members of the Martin handcart company were strung out along a dusty trail due west of Iowa city. Though the company had been split into two groups under separate leaders, to the settlers of Iowa they looked like one large, and strange, caravan. Not that the Iowa settlers weren't used to seeing streams of dream seekers heading west, but the nearly six hundred pioneers, one hundred and forty six handcarts, seven Chicago wagons, thirty oxen, and fifty cows made the Martin company rather unique in both size and shape.

Steve's biggest challenge the first day of the trek was convincing himself that he was really pulling a handcart across Iowa. While he wasn't pinching himself, he moved among the handcarts of the families and the single sisters for which he was responsible. He helped them pull or push giving others a chance to rest. The handcarts themselves were initially a pleasant surprise. If the load was balanced over the axle, there was no lifting required, just pulling. While the pulling did require effort, it was definitely easier than carrying all of the goods that the handcart ticking now supported.

About the time that Steve had convinced himself that he was pulling a handcart through Iowa; someone up the line started singing. Gradually others in

the caravan joined in and began to sing. Steve came out of his thoughtless stupor with a snap. He could not believe his ears.

"You guys really sing that song?" he yelled to Samuel who was pulling next to him.

"Of course, we learned it on the Horizon, don't you remember?"

Steve shook his head. He remembered learning it, but it wasn't on the Horizon. It was in the primary room of the old fourth ward chapel. It brought back a flood of memories, but the cheerful spirits of the pioneers that morning were contagious and Steve couldn't help but join in:

Ye Saints that dwell on Europe's shores,
Prepare yourselves with many more
To leave behind your native land
For sure God's Judgments are at hand.
Prepare to cross the stormy main
Before you do the valley gain
And with the faithful make a start
To cross the plains with your hand cart.

Some must push and some must pull
As we go marching up the hill,
As merrily on the way we go
Until we reach the valley, oh.

Steve knew the chorus well, but stumbled through the verses. Thankfully, it was a favorite of the company so he had plenty of opportunities to learn and practice. By the time they made camp the first night, he knew the first three verses cold and by the second night he had all six down.

A new song wasn't the only thing that Steve had to his credit by the first night, he also had some pretty serious blisters on the heels of both feet and the sides of his small toes. Though he had been wearing the old fashioned, leather boots ever since his arrival on the train, working in the blacksmith shop had not required much walking. Now they were out on the trail, the short comings of the boots became very obvious. After both tents were set up and the others were getting their bedding in place, Steve found a spot on a log, sat down and slowly unlaced each boot. The wind that had been blowing dust in his face all day now felt good as it cut through the sweat of the bulky wool socks. Slowly he peeled them off to reveal the damage.

The blisters on both heels had popped and the loose skin was torn away. Some of the dark lint from the socks was stuck in the moist surface of the red, inflamed skin. Steve grimaced as he lifted first his left foot and then his right foot on to his opposite knee to get a closer look. The blisters on the side of his feet had not popped, but looked like they would burst at any moment.

“Elder, with all the walking you did in England, I'd not have thought you would have blisters.”

Steve looked up to see Annie standing next to him. Too tired to start another argument about whether or not he had actually been in England, he shrugged and replied,

“New boots. I wish I had the pair I left in my closet at home--breathable uppers, light as a feather, high-tech all the way. These old things are going to kill me.”

“I thought you said they were new?” Annie asked, confused by most of what Steve had just said. Steve just smiled.

“Sorry, they are new to me, but after wearing them today they feel very old. So what about you, did you get any blisters on the first day?”

“No, no of course not. I’ve walked many miles in these shoes and I’m sure I will walk many more before the Lord sees fit to bless me with a new pair. Elder, those really look painful.” She produced a hanky from the sleeve of her blouse, bent over and started to wipe the lint out of the blister on the foot that was resting on Steve’s knee. “Do they hurt?”

“Hello! They hurt like monsters! Don’t do that!” Steve tried to pull his foot away but Annie held it firmly.

“You’ve got to get it clean Elder or you’ll lose your foot!”

“OK! OK! Just go easy please!” Steve grimaced and leaned back while Annie worked over the blisters of both feet. When she was done, she handed Steve the handkerchief she had been using.

“You’ll be needing bandages, you can use this.”

“Thanks. I was just wondering what I would do without band-aids.”

“Elder?”

“Yes?” Steve looked up at Annie sensing the serious tone in her voice.

“I’ve been thinking about your claims of being from the future and all the strange words that you use.” She hesitated for a few moments, but Steve

remained silent.

“Were those things you said in the woods the other day really true? Does the church really grow to have twelve million members--I’m not saying I believe you came from the future, but are they true?”

Steve smiled and didn’t respond immediately; carefully considering how to phrase his response.

“It’s true Annie. I’m sorry that it is confusing for you. It’s confusing for me too, but it is true. In the year 2006 there are--or will be--over twelve million members of the Church. I live--or at least lived--then.”

Annie now took a seat next to Steve on the log. “Well if you really live in two thousand...”

“Six” Steve had to remind her.

“Yes, 2006. If you really live then--and I’m not saying I believe you did, or do, then what are you doing here now and how did you get here?”

Steve sighed, “Are you sure you want to talk about this? Last time we did, you refused to talk to me for two weeks.”

Annie smiled a weak smile. “Yes, I’m sure. I’m not going to get mad this

time.”

“Well the answer to your question is: I don’t know. I don’t know how I got here and I don’t know why I’m here. O’Malley thinks I might be here to help the company survive the trip to Utah. But it seems to me, if God wanted somebody to do that, he could have found some one that had made the trip before. Anyway, all I know is that I’m here and every time I try to leave I feel dark and empty inside. On the other hand, when I’m sticking around I feel ok.”

“Interesting.” was all Annie replied.

“No, interesting is a show about nature on The Discovery channel. This isn’t interesting--it’s a nightmare.”

Just then Samuel came around the side of the tent toward them. “Elder, there you are! Captain Martin is looking for you. He’s called a meeting for all the tent captains over by his tent.”

Steve slowly rose to his feet, picking up his boots and socks as he stood. His muscles felt fine. He guessed they’d only covered seven to eight miles that day, but the blisters made all of his moves very measured and careful.

“Thanks Sammy. Where’s his tent?”

“Up the trail on this side.” Samuel pointed Steve the right direction.

“Thanks.” Steve replied and then called, “See you later Annie” over his shoulder as he walked away.

“What? Oh! Yes, goodbye.” Annie seemed to be lost in her thoughts and hardly noticed Steve was leaving.

Steve found the other tent captains gathering next to what he assumed must be Captain Martin’s tent. He recognized most of the other captains and was familiar with a few but didn’t know any of them very well. O’Malley was now part of the other half of the company being lead by Jesse Haven so he wasn’t there. Steve shook hands with a few of the brethren, but then waited on the outskirts of the group until the captain came out of his tent and called them to order.

“Brethren, thanks for coming. There are a few matters of business we need to take care of and then you can get back to your tents and your dinners. Men, I learned one important thing marching with the battalion to Mexico: we must be organized and disciplined.”

The captain cleared his throat and looked around at his tent captains for emphasis before continuing. “First, we walked eight miles today. As you all know, we are late in the season. We’re going to need to go much further

than that in the future. In fact, we need to be doing twenty to twenty-five miles a day. In order to do that, we need to be up with the sun every morning. Elder Steve, will you please have John come see me when we're done here so that I can give him the times I'd like the bugle calls?"

The captain hesitated just long enough for Steve to nod his head then continued, "Organize your tents brethren. Taking down and putting up tents should take just a few minutes, not an hour. It will come with practice, but time is short. We must make every effort to do things faster.

"Now, with regards to food. The rations are as follows. Each day each person should get a pound of flour. On a weekly basis provide them each with three ounces of sugar and one half pound of bacon. You might be tempted to give out more brethren, but remember we have a long trip ahead of us and we must be wise stewards over what the Lord has given us. You can collect the rations for your tents before each meal from one of the wagons.

"That is all. Thank you for your good efforts. The Lord is with us, but he will not do for us what we can do for ourselves. Does anyone have questions or anything to report?"

One tent captain noted that a few of his handcarts were in need of some minor repairs and asked who, if anyone, had the skills to repair them. Captain

Martin urged him to repair what he could and take those he couldn't repair to a carpenter who was a member of the company. No one else had questions, so the group split up and headed back to their respective tents.

By Tuesday morning, Monday's breeze had become a stiff cross wind. The canvas of the tents fluttered and snapped as the pioneers took them down and tried to fold them up. The bugle sounded just before sunrise as Captain Martin had ordered, but breaking camp was not something that the pioneers had much practice at--yet. It was 9:30 by the time they were on the trail again.

Steve's feet refused to go back into the socks and boots, so he tossed them into the back of the cart he was sharing with John and Margaret and set out with bare feet. Every summer that he could remember, he and his brother and sisters had shed their shoes as soon as school was out. They then competed to see whose feet could take the "mail run" first. Since their mail box was in the gravel at the edge of the road, getting to it required walking on gravel. Until the soles of their feet became hardened by going barefoot for a few weeks, it was almost impossible to do without shoes. Steve was usually the winner so he felt confident his feet could take it. He had also seen several children of the company without shoes the day before, so he figured it was safe.

As it turned out, his feet were the least of his problems that day. As soon as the caravan started rolling, the dust became almost unbearable. The trail they walked on was like a river of fine dust. The hundreds of feet, wheels, and hooves lifted the dust into the wind which then swirled it endlessly around the pioneers. As they passed areas where fields had been cleared for farming but not yet planted, the dust storm grew even thicker. At times, Steve could not see the cart in front of him, though it was only two or three yards distant.

To make matters worse, the breeze was not cool, but grew brutally hot as the day progressed. Sweat quickly became streaks of mud as the flying dust combined with perspiration. The conversation and singing of the day before were avoided. An open mouth at the wrong moment could lead to a very gritty mouthful of dust.

Despite the hardships, by the time Captain Martin called the company to a halt at 1:00 pm the company had made nearly twelve miles. Setting up camp in the wind and dust was yet another challenge. Steve helped get the family tent up first then he and Samuel helped the sisters finalize their setup. After getting the dust-caked belongings off the carts and into the tents, he collapsed in his little corner of the family tent. A good amount of dust blew in through the door flaps and the floor was dust, but Steve was grateful for

the relative relief of the tent. He laid his head on his bag and was almost instantly asleep.

A growling stomach woke him several hours later. The tent was dark and Steve could hear the regular breathing of the others in the tent. He had no idea what time it was, but he was very hungry and knew he wouldn't get any sleep until he got something to eat or at least something to drink. Digging through his bag he located his tin plate, cup, and spoon. Then, as quietly as possible, he got up and made his way to the flaps of the tent.

Stepping outside, he saw several camp fires still burning and a few pioneers moving about. The wind had stopped and the sky was filled with millions of stars. The cooking fire used by his tent was long since cold, but he found a tin cup full of flour and a few pieces of bacon carefully covered with a cloth which he assumed must be his ration. Rather than trying to light a fire of his own (Steve hadn't quite mastered flint and steel fire lighting) he picked up his rations and headed to the sisters' tent which still had a fire burning.

There were two sisters sitting by the fire as Steve entered the circle of light.

"Mind if I borrow your microwave?" He said motioning towards the fire.

The sisters looked up at him a little surprised. Lydia smiled when she saw it was Steve.

“Why no Elder, please go right ahead. Have you missed your supper?”

“Yeah, I fell asleep as soon as the tents were up and just woke up. I’m starving. So I raided the fridge and found some cold pizza. Thought I’d pop it in your microwave for a few seconds and warm it up. Speaking of microwaves, doesn’t microwave popcorn sound good right now? Any popcorn for that matter. Do you have popcorn in this century sisters?”

Lydia and Elizabeth both stared at Steve with weak smiles on their faces. Neither was sure what he had just said nor how to reply. Steve had grown to enjoy being different but he didn’t leave them squirming too long.

“Well, if we don’t have popcorn, how about water? Is there some water somewhere near here?”

“Uh, yes. Yes, of course we have water Elder.” Elizabeth was the first to regain her composure and reply to Steve.

“Right here Elder!” Lydia stood and directed Steve to a wooden bucket hanging from the side of a near by cart.

“Thanks sisters, I need just enough to mix with my flour here. Is there any trick to mixing this stuff up?”

“Stuff, Elder?” Lydia had regained her composure and retaken her seat next to Elizabeth.

“The flour, do I just mix the water with it or am I supposed to add something else?”

“The flour is self rising Elder. But, here let me do it for you.” Lydia stood to take the cup of flour and water from Steve.

“No, that’s ok sit down, sit down. I’m an Eagle Scout. You’d be amazed at what I can cook. Every Saturday morning my family has pancakes for breakfast. Who do you think cooks ‘em?” Steve pointed at himself with his spoon which now had gobs of wet flour stuck to it. “Blueberry pancakes are my speciality!”

“I saw some along the creek while I was fetching water this afternoon.”

Steve, Lydia and Elizabeth all turned in surprise toward the flap of the tent from which the last comment came. Annie made her way from the tent door to the log where the other sisters were sitting.

“You saw some of my pancakes while you were getting water?” Steve asked incredulously.

“Not your pancakes--blueberries! I saw some blueberries while I was fetch-

ing the water.”

“Really? Are they far? Do you think we could find them in the dark? Does anyone have a flashlight?” The thought of some fresh blueberries in his otherwise drab biscuits got Steve excited.

“Slow down Elder, slow down.” Annie was growing used to Steve’s non-sensical words and was no longer intimidated as the other sisters were.

“What is a ‘flashlight?’” she asked.

“Oh sorry. It’s a light you hold in your hand. It uses batteries so you don’t have to plug it in. Mostly we use ‘em for camping or when the power goes out or something like that.”

“Oh, you mean a torch! We can make our own torch.” Annie bent over and picked up a good size stick from the fire. “Come along Elder, I’ll show you the blueberries. Sisters would you please mind the Elder’s bacon and flour until we return?” Elizabeth and Lydia nodded politely but kept stealing concerned glances at Steve.

As soon as they were out of hearing distance Annie reprimanded Steve.

“Elder, you really mustn’t talk such nonsense in front of the others. They’ll

think you’re not ‘whole.’”

“Not whole? Oh, you mean they’ll think I’m crazy or bonkers or looney tunes?” Steve replied with a laugh.

“There you go again, Elder. It is a wonder that I continue to think you are whole.”

“But you do don’t you? And you know why? Because deep inside you know I really did come from the future. That’s why!” They were out of the tent city now and heading back down the main trail toward the last crossing of the creek.

Annie thought for several moments before replying. “Elder, I know you are different. Maybe you are ‘crazy’ as you say. It would sure explain a lot of things. But you are right, something inside tells me that is not true. Maybe you really are from the future.”

Steve was ready to hug Annie on the spot. Somebody in this crazy dream finally believed him! But Annie kept right on walking and talking and didn’t leave him any time for a celebration.

“I’ve been thinking a lot since we talked yesterday Elder. I also think brother O’Malley is right. I think God sent you here to help us.” Steve’s

enthusiasm of a moment earlier was now crushed. It was one thing to have someone believe he had come from the future. It was quite another to have them believing that he was some kind of messenger from God.

“Well you’re getting closer Annie. I am from the future, but I’m not on any kind of mission from God.”

Annie stopped walking for a minute and held the torch up high so she could look into Steve’s eyes. What she saw must have sufficed, because she turned and kept walking toward the creek.

“The berries aren’t far Elder, we turn off the main trail here.” She lead the way and held the torch out in front of her, talking while she walked.

“Yesterday, you said if the Lord wanted somebody to help the company to Utah, he surely could have found a person that had made the trip before. When you said that, it occurred to me that both Enoch and Moses felt inadequate for their callings.”

Steve tried to interrupt but Annie kept right on talking.

“Even Joseph Smith probably could have said, ‘If the Lord wanted someone to lead his church he could have found a minister.’”

“Now wait just a doggone minute!” Steve stopped walking and raised his voice, but Annie kept right on walking and since she had the only light, Steve was obliged to keep up.

“So,” Annie continued, “it is clear that the Lord uses a different measuring stick than we do. It is also clear that he could overlook even all of your obvious deficiencies if he wanted to call you.”

“Gee thanks!” Steve said, but Annie continued without interruption.

“What really bothered me was you insisting that you had come from the future. It just didn’t seem possible.”

“Tell me about it!” Steve muttered to himself, having given up on actually carrying on a dialog with Annie.

“Here we are Elder, the blueberries.” They had come upon a row of thick foliage. Steve could hear the creek running now and could just see the tops of willows behind the low bushes to which Annie was pointing. She stuck what was left of the torch almost directly into the bushes.

“They are very difficult to see in the dark. You’ll have to feel them with your hands Elder.”

Steve stepped closer to the bushes, being very cautious with his bare feet in the dark, and began searching for berries. She was right, they were difficult to see but he figured it was worth the effort. Annie continued her discourse holding the torch with one hand and feeling into the bushes for berries with the other.

“I now think it is possible, Elder.”

“Yeah, look! I’ve already got a handful!” Steve held out his hand full of scrawny little wild blueberries.

“Not to find blueberries! I think it is possible that you could be here from the future! This afternoon I was reading in the book of Alma. In talking about the resurrection he tells his son that time is only ‘measured unto men’ and that ‘all is as one day with God.’”

Annie now paused and put down the torch which had burned out. She waited for Steve’s appreciation of her discovery. Steve wasn’t so impressed.

“That’s all very interesting, Annie. Do you have something we can put these berries in? My hands are full.”

“Elder, don’t you understand what I’m saying? To God there is no future or past, it is all one day. So just like he sent messengers from the past to Jo-

seph Smith, he could send a messenger from the future to us!”

Steve now stopped picking berries and turned to look at Annie with his two hands cupped full of blueberries. She stacked the berries she had picked onto Steve’s already full hands then she produced a handkerchief from her skirt pocket. She laid it out flat over her cupped hands and Steve dumped the stack of berries from his hands in to it. Once his hands were empty he began to talk.

“Listen, Annie, I can’t tell you how glad I am that you finally believe I came from the future, because it’s the truth. But, I don’t like all this talk about being a messenger from God because I’m not. A messenger has to get sent by somebody and usually has a message to deliver. I don’t have a message and nobody sent me! I’m just here, that’s all!”

“How can you say that Elder?” Annie asked with a very serious tone to her voice and then added “Come along, we better get back to camp.

Steve had now taken the corners of the handkerchief together and was holding the little bundle of berries. They started back the way they had come on the same trail with Annie leading and talking.

“I don’t understand how you can say that no one sent you Elder. You told me yesterday that every time you try to leave us you feel dark and empty

inside, but when you decide to stay you feel peaceful. To me, that is every bit as much a message from God as the burning bush was to Moses.”

Steve had to think about that one and walked on for a few minutes in silence. As they reached the main trail he responded.

“I can’t deny what you just said. I do feel better when I am working and ‘staying’ than when I’m thinking about going. I never recognized the spirit before, but that may be what it is.” A tingle went down Steve’s spine as he said the last words. “Even so--I’m no messenger from God.”

“How can you be so sure Elder?” Giving up was not one of Annie’s natural traits.

“I’m just sure, that’s all. If I were a messenger, wouldn’t I know what message I’m supposed to deliver?”

“Maybe you are supposed to discover your message.”

“Right. I can hear Moroni talking to Joseph Smith now. ‘Hi, I’m a heavenly messenger. My name is Moroni, but I’ve got to figure out what it is I’m supposed to be telling you. Could you hang on just a minute?’” Steve paused a moment and then added sarcastically, “I don’t think so.”

They were now making their way through the first tents of the tent city.

Only a few campfires still burned. Annie was quiet for a while as she thought about what Steve had said. Steve worried he may have offended her with his last comment and wasn’t comfortable with the silence. He stopped walking and held her arm so that she had to stop and look at him.

“Look I’m sorry. I’m really glad that you believe me and I don’t want you mad at me again. How about we just agree that I’m from the future and that I’m supposed to be here and leave it at that for now?”

Annie was quiet for a few long moments. Twice she looked like she was about to speak but thought better of it. Finally she smiled at Steve and replied, “Yes that will be fine for now Elder.”

Chapter 16

There was something pleasant about being shaken from a deep sleep by a bugle. Steve couldn't put his finger on it, but even at the unearthly hour of four a.m. he woke better rested and happier to the sound of the bugle than he ever did back home to the obnoxious buzzing of his digital alarm clock. Maybe it had something to do with the fresh air, the constant exercise, or the fact that staying up late to watch movies was never an option. Whatever it was, it was one of the few positive things in what were otherwise very difficult days.

By Saturday, the company had become very proficient in breaking camp and getting on the trail at an early hour. More than Captain Martin's urgings, the memory of the heat of the sun from the day before encouraged the pioneers to get quickly on their way in the cool of the morning. Friday had been particularly hot. Hot enough that one of the older brethren in the camp had fainted under his cart.

On one of the first days of the trek, Steve had made an off-handed comment to the single sisters, that the brethren could get a tent down twice as fast as they could. From that day until Saturday the sisters's tent was down, folded, and in a cart before Steve even rolled out of bed. So when he came out on Saturday and saw the sisters' tent still standing he hissed to Samuel and the

other brethren in the tent, "The sisters' tent is still up men! C'mon let's get this dog down!"

In a rush, all the brethren in the tent rolled out of their blankets and started pulling on pants. Steve didn't wait for them, but started pulling up pegs and untying support lines. By now, the single sisters had come out of their tent and the race was on. The sisters had the advantage that there was no one inside their tent as they took it down, but Steve and the others still managed to get their tent in a cart within seconds of the sisters even though they had to step over several sleeping children and other unpacked items.

By five a.m. the entire company was on the trail and making good progress. The spirits of the pioneers were high as the sun rose behind them and they pushed and pulled their carts along. By nine a.m. they were passing through a rather well established settlement. The first few days of the trek they had passed through several such villages and settlements along the trail. But these had thinned as they moved further west and this was the first they had seen since Thursday afternoon. Steve liked the settlements for the change of scenery they always provided.

This particular one was made up of roughly a dozen unkempt log homes. Most of the homes had split rail fences around their yards. As the company made it's way through town several of the settlers took a break from their

morning chores and came out to watch the procession. Steve, and the rest of the company, were now used to being a spectacle. It always reminded Steve of the Pioneer Day parade back home. The saints would wave and the settlers would typically wave back and wish them good luck. For some reason though, this particular settlement wasn't that friendly.

Because Steve's carts were the first packed and ready to go that morning, they were near the head of the train and were among the first to enter the village. They waved to the villagers and said hello as they walked past their homes. But instead of return waves and well wishes there were jibes and sneers in return.

"Awful hard way to serve the Lord!" One yelled.

"Best use of Mormons, I ever seen!" yelled another. "Tie 'em up to wagons just like a bunch a dumb asses!"

Steve was helping John and Margaret pull their cart as they walked through town. The sisters, Elizabeth and her children, and Aaron and his family followed with their carts. As the insults continued through the length of the village, Steve could feel his anger rising. Apparently so could John. He reached over and put his hand on Steve's arm as they pulled side by side.

"Take it easy Elder. Remember Peter and John 'rejoiced' that they were

'counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.'

"Yeah, well these yahoos aren't going to be rejoicing much longer."

"It's not worth it Elder. We're just about out of town, just let it go."

Steve took a deep breath and nodded. "Yeah ok, ok."

He concentrated on the ground in front of him and tried to ignore the taunts. After what seemed like an eternity, they reached the end of the village and the taunts became less and less audible.

"Now what do you suppose they're up to?" Steve was awakened from his deep concentration on the ground in front of him by the query from John. He looked up to see several of the older boys from the village running ahead of the handcarts.

"I dunno, but I'll bet it's no good." Steve replied flatly. "Looks like they're stopping in those trees up ahead."

Not far past the end of the village, the trail descended a slight incline and entered a long line of trees that extended as far as the eye could see in both directions. Typically Steve looked forward to trees on the trail and the shade they provided, but as he pulled his cart into the shade this morning he had a

bad feeling in his stomach. It didn't take them long before they found the boys from the village.

The line of trees they had seen from afar and were now crossing had grown up along the edge of a beautiful little stream. If not for the presence of the village boys, Steve would have been perfectly delighted by the scene. The stream was no more than ten to twelve feet wide and flowed steadily. The banks were covered in a motley green combination of moss and grass except for a few clumps of willows that grew right down to the water's edge. Where the trail intersected the stream, the banks had been worn down and widened, forming a large slow moving pool through which the carts would pass.

The boys from the village had taken up positions along the banks of this pool and were now waiting for the show to begin. The pioneers had crossed dozens of streams over the past week and were becoming rather adept at the process. Those who wore shoes, typically took the time to take them off. The brethren rolled up their pant legs and the women hitched their skirts as high as they needed to avoid getting them wet. Despite the widened banks, this looked to be one of the deeper, if not the deepest, crossings the company had made.

Steve always enjoyed the crossings. His feet were healing well, but a nice

dip in a cool stream with soft mud or smooth pebbles in the bottom always felt great. The sisters in the company weren't quite as enthusiastic. Hitching a skirt was somewhat of an embarrassment and hitching a skirt with one hand while pulling or pushing a cart with the other was down right cumbersome. Steve figured, the rude spectators wouldn't help at all.

He was right. As he and John entered the water pulling the cart, Margaret hitched her skirt and followed into the water pushing from behind. The boys along the bank began to snicker and hoot and yell cat calls. Now Steve could see John's anger rising.

"I think it's time to start rejoicing brother John." Steve said so that only John could hear him.

"Rejoice?" John replied obviously distraught over the abuse his wife and the other sisters were taking.

"Yeah, I was thinking we're about to see a few baptisms and we ought to have an opening song and start rejoicing." Steve replied.

"Baptism?--"

"Yeah, I'm thinking it will be more of a sprinkling affair than immersion, but we'll just have to see how the spirit moves won't we? Do you have a

bucket or a pot or kettle in your cart?"

"Yes, yes! As a matter of fact I do!" John now seemed to understand Steve's intention and he dropped the handle and turned to the bed of the cart.

"No! Not yet John. Wait till we get the cart to the other side. I'll go back to help the others and round up a few more buckets. You get your cart up the trail a ways and then come back with your bucket. Cross the stream on the far side of the carts from these 'low-lives' so they don't notice what we're up to. Oh, and let's start singing, that will distract them and drown 'em out."

By now they had reached the opposite side. Steve slipped out from behind the pulling bar of John's cart and reentered the stream singing at the top of his lungs. Gradually the train behind him picked up the tune.

But some will say it is too bad
The Saints upon their feet to pad
And more than that to push a load
As they go marching up the road.
We say this is Jehovah's plan
To gather out the best of men,

And women too, for none but they
Will ever gather in this way.

Some must push and some must pull
As we go marching up the hill,
As merrily on the way we go
Until we reach the valley, oh.

The single sisters had already hitched their skirts and had their cart well into the stream by the time Steve got back to them. The cat calls from the spectators only increased in volume as the pioneers heartily sang their favorite tune. Steve grabbed the bar next to Elizabeth and began to pull.

"Do you have any buckets or pots?" He hissed in her ear.

Elizabeth was slightly taken back but had learned to expect just about anything from Steve.

"Yes, Elder we have a water bucket. Why?"

Steve quickly explained his plan to her. She approved with a broad smile.

"The bucket is hanging from the back of the cart. I'm thinking this will

work as well.” She stepped away from the cart as the others pulled it up onto the bank and undid the strap around her waist from which her prized hat box dangled.

“But you don’t want it to get wet do you?” Steve queried.

“It will dry and I can’t think of a better use for it right now.” She quickly dumped the contents into the bed of the cart and handed it to Steve.

“Thanks Elizabeth. Go ahead and pull your cart up the trail a ways. We’ll catch up.”

Steve accepted the hat box and grabbed the bucket from the back of the cart then headed back across the stream. The boys from the village were totally engaged in the spectacle of those just entering the stream and paid no attention to Steve. John had now also returned and helped Steve pass the word along to Samuel and Aaron.

As soon as Samuel and Aaron had their families and carts safely across the stream, they grabbed their buckets and pots and joined Steve and John in helping others across and spreading the word. Within a few minutes there were a dozen brethren with buckets in one hand helping pull carts across the stream. As the numbers grew, Steve began to worry that the hecklers would catch on and decided the time had come to put his plan into action. He

quickly divided the group in half and sent one half, with their buckets full, back up the trail from which the carts continued to arrive. He sent John with them and instructed him to walk back up the trail until they were out of sight, then circle around through the trees until they were behind the boys.

While they waited for the first group to get into position, Steve and the other brethren continued to help the oncoming carts across the stream. As soon as Steve saw movement in the trees behind the boys, he began to slow the carts as they entered the stream, and encouraged additional carts to follow closely. In this way he soon had four to five carts bumper-to-bumper across the width of the stream. Behind this cover, he then scooped the hat box full of water and motioned to the other brethren to do the same. Slowly and nonchalantly they slipped between the carts and rushed the boys.

The hecklers were still heckling and only realized what was happening after it was too late. Steve launched the first bucketful and caught a toe-head with his mouth still open. He came up gasping with a completely baffled look on his face, but wasted no time in beating a retreat to the woods. Steve “reloaded” quickly and continued the assault. The village boys were now scrambling a hasty retreat to the woods. Steve and his bucket brigade scooped their buckets full and jumped up on the bank in hot pursuit.

By now the quickest hecklers had reached John and the others who were

well hidden in the woods. The second ambush was even more effective than the first. John had his forces well hidden and the hecklers ran straight into the trap. The second dousing was completely unexpected resulting in a mass of confusion that lasted just long enough for Steve and those with him to catch up and douse the hecklers one more time from behind.

The heretofore hecklers were completely soaked and exasperated. They bolted in every direction and scattered through the trees like wet cats. John, Steve and their conspirators returned to the train amid the cheering and clapping of the other pioneers.

That night at camp, Captain Martin called a general session and gave a stern lecture on turning the other cheek. He did, however, note that even the great Captain Moroni would have been proud of the stratagem used that day.

Chapter 17

For perhaps the first time in his life, Steve was glad that it was Sunday. And this Sunday was truly a day of rest. The company had been on the trail for nearly a week and while most were getting used to the routine, a day of rest was just what their tired muscles and sunburned bodies needed.

Church services were held in the morning with the usual preaching that Steve had now grown used to. The saints were urged on to greater faith and diligence and the evils of slothfulness were expounded upon. At the conclusion of the services Captain Martin organized a detail of brethren to repair carts that afternoon. Just as predicted, the green wood of the handcarts had begun to dry out and warp and crack and several of the carts were in need of repair. Steve thought he might get an afternoon nap but his conscience got the better of him and he pulled himself up from his rock seat and followed the repair volunteers. He didn't get far before the captain called him back.

"Elder! Elder! I have another assignment for you. Would you please come with me back to my tent?"

Steve was a little surprised by the request, but repairing handcarts hadn't sounded all that fun, so he agreed.

"Uh sure. No problem."

The captain nodded and then proceeded to dismiss the rest of the pioneers. As he did so he encouraged them to spend the afternoon making sure they were ready for an early start in the morning.

Steve waited while Captain Martin dismissed the saints and then followed him back to his tent. The captain exchanged greetings with several saints along the way. Steve's curiosity was beginning to get the better of him.

"Listen, if it's the water thing yesterday, it won't happen again. I promise." He blurted out as the Captain motioned him to take a seat on an overturned bucket in front of the tent.

"The water thing? Oh, no Elder. I've already said my piece on that issue. No, I've not asked you to come here to offer a reprimand."

"Oh?" Steve's tone and demeanor began to lighten.

"No. You've done such a good job with the single sisters, I'd like to call you to take on another stewardship."

Steve appreciated the compliment, but had never really liked or understood the term 'stewardship.' In his experience, work of one kind or another always followed when someone mentioned stewardship.

“Uh, exactly what kind of stewardship?”

“It has come to my attention that one of the reasons so many of the carts are breaking down is that they are overburdened. They are carrying too much weight. I believe we need to do another weigh-in and I would like you to do it.”

Steve wasn't overjoyed at the thought of bearing the bad news that the pioneers would again have to leave prized possessions behind. He answered matter of factly. “Why me?”

“As I said, you have done a remarkable job with the single sisters. I remember how you handled them during our first weigh-in. While I don't wish to cast any dispersions, I believe that most of the weight offenders are sisters.”

Steve almost burst out laughing. “So this is where BYU coed jokes got started.” He said, half under his breath.

“I beg your pardon?” The captain asked bewildered.

“Oh, it's nothing really. I was just thinking that some of the sisters might not like being called weight offenders.”

“No, no of course not. That is why I would like you to handle the weigh in. Will you do it?”

Steve thought for a few minutes before responding. “Reducing weight is not going to keep these carts from breaking down. You know as well as I do, that as the wood dries they are going to continue to fall apart.”

The captain nodded. “I know some of the carts will continue to break down. But reducing the weight might save a few. It should also help us to move faster--something I know you would like to see happen.”

Steve had to agree with that. Any time they could make up might help them avoid the disaster he feared awaited them.

“Yeah. Ok. I'll do it. When do you want it done?”

“Right now. I've got the scales right here.” Captain Martin stepped over to his cart and lifted the scales out. “Seventeen pounds Elder. Do you remember how to set the scales?”

Steve nodded as he took the scales from the captain. “Are you going to announce this, so that people know why I'm showing up?”

“No, I decided it would be best not to announce it so that no one has time to

put on extra clothes.”

“Yeah, good idea. There’s only one problem: I know very few of these saints and very few know me. What makes you think they’ll even let me weigh their stuff?”

“I’m not sure what you mean, Elder. You’ve been with these saints for years in Britain and now the duration of this trip. You know them as well as anyone.”

“No but, that wasn’t--” Steve was about to explain, but then realized what he was doing and thought better of it. The captain could see Steve’s concern and added.

“If anyone has issues with reweighing have them come and talk to me. And, if you would like some help, please go ahead and ask who ever you please.”

Steve nodded. “Ok, I’ll think about it. I’m going to eat first and then get started. Is that OK?”

“Good. Good” the captain replied. Steve turned to leave.

“You might want to ask a sister to go with you.” The captain called after him. “One that’s not over weight!”

Steve smiled to himself and replied over his shoulder, “Ok, I’ll see what I can figure out.” The captain’s last minute counsel reminded him of leaving home for a date. His mom or dad would shout a last word of encouragement or counsel after him. “Remember who you are and what you stand for!” or “Be home by 11:00, we’ll be waiting for you!” or “Treat her like a queen!” As far as he could remember though, they’d never shouted to find one that wasn’t over weight.

The meal that afternoon was becoming a regular. The pioneers called it corn stirabout, which is exactly what it was. A little cornmeal flour mixed with water and then stirred about over a fire. Steve gulped his down. There was no taste to savor and he was in a rush to get the weighing done before dark.

Annie wasn’t at either tent. He finally found her at the stream trying to scrape some burnt stirabout out of the bottom of a pan. The cornmeal was burned black and had almost become one with the iron of the pan.

“Here let me show you a trick I learned at scout camp.” He took the pan from her and scooped up a handful of sand from the creek, dumped it into the bottom of the pan, and rubbed it hard with his fingers over the black corn meal. It slowly gave way and, by the time Steve rinsed the sand out in the creek, the pan was cleaner than it had been for years.

Annie was impressed, or at least acted that way. “What is this scout camp?”

“Oh, in my time there is a thing called scouts. You start when you’re twelve. You get together once a week with other scouts to do activities. You wear these green uniforms and earn badges and stuff. Scouts go camping a lot so you learn about camping. It’s pretty fun.”

“And you were a scout?” Annie asked.

“Yeah. Even got my eagle--that’s the highest award you can get.”

“Do scouts pay well?”

“Pay? Heck no! In fact you have to pay to be a scout, but all the parents love it because it teaches good things so they don’t mind paying. C’mon, let’s get this pan back to camp.” Steve turned and started walking toward the tents.

Annie had to hurry to keep up. “Well if scouts doesn’t pay, how do all these young men earn a living?” she asked as she caught up.

“Earn a living?” Steve asked incredulously. “Scouts are only twelve to fourteen years old! They don’t have to earn a living.”

“I don’t understand?” Annie responded. Steve stopped suddenly and looked

at her for a moment.

“You’re serious aren’t you?” he asked. Annie nodded. Steve continued, “Do twelve year old boys have to earn a living where you come from?”

She nodded again and added, “Well of course, and even younger. And not just boys, but we girls as well.”

“What about school and your parents? Don’t the parents work?”

“Oh my yes. But they don’t earn enough to feed the whole family.”

“And school?” Steve asked again, “What about school?”

“Only the very wealthy are able to attend school after about the age of ten. And even those that do attend school usually have some kind of work to attend to in the evenings.”

“Whoa!” Steve turned and began walking toward the tents again before asking, “What kind of work did you do Annie?”

“While I was with my family I did house work for some of the wealthier families in the area. In London, I worked in a knit shop.”

“A nit shop?” Steve asked, not understanding exactly what he had heard.

“Yes a knitting shop. We knitted socks, caps, and other things.”

“Oh a knitting shop. So when my socks finally wear out, you’ll be able to make me a new pair, huh?”

Annie blushed a little. “Of course Elder, of course. And you, Elder? What is your trade?”

“My trade? I don’t know yet. One summer I worked at the community pool. My parents want me to go to college, but my best friend didn’t go and he’s got a killer job in construction.”

“He is a butcher?” Annie asked a little confused.

“A butcher? No, he builds houses. Why did you think he was a butcher?”

“I thought you said he had a ‘killer’ job?” Annie responded.

“Oh no, killer means cool.” Steve replied and then caught himself again.

“Both killer and cool mean something is good.”

“Your time sounds very interesting Elder. You must come from a very wealthy family to not yet have a trade and to have the opportunity to go to college.”

“Oh no, my family is not rich. We’re just normal. Not rich and not poor.”

“So most boys in your time get to go to school until they are older?”

Steve nodded. “In fact, it’s the law. You can’t even get a part time job until you’re sixteen.”

“And the girls?” Annie asked hopefully.

“Same.” Steve replied.

“Killer!”

“What was that?” Steve asked, not believing his ears. “What did you just say?”

“It’s very good Elder! Your time must be wonderful. Everyone learning so much and not having to work. It must be like paradise!”

Steve had to think about that one for a few minutes. They’d reached the single sisters’ tent now and so he put the pan in one of the handcarts before responding. “My time is good Annie. In a lot of ways it’s a ton easier than this.” Steve waved his arm at the surrounding camp. “But it’s not paradise. Heck we have drugs and crime and all kinds of problems you’ve never even heard of. I guess not everybody uses their free time like they should.”

“And you Elder? Did you use your time like you should?”

“Too many questions Annie.” Steve came out of his uncharacteristically deep thoughts. “I didn’t come to talk about my time, I came to tell you that I discovered my message.”

“You did?” Annie would have persisted with the prior line of questioning, but was much more interested to hear why Steve had been sent to be with the pioneers. “Well, what it is Elder. You must tell me! Quickly!”

“How does this sound?” Steve asked, “I’m sorry sister, but you are overweight!”

“Pardon me?”

“Um, you don’t like that one huh? Is this better? ‘Begging your pardon ma’am, but you need to lose a few LBs!’”

“Elder, what kind of nonsense are you talking now?”

“Well, the captain helped me discover my message this morning. He asked me to reweigh all the goods in the camp. He is particularly concerned with some of the sisters.”

“I see. And you’ve come to warn me?”

“Well not exactly. I’ve come to ask you to help me.”

“Help you break these poor people’s hearts again? I think not Elder.”

“But Annie, I don’t even know most of these people.”

“You don’t need to know them Elder. Just walk up to them and ask to weigh their goods.”

“You don’t understand. For four weeks now I have avoided conversations with most of them. Not because I don’t like them. I try to be friendly, but they think I’m some one I’m not. They think I’m the Elder. They think I know them. But I don’t. What if I say something or don’t remember something that they think I should? I don’t want to offend them. If and when the real Elder ever gets back, I want him to still have a few friends!”

Annie thought for a few moments about what Steve said, finally she replied.

“Ok Elder. I’ll help you.”

“Thanks Annie! I’ll be right back. I’ve just gotta get the scales. Say, you and the real Elder, you huh, you like each other?”

“Of course we like each other Elder. I like all my fellow saints.”

“No but I mean in a, you know, romantic kind of way?”

Annie blushed slightly and didn't respond directly. "Elder, the scales?"

"Oh yeah, sorry. I'll be right back."

Within five minutes Steve and Annie were standing at the flap of a nearby tent announcing their purpose for being there. The first few tents were a little awkward as Steve and Annie settled in to their roles. Steve didn't mind talking with people, but he knew his message wasn't a pleasant one and that made him more self-conscious than usual. In addition, though Steve had seen most of them about the camps for the last four weeks and recognized their faces, they were for the most part strangers to him. Actually they were worse than strangers, they were strangers that knew him and thought he should know them. Annie did the best she could as his guide. Before they reached a tent she would try to determine which families lived in it and give Steve a little background.

"I believe that is Hannah and her two boys sitting by the fire. Annie whispered to Steve as they approached the campfire of one of the many tents.

"Yes, yes I'm sure it is. That is sister Hannah. She is a single sister but has two young boys traveling with her. Joseph and Hyrum are their names. They are not her sons, but the sons of a friend who went in one of the earlier companies."

"Why aren't the boys with their parents?" Steve whispered back as they got closer.

"Their father is blind and their mother is not well. The captains thought it would be better for someone else to care for the boys."

"Bummer." Steve muttered under his breath. Annie looked at him quizzically but they had now reached the fire circle and Steve began talking to the sister.

"Good afternoon sister Hannah!" He said, "how are you and these two fine gentlemen doing?"

"We're fine Elder, fine." She smiled down at the boys and they both smiled back.

"I'm glad to hear it sister. Uh, I have these scales with me because Captain Martin asked that all personal belongings be weighed again."

"I see." Hannah replied glumly but with courtesy.

"The captain is concerned that the carts are breaking down because they are overloaded." Annie chimed in to try and further explain the unpleasantness.

"It is fine. Really it is." Hannah said as she rose from the log she had been

sitting on. "I am sure that we were under the weight limit in Iowa city and we have added nothing since." She smiled at both Steve and Annie. "I will notify the others and gather our belongings." She left Steve and Annie and entered the tent.

Steve was a little surprised that the boys, Joseph and Hyrum, were so young. He guessed the oldest at five or six and the younger at three or four. How hard it must have been for them to see their parents walk off with a different company. How hard it must have been for their parents to leave them and how hard it must be for this single sister to care for them. If they were overweight, Steve determined in his mind right then that he would let them stay that way. As it turned out, Hannah was right, they were no where near overweight.

The boys were amazed by the scales and became "official helpers" while the rest of the tent was weighed in. Steve held the scales and gave directions to the boys to add or subtract weights from the weight side of the scale. Annie stood by with a ledger book and noted the pioneers name and the actual weight of their belongings. A few of the sisters from Hannah's tent were overweight by about a dress. Steve explained to them that they would either have to wear two dresses all the way across the plains or leave one in camp. Given the heat and dust of the prior several days, most opted to leave the

extras.

On the way to the next tent, Annie and Steve both started talking at the same time. They both laughed and Steve let Annie go first.

"You mentioned your message earlier when you asked me to help you. Does that mean, you believe there is a message for you to discover?"

"Heck, I don't know. I guess I hope there is a reason that I'm here and that it's not just some freaky accident. But I don't know."

"You know Elder, in a way, it is not so strange. In fact, I think we are all trying to discover a message."

"What? Now you're going to tell me you're not from this time either?"

"No, no, that is not what I meant. What I meant is this life. We all come to this life without a memory and spend our days on this earth trying to determine what we are supposed to do and be. In other words, we are all looking for our message or our mission, so to speak."

Steve thought in silence for a few moments. They were now nearing the cooking fire of the next tent. "I guess I never thought of it that way." He finally responded. "So what about you Annie? Have you discovered your

message?”

She smiled. “You asked me once what could be worth leaving my family and traveling like this to Zion. The answer is my message Elder. I discovered it and now I’m following it.”

They took the last few steps to the tent in silence. Steve again had that tingling feeling that he had come to recognize as the spirit. He wished the tent was another hundred yards off so that he could just go on feeling this way. But there they were at the tent door. He smiled at Annie and called out. “Trick or treat! Anybody home?”

There was rustling within the tent but no immediate answer. Steve tried again, “This is the FBI. We’ve got this tent surrounded! Come out with your hands up and nobody will get hurt!”

Annie elbowed Steve. “Stop it Elder, you are surely going to scare them.” She then called toward the tent. “Hello! Hello? Annie and the Elder here. Is anyone there?” There was more rustling from inside the tent and then the head of an older man popped out the flap.

“Annie! Why didn’t you say so at first! Welcome lass! Welcome!” By now the body that belonged to the head had emerged and before them stood a short and stocky little man. Steve estimated his age at fifty or more. His

entire head and face were round and jolly. The top of his head was as bald as a billiard ball and no less shiny. It was obvious that he was accustomed to wearing a hat. His face was as red as a beet, but his dome was white and shiny. His clothes were loose and rumpled. It was obvious he had just been awakened from a nap and didn’t care who knew it. He took Annie’s hand and began pumping before turning to give Steve the same treatment.

“Elder, Elder! How are you? I’ve not seen much of you since we reached this new land. Have you forgotten about your friends from the mother country so soon?”

“Forgotten? No! No!” Steve responded looking to Annie for help. “We’ve all been busy brother--” He hesitated for a moment and Annie cut in.

“Luke! Brother Luke, how are all the other members from the Clitheroe Branch doing? And where is that traveling companion of yours, Brother William?” Steve looked at Annie and pretended to wipe his forehead in relief. Annie tried to repress a giggle while listening attentively to Brother Luke’s reply.

“He’ll be appearing shortly I’m sure. Been restin’ ‘is weary bones. Poor chap. I’m afraid all the walkin’ is takin’ a considerable toll on ‘im.”

“Who is that you are babbling on about now Luke? I’m as fit as ever I’ve

been and will use these 'weary bones' to walk to your funeral some day I'm sure."

Steve turned to the flap and almost had to look up to take in the entire individual that had emerged. The man was at least six feet which was very tall for pioneers. His clothes were very neat, but it was obvious that he had trouble finding trousers long enough as those he was wearing ended half way up his ankles. Unlike Luke, his face was thin and narrow and generally dour. Ichabod Crane was the first name that came to Steve's mind as he put out his hand. "How are you brother--" he hesitated for just a moment and then remembered the name Annie had used, "William?"

"I'm quite fine Elder. Quite fine. All other commentaries to the contrary." He shot a side ways glance at Luke and then turned to Annie. "And sister Annie. How are you?" He took her hand and shook once bowing his head slightly.

Annie responded. "I am doing very well thank you."

"And to what do we owe the honor of your presence here today?" William continued.

Steve was still struggling to take in the picture before him. "I feel like I'm in an Odd Couple rerun." Unintentionally, he said it right out loud.

"I beg your pardon?" William asked curiously.

"Sorry, I was thinking of a dream I had last night. Strange dream!" Steve back peddled then figured the best way to change the subject was to bring up the real reason for their visit. "Captain Martin asked us to visit all the tents and reweigh all personal goods."

The two men responded just as Steve would have guessed they might. Luke said, "Sure" and headed back into the tent to gather his things. William on the other hand just stood there and scowled. Rather than add fuel to the fire, Steve left Annie to deal with William and pretended to be absorbed setting up the scales. In a matter of minutes Annie was at Steve's side again. He glanced over his shoulder just in time to see William disappear into the tent.

"Is he getting his things?" Steve whispered to her.

She nodded but said nothing. "What did you say to him?" Steve persisted.

"I told him that ever since you had bumped your head, you had been less than whole. I also told him that when you feel stress you experience fits."

"Fits?"

"Yes. Fits of frenzy. I told him that they always start with strange dreams

and that unless he wanted to deal with a fit of frenzy he should gather his things and have them weighed at once.” Steve looked at Annie and she smiled back at him.

“Fits?” Steve asked again.

She nodded and added, “Of frenzy.”

“Clever. Very clever. I’m glad you find my medical problems amusing and useful.” He pretended to be offended but winked at Annie as he said it.

Luke came out of the tent and the weighing began again. Neither Luke nor William had any problem with weight. Steve did notice that William kept his distance throughout the process. As they finished up, some fine dust from one of the family heirlooms that had been weighed found its way into Steve’s nose. The tickle was unbearable and he finally had to sneeze.

“Achooo!” Steve let go with a from-the-belly blast. William jumped up from the log where he had been sitting, tripped over an empty pot and bolted for the tent. Annie and Steve exchanged knowing smiles but managed to suppress their laughter until they were well on their way to the next tent.

Chapter 18

It was late in the evening when Annie and Steve completed the weighing and returned to their tents.

“Thanks for your help Annie.” Steve said, “You better get some sleep. I’m going to take these scales back over to the captain.”

“You are most welcome Elder. I must admit I actually found myself enjoying the effort.”

Steve smiled. “Yeah me too. It’s amazing what you can get a kick out of around here. Anyway, I couldn’t have done it without you. Thanks for saving me on the names and stuff.”

“It was my pleasure. Have a good night.” She turned and headed for her tent and Steve picked up the scales and made his way through the tent city to the captain’s tent. Most of the pioneers had turned in for the night but a few fires were still burning. Here and there Steve caught the face of someone he had met that day weighing and waved or called out a hushed “good night!”

The captain was sitting in front of his fire apparently deep in thought when Steve approached. Steve put the scale back in the wagon. Despite the clanking the captain didn’t budge. Steve moved closer to him and tried

clearing his throat. Still no response. Finally, in a slightly exaggerated tone, Steve said, “Excuse me sir, we’ve finished the weighing!”

“What’s that? Oh, I’m sorry Elder. I didn’t hear you come up. I was just sitting here thinking and must have dozed off.”

“Do you sleep with your eyes open?”

“What’s that? No, were my eyes open? Must have just been thinking too deeply.”

“Well we finished the weighing sir. Annie noted down the weights of all the families in this ledger.” Steve handed the ledger book to the Captain. “She thought it might be useful, in case we ever have to reduce weight again or something.”

The captain took the book and began turning the pages. “Very good. Very good, and excellent penmanship too I must say.” The captain muttered.

“And the sisters Elder? Any problems with excess weight?”

“Oh there were a few that had too much weight. Not just sisters, a few of the brethren did too. But they all agreed to either leave it or carry it themselves. We didn’t really have any problems. Brother William didn’t want us to weigh his stuff, but Annie talked him in to it.”

“She did eh? He is a sour one. What did she say to him.”

“Oh, she basically told him I was demented and would have a fit at any moment if he didn’t bring his things out to be weighed.” The captain chuckled and Steve smiled and turned to leave.

“Before you go Elder. Is there anything else you can think of we should be doing?”

“Sir?”

“The spirits of the saints are good Elder. Their muscles have been strengthened. Now the carts are repaired. But I am still concerned about the trip ahead. Can you think of anything else we should be doing to ensure the safety of these good saints?”

Steve thought for a moment. “Speed sir. We don’t want to get caught in a snowstorm. The faster the better.”

The captain must have taken Steve’s suggestion to heart. Over the next few weeks even Steve had a hard time keeping up with the pace that was set. But the captain was right. The saints were strengthened and in general endured it well.

Steve himself didn’t mind the walking, the heat, and even the constant dust, but the food, or lack of it, began to get to him. Less than a pound of flour a day and a half a pound of bacon and three ounces of sugar once a week just weren’t enough. Steve did what he could to supplement his intake by finding berries along the trail, but it still wasn’t enough. He went to sleep most nights hungry and, as he lost weight, was beginning to have a hard time keeping his pants from falling off. Of course he wasn’t alone. All the pioneers received the same rations. It was perhaps hardest on the children who cried with hunger and their parents who could do nothing to help them.

On the fifteenth of August, nineteen days out of Iowa City, the company made it’s way into another small town. The settlers were very friendly and offered water and shade to the saints. The carts Steve was responsible for were near the back of the train that day. They made their way into the settlement after most of the other pioneers had put down their cart handles and refreshed themselves at the community well.

“Hey Elder look! They’ve got a general store here!” Sam came over close to Steve and whispered as he put down his cart handle. “Cool.” Steve said without emotion. “I wonder if they have Slurpees.”

“Food Elder! General stores have food!” Sam hissed.

“Well I don’t know how stores work here, but where I come from you have to have money to get anything from a store and why are you whispering?”

“I’ve got a half dollar piece, Elder!”

“Hold me back! What are we going to do, buy half a candy bar? I’m dying of thirst. I gotta go get a drink. Anybody else coming?” Steve called out and looked around at the other carts, but most of his “people” were way ahead of him and already on their way to the well.

“Elder!” Sam had now raised his voice. “In Iowa city I got four loaves of bread for ten cents!”

“Well what are we waiting for? Let’s get to that store!”

As it turned out, the general store hadn’t planned on nearly six hundred pioneers coming through town that day and was completely out of bread and most everything else. Steve cornered the proprietor.

“What have you got to eat? You must have something left in this store that we can eat!”

“Pretty hungry are ya?” The man drawled casually from behind the counter.

“They make y’all pull your own wagons and don’t feed ya enough besides,

eh?”

Steve felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up, but he was too hungry to let his pride get in the way. Very slowly, but with a determined air he replied, “Sir, do you have any food for sale?”

“No need to get ornery now. I was jest tryin’ to be sociable. I got a few strips of dried meat left. Buffalo from last season. How much money ya got?”

Steve could see a con coming on and was about to ask for the price first when Samuel blurted out, “Half a dollar!”

“Well now, ain’t that a coincidence? That’s exactly what I’m sellin’ the last of my dried meat for, half a dollar!”

Steve had to restrain himself to keep from reaching over the counter and ringing the greasy operator’s neck but hunger is a powerful force and he did nothing. Samuel seemed undaunted. “We’ll take it!”

“You know,” said the store keeper as he began to dig the dried meat out of a barrel behind the counter, “Sullivan, south of town is lookin’ for some hired help. Payin’ two dollars a day, plenty of food and a dry barn to sleep in.”

Steve and Samuel were watching the storekeeper put the dried meat onto a piece of paper and then wrap up the edges. They weren't paying too much attention to what he was saying, but the mention of plenty of food caught their attention.

"What kind of work?" Steve asked as Samuel took the paper wrapped package from the storekeeper and handed over his coin.

"Does it matter, son? You're lookin' for food, ain't yah?"

Steve's anger rose again. It is one thing to grovel and another thing all together to have some one point out that you are groveling--especially someone as greasy as this character.

"C'mon Sam, let's get out of this place. I think I'm going to be sick."

By the time they got out the door, Samuel had the package unwrapped and handed a piece of the nearly black meat to Steve. Steve sat down on the edge of the boardwalk and looked at the meat. Samuel sat down next to him and started gnawing on his piece.

"Umm. Aren't you going to eat that, Elder?" Sam asked, chewing vigorously on a wad in his mouth.

"I can't." Steve replied glumly.

"Why?" Samuel asked, completely perplexed.

"Don't know. That guy was a jerk, he made me sick."

Samuel just nodded and started gnawing off a new piece.

"I was ready to do anything for food in there..." Steve trailed off and then asked Samuel suddenly, "You mind if I give this to some of the kids?"

"No, no, go right ahead. Here's a couple more pieces, I was going to share them around anyway." Samuel handed the opened paper package to Steve.

"You keep one and share it with your family dude. I'll give these other two to Aaron and John for their children. Thanks for sharing Sam." Steve stood up to walk back over to where their carts were parked.

"You're welcome Elder." Sam called after him. "I'll join you in a minute, I'm just going to sit here until I finish."

Steve found John and Aaron by their carts and handed each of them a strip of the dry meat for their children. They both seemed pleased. Steve told them to thank Samuel when they got a chance then made his way to the well for the long awaited drink. He'd just finished quenching his thirst when

John's bugle called the company to move out again.

By the time the company came to a halt late that afternoon, they had covered better than seventeen miles. Steve was so exhausted he toyed with the idea of having everyone sleep under the stars that night so they wouldn't have to set up the tents. But a few big thunder heads rumbling in the distance changed his mind. While Samuel, Aaron, and John got the family tent up, Steve helped the single sisters get theirs up.

"Something wrong Elder?" Annie asked as she pulled a tie rope taut while he pounded a wooden stake in the ground with an old hatchet.

"No, I'm fine. Why?"

"Oh you just haven't said much this afternoon."

"Thinking, I guess." Steve gave the stake one more good whack.

"That's a worthy achievement Elder--the thinking I mean." Annie smiled as she handed Steve the end of the rope. Steve pulled it tight, wrapped it around the stake, and tied it off.

He smiled back and relaxed a little. "Sam and I bought some dried meat at that store in the town today. It scared me."

"The meat scared you?"

"No, the fact that I was willing to do anything to get something to eat." He walked over to the next tie line and began pounding another stake in the ground. Annie followed.

"I was so hungry that I wasn't even going to tell anyone we had the meat so there would be more for me. And then that slug of a storekeeper gouged us on the price and I didn't care, food at any cost. But the worst part is, he mentioned a job in town. Two dollars a day and plenty of food. For a minute I actually considered taking it."

"What changed your mind?"

Steve stopped pounding and looked up and shook his head. "I got sick. I couldn't eat the meat or even talk to the storekeeper." He whacked the stake a few more times and then stopped again. "What if I hadn't got sick? I'd be just like that hairy guy that sold his birthright for a bowl of oatmeal."

"You're here for a reason Elder. The Lord is watching over you."

"Maybe. But, if I think it out logically, stopping to work for a farmer makes great sense. In fact I think the whole company should do it. Stop and work, wait out the winter and get an early start next spring."

“Must have been what Brother Arthur and his family thought. They quit today.” Annie interjected matter of factly.

“What?” Steve asked incredulously.

“Brother Arthur and his family stayed in town and went to work. They said they couldn’t take it anymore. Captain Martin tried to talk them in to continuing, but their minds were made up.”

“So why didn’t they get a sick feeling inside?”

“Perhaps they did, but they chose to ignore it.” Annie replied. Steve pounded the final stake home and tied off the line.

“Maybe. Or maybe they’re just plain smarter than all the rest of us.”

“Elder, how can you say that?” Annie was clearly upset. “The Lord has just protected you and you know it. If you are not willing to admit it, then you deserve to be scared!”

“Yeah, you’re right. I admit it. He did protect me and maybe that is what really scares me. I mean, it must be important that I be here, but I have no idea why. What if I never figure it out? Or what if I figure it out, but can’t do it?”

“Then we’ll all die.” Annie said trying to keep a straight face.

“Oh gee, thanks.”

“Elder, He’s gone to all the trouble to get you here and keep you here. When the time is right, you will find out why. I’m sure of it.”

That night Steve had trouble falling asleep. It wasn’t his empty stomach but rather his full and questioning mind that kept him awake.

Chapter 19

Through all of the hunger, difficult questions, and longing for home, Steve's greatest solace came from the many children that were part of the company.

The children reminded Steve of little brothers and sisters at home. And, while he never put it to himself in these terms, playing with the children gave him a chance to act like a kid again, something that he dearly missed.

The children weren't one whit behind in their love for playing with the "Elder." When parents and energy allowed, they followed Steve like he was the piper. While the company rested, they laughed at his jokes and listened to his strange tales about a land where machines fly and children watch moving pictures in a little box.

So it was not too unusual when Martha, a girl of about ten, ran up to Steve as he was helping put the tents up. "Elder! Elder! have you seen Arthur?"

Steve didn't know Martha very well, but ever since the frog incidence with Maeve he and Arthur had been good "buds."

"Uh, no. Not since, the afternoon break up on the hill when the storm started. Why?"

"We can't find him anywhere! Oh Elder, what if the Indians got him?"

Martha started to cry.

Steve smiled. "Oh, I don't think you need to worry about Indians Martha. C'mon we'll find him, don't worry." He left the tent to the others, took Martha by the hand and started through the tent city calling Arthur's name.

A half hour and hundreds of shouts later there was still no Arthur. Steve was concerned now and headed for the captain's tent with Martha still in tow.

Arthur's parents had been concerned for some time and were already at the captain's tent along with several other saints who were aware of the situation. The captain seemed relieved to see Steve and Martha approaching.

"Any luck Elder?" He called as they approached. Steve shook his head and the captain's relief disappeared. Martha ran to her mother and buried her head in her skirts crying. A number of conversations were going on amongst those gathered. Some were trying to remember when Arthur was last seen, others were guessing his whereabouts, and still others were discussing the possibility of Indians. The captain called for attention.

"Brothers and sisters. Brothers and sisters!" He raised his voice for attention and the other conversations ceased. "We'll never find young Arthur while we stand here talking. We only have two or three more hours of daylight so it is important we get started right now. My understanding is that

the last time Arthur was seen was on the hill where we took our afternoon break. Has anyone seen him since then?" No one answered.

"He must have been left when the storm came up and we all rushed off." The captain concluded. Young Martha raised a sob to accentuate the captain's statement. Her mom comforted her and Captain Martin continued. "That hill is no more than a mile or two back. We can be there in half an hour, if we hurry. We'll then spread out and search from there. Tent captains, I want every able bodied saint searching for that boy. Please have them on the trail in five minutes."

Steve approached Arthur's parents as the others ran off to spread the word. He didn't know quite what to say, but was determined to say something. "I'm, I'm really sorry." He said quietly.

"Arthur was right there with the rest of us on the hill. I didn't even think to turn around and look when the storm started and everyone ran for their carts. I just assumed everyone was with their families. I didn't know."

"Elder it is not your fault." Arthur's mom reached out and took Steve by the hand. "We too assumed that Arthur was with the company and didn't look back. Right now the most important thing is that we find him--and we will Elder, we will. Go on, join the others and bring back my boy." She patted

the back of Steve's hand and then turned to her husband to say goodbye.

Steve didn't wait around but ran quickly back to the site of his two tents to gather other volunteers. News had already reached the tents and John, Aaron, Samuel and Robert were already on the trail. Annie, Elizabeth, and Lydia were just getting ready to go. Steve was in no mood for conversation or a slow walk, so he said his goodbyes and hit the trail on his own at slightly more than a jog. He was pleased to see the number of saints heading back up the trail to join the search, but didn't waste any time with pleasantries and just kept running. Within a few minutes, there was no one on the trail in front of him and he was free to wallow in his thoughts.

If he could just have one minute back. Not even one minute, if he could just have one second back. All he had to do was turn around and look. In his mind he could see exactly where Arthur had been laying. He could picture the rock, the weeds growing up around it, and Arthur laying across the top of it. Just one second, and Arthur would be in camp now, rather than who knows where. Where ever he was, Steve hoped that he would just sit still and wait for the others to find him. The storm had been a real down pour and any footprints that might have been visible in the sand and dust would surely have been obliterated by now.

Adrenalin made up for Steve's lack of nutrition and rest. Within fifteen

minutes he was back at the hill. There was no sign of Arthur. Steve collapsed on the rock where he was sure Arthur had been laying the last time he saw him. “Where would I go from here if I was a six year old boy?” He gasped out loud to himself. “I’d go to the trail, wouldn’t I? But what if it was raining? What if I fell asleep and when I woke up it was raining and nobody else was around? I’d look for cover. Trees maybe.” Steve stood and turned three hundred and sixty degrees scanning the horizon. “There!” He started down the hill at a trot towards a grove of trees visible in the distance. The other searchers were now beginning to arrive at the hill. Steve yelled to them without breaking stride.

“Tell the captain Arthur was laying on that bolder when I last saw him! I’m going to search in the trees to the north!” Without waiting for an answer, he picked up his pace and continued down the hill.

“Elder, wait! I’m coming with you!” Steve looked over his shoulder to see Samuel struggling to catch up with him. He eased up a little and allowed Samuel to catch up but didn’t say anything till they reached the trees.

“You head through the trees on this side of the ravine. I’ll go over to the other side and stay parallel with you. Look for any signs that some one has been here recently--broken twigs, turned over rocks, anything.” Steve was still gasping for air and the effort of speaking brought on a completely unex-

pected coughing fit which ended with the dry heaves. Steve doubled over with his hands on his knees, his whole body convulsed with the wrenching coughs.

Samuel put his hand on Steve’s back but didn’t say anything until Steve was done. “You better slow down Elder. You’re going to kill yourself.”

“I just as well be dead if we don’t find this poor kid, Sam. We’ve got to find him. Give me a few minutes to get to the other side of the ravine, then we’ll start through the trees together.” Steve’s body refused to run for a while, so he settled for a fast walk.

The trees grew along both sides of a rather steep ravine that started near the base of the hill where the company had rested. Rather than go down through the ravine and back up the other side, Steve circled back around the head of it until he came parallel to where Samuel had been waiting. He gave the signal and they both headed into the trees following the general course of the ravine.

“Arthur! Arthur!” Both Steve and Samuel shouted regularly at the top of their lungs. But there was no response and no sign that anyone had passed through the trees before them. They continued on until they began to run out of light. There were a number of deadfalls and few trails through the

trees which made the going very slow and difficult in full day light, impossible in darkness. Samuel was the first to admit the fact and called across the ravine to Steve.

“Hey, Elder! We better head back before it gets any darker or we’ll be lost too!”

Steve dreaded the words but knew that Samuel was right. He made his way over to the lip of the ravine. “OK, you’re right. Why don’t we walk back up the bottom of the ravine? The going looks a little easier. Maybe he fell down there or is sleeping under an overhang or something.”

“Sounds good to me.” Samuel started skidding down the steep side towards the bottom of the ravine. Steve did the same from his side. There was a small flow of water in the bottom. Steve couldn’t tell if it always ran or just when it rained. It was clear that it had run much higher in the very recent past. The going was much easier up the bottom of the ravine, but by the time they reached the head there was still no sign of Arthur.

Samuel tried to cheer Steve up as they made their way out of the ravine and on towards the hill. “Maybe the others found him Elder. He couldn’t have gone far. He probably just walked the wrong way back up the trail.”

“I hope you’re right Sam. I hope you’re right.” But Sam wasn’t right. The

glum faces that they found on the hill told the story without words. The sun had been down for nearly a half an hour and the last of the light was disappearing to the west.

“We can’t do anything more in the dark.” The captain was saying as they arrived. “We’ll end up with more lost than found. Let’s go get some sleep and we’ll start the search in the morning.” Most nodded and slowly began moving down the hill toward the trail and camp. Arthur’s dad objected.

“I can’t sleep knowing that my son is out there Captain. I believe I’ll stay right here in case he returns.” The captain hesitated, seemingly unsure how to respond. Steve cut in before he could.

“I couldn’t sleep either. I’ll stay with you if you don’t mind.”

Arthur’s dad nodded his head and the Captain gave his approval. “Alright. But I don’t suggest that either of you wander off by yourself in the dark. A broken leg won’t do Arthur any good.”

As Samuel left he handed Steve a small strand of dried meat. “You’ll need this more than I do Elder.”

“Thanks Sam. Say, make sure the single sisters are OK till I return, will you?” Samuel agreed and headed off with the others. Steve tore the meat

and handed half to Arthur's dad before collapsing on the rock where Arthur was last seen. Arthur's dad said nothing but sat on a nearby rock with a sigh.

"He's never been without us."

"What's that?" Steve wasn't sure he heard what he thought he did.

"Arthur. He's slept in the same room as the rest of the family since the day he was born. Never even slept in his own bed."

"He'll be ok." Steve tried to bolster both the father's and his own confidence. "Knowing Arthur, he's probably found a nice warm, dry spot and is fast asleep."

The distraught father smiled but didn't say anything. Steve's mind continued to race. What if he wasn't asleep? What if he was out there wandering around some place scared to death, looking for something familiar? Looking for something! That's it! Steve jumped up.

"C'mon, we've got to go get some wood and get a fire going! Arthur may be out there looking for us right now. If we build a big enough fire on the top of this hill, he should be able to see it for miles." Arthur's dad didn't require any more motivation, he jumped up and followed Steve through the

darkness.

"There were lots of deadfalls in the ravine down here. We ought to be able to find some dry enough to burn." Steve noted as he gingerly made his way through the darkness. They spent the next hour or so pulling a dead log with most of its branches still attached back up the hill. Steve started breaking off the smaller branches when they got back to the top.

"Listen, I'm not too good at making fires without matches. Why don't you get started on that and I'll get the wood ready." He said to Arthur's dad.

Within a few minutes, a small fire was burning on the highest point of the hill. Arthur's dad and Steve continued to add bigger and bigger branches until the flame reached four or five feet high and all that was left to burn was the trunk.

"We're going to need more wood to keep this thing going all night." Steve noted. "Why don't we take turns. I'll make the first run. You stay and keep feeding the trunk in."

Arthur's dad nodded but didn't say anything. Steve turned back toward the grove and headed off at a trot. After looking into the fire, for so long it took his eyes a while to adjust to the darkness again. Thankfully, the last tree they pulled up the hill had cleared a wide swath through the prairie grass

which made it easy to find the way. At the bottom of the hill Steve turned and looked back at the fire. He was pleased. It burned brightly and he was sure it could be seen for some distance in all directions.

Finding the right deadfall to haul back was quite a bit more difficult than finding the ravine of trees. Any light that the sliver of a moon gave off never reached the ground in the thick foliage surrounding the ravine. It quickly became a matter of Steve tripping over a fallen tree and then seeing if he could budge it to drag it back. It was a painful but unavoidable process. After four or five attempts, he finally found a log that he could budge by himself. He wrapped both arms around, pulled it in close to his side and began trudging back through the trees towards the glimmer of the fire that he could just make out from time to time through the foliage. Of course dragging a log he was even more susceptible to tripping and went down three or four more times before he came out of the trees. He dropped the log and sat down on it for a moment to catch his breath. At that moment he heard a sound that sent a chill through his body he would never forget.

The howl of a wolf carried clearly on the still night air. Steve had heard coyotes before but only from a distance and always around a campfire with several other people. But this was not a coyote off in the distance, it was a much bigger and closer sound. Steve's first inclination was to leave the log

and bolt for the fire. In fact he jumped to his feet with that intention. But then he thought of Arthur and Arthur's dad.

Arthur was out there somewhere with that wolf and whatever other kind of beasts there were. And Arthur's dad was plenty worried. To see Steve running to the safety of the fire because of a wolf, wouldn't do anything to alleviate his worry. Maybe up near the fire Arthur's father hadn't even heard the wolf. Steve definitely wasn't going to bring it up. And, though the logic was a little weak, Steve thought that maybe if the wolf concentrated on him, it wouldn't have time or energy to find Arthur.

With these thoughts in mind, he steeled his courage, bent over, picked up the log and started trudging up the hill. With all the energy that he had left he started singing.

“Who's afraid of the big bad wolf, the big bad wolf, the big bad wolf.
Who's afraid of the big bad wolf. Tra-la-la-la-la.”

As Steve neared the top of the hill, Arthur's dad saw him coming and came over to help him.

“Just in time, Elder. I just pushed the last of the trunk into the fire. I thought I heard someone singing, was that you?”

“Uh, yeah. I figure Arthur might be able to hear us if he can’t see us.”

They hauled the log back up to the fire which was now burning about three feet high and had developed an immense bed of coals. Throughout the remainder of the night, Steve made up several different excuses to keep Arthur’s father on the top of the hill while he went back down for more wood. By the time the sky began to brighten to the east, Steve was absolutely exhausted and disappointed. He was sure that the fire could be seen for miles around, if Arthur was up and looking at all during the night, he should have seen it. Steve slumped down on a rock and almost instantly fell asleep.

For the first time in several days he dreamed of home. He dreamed of his younger brother Brian. He dreamed of his little sister Jessica and he dreamed of Maeve. Sweet little Maeve in that cold dark grave! He was with her and the dirt was being shoveled in on top of them. No! No! He woke with a start to some one shaking him. It took him a few minutes to remember where he was and what he was doing there. He was relieved at not being buried, but the weight of Arthur’s disappearance was almost as bad.

Annie was at his side. “Elder! Elder! Are you alright?”

“Yeah, I’m Ok I guess.” Steve replied with a yawn.

“I’ve brought you something to eat.” She held up a bundle in a cloth with the corners tied at the top.

“Great! I’m starving.” Steve looked around as he yawned again. “Where’s Arthur’s dad? He’s got to be starving too.”

“He left with the other searchers at sun up. They were going to go back up the trail.”

“Sun up? How long have I been asleep?”

“I’ve been here about an hour.”

“Why didn’t you wake me? I should be out there with the others.” Steve stood to go.

“Sit down for a minute Elder.” Annie replied sternly. “You don’t sleep. You don’t eat. Soon you will collapse and then what good will you be to little Arthur?” Steve remained on his feet but didn’t move. He looked down at the bundle of food on the rock. Finally he sat back down with a sigh.

“Okay, but just long enough to eat.” Annie unwrapped the bundle which was filled with three or four corn meal biscuits and a couple of pieces of bacon.

“I’ll get the water. I left the bucket over by the fire.” Annie walked over to the fire which was now a gray smolder while Steve woofed the biscuits and bacon.

“We saw your fire from camp last night. A very good idea.”

Steve shook his head. “I thought sure he’d be able to see it and make his way back to us.” They were quiet for a few minutes while Steve ate and drank. He was the first to speak.

“I heard a wolf last night while I was getting wood down in that ravine.” He pointed in the direction of the ravine.

“Yes, we heard some in camp last night too. Poor Arthur’s mother was beside herself with grief. Poor, sweet woman.”

“I just can’t figure out where he could be. He’s only six, he couldn’t have gone that far! We’ve got to find him, I’m not leaving here until we do.”

“The captain’s plan is to move on this afternoon,” Annie hesitated for a moment, “whether Arthur is found or not.”

“What?”

“He said we’re so late in the season, we can not afford to delay the company

any longer.”

Steve groaned. Deep in his gut he knew the captain was right, but he couldn’t stand the thought of leaving little Arthur by himself in the wilds.

“We’ll just have to find him before noon then.” He said as he finished the last biscuit. He stood and took the tin cup of water offered by Annie.

“Thanks Annie.” He handed the cup back. “Will you please make sure that our tents get down and the carts loaded?”

Annie nodded and Steve hesitated for a moment and then added, “If I’m not back when the company pulls out, go ahead and start without me, I’ll catch up.”

Chapter 20

When the company pulled out that afternoon, Steve was with it but Arthur and his father were not. Steve had caught up with the other searchers quickly that morning and together they had combed an ever widening circle around the hill. They yelled, they hollered, they looked in every ravine, under every bush and behind every tree but there was no sign that a six year old boy had ever been there. At noon the captain sent the word for all searchers to return to camp. Steve and Arthur's father resisted but the captain prevailed and promised that once in camp they would decide who should stay and search while the others went on.

The spirits of the pioneers were subdued as the searchers returned to camp. The tents were all down and the carts ready to go, but most had hoped that Arthur would be found that morning or that the captain would change his mind and the company would stay and continue to search. To hear the bugle calling them to pull out caused an almost perceptible collective groan from the entire company. Most members of the company knew Arthur and several families had children of similar age. To contemplate leaving their own out there alone was almost too much to bear. And yet, they all knew that the lives of the entire company might hang in the balance if they did not press on.

Arthur's parents seemed to take it better than Steve. While Steve loudly protested to the captain, they quietly conferred as a family. After a few moments Arthur's father came forward to where Steve was confronting the captain. Steve stopped complaining long enough for Arthur's father to speak.

"The missus and I have decided that I will stay behind and search for our Arthur." He said. Steve noticed as he was talking that he seemed much older than he had just a few days before.

"I'll stay and search with you." Steve offered immediately.

Arthur's father smiled at Steve but shook his head. "I am thankful for your offer Elder, but there is no sense in risking any more lives. The company needs you. I will stay and search by myself and will catch up once I have found Arthur."

"But--" Steve began to protest but the captain cut him off.

"This good brother is right Elder. The Lord will go with him to help him find his son. We need you here with your people."

Steve shook his head and sighed. He wanted to tell the captain that his people would be just fine and that someone should go with Arthur's father, but the sincerity of the father's request restrained him and he held his tongue.

The pioneers with their carts were beginning to make their way on to the trail. Arthur's mom came forward to where Steve, the captain and her husband were talking. She took the bright red shawl she was wearing off her shoulders and proceeded to pin it to the thin shoulders of her husband. She spoke as she did so.

"When you find our little boy, if he is dead, bury him in this shawl. If he lives, you wave this shawl as you return to camp." The poor father nodded his weary head, hugged his wife and started walking back up the trail in search of his son.

Steve stood motionless, completely oblivious to the carts passing him.

"Elder, will you please help his good wife and family get their cart on the trail?" The captain asked, pulling Steve from his thoughts. Steve nodded and turned to help Arthur's mom. She and her other children were already on their way to their cart. Steve had to jog to catch up with them.

Besides Martha, Arthur's older sister, there was an older brother of about twelve named Max, and a little baby girl named Ada. Arthur's mom was very cordial and politely thanked Steve for his willingness to help, but it was clear to Steve that she was very independent and had no doubt that she and her family could take care of themselves. Once the cart was out of the camp

and on the main trail, she again thanked Steve for his help and strongly suggested that he go check on those that he was responsible for. He reluctantly agreed and promised to check back on them from time to time.

Steve didn't realize how very tired he was until he fell in next to Lydia and began to help push the single sisters' cart. Every step was a struggle. A few times he actually fell asleep and was jolted awake as he fell to his knees. He was very grateful late that afternoon when the carts began pulling off the trail.

There had been no singing on the trail that afternoon and there was little laughter or playing that evening. Conversations were, for the most part, held in hushed tones. Everyone was thinking about little Arthur and his poor family. His mother set up vigilance on a little hill to the east of camp and never took her eyes off the trail they had just traveled.

As much as Steve wanted to help, there wasn't much he could do. By the time the tents were set up, even his hunger pains were overwhelmed by exhaustion and when he collapsed on his sleeping blanket he was instantly asleep.

The new day brought renewed energy to Steve, but no Arthur to the camp. As Steve emerged from the tent to the stillness of the early morning, he was

surprised to see the silhouette of Arthur's mom against the growing light of the eastern sky. Either she hadn't slept at all or she had risen very early. Steve guessed it was the prior.

Whether it was to ensure the pioneers' safety or to keep their minds off little Arthur, the captain seemed intent to cover as many miles as possible over the next few days. They covered over twenty miles in their first full day back on the trail, seventeen the next. The western border of Iowa and the great muddy Missouri were now within a week's travel. If not for the absence of Arthur the company would have been jubilant at the thought of reaching the last major milestone before crossing the plains. As it was, they plodded on, barely noticing the gradual change of scenery as the flat and dusty heart lands of Iowa began to give way to rolling hills.

Steve knew the chances for Arthur's survival grew dimmer and dimmer with each passing day. A boy of six with little or no experience in the wilds could not survive long. His concern for Arthur's mother also grew with the passing days. At the conclusion of each day, while the others set up camp, she would take up her vigil watching the trail to the east. Steve was certain that he she hadn't slept since Arthur's disappearance and yet each day she, with the help of her children, pulled their cart along with the rest of the company. All offers of assistance from Steve or anyone else were politely refused.

On the evening of the third day, Steve sought out the captain who was sitting near his tent finishing his dinner. The captain seemed pleased to see Steve, though Steve noted he seemed to have aged over the past three days as well.

"Elder, pull up a seat here. What can I do for you?"

"Sir," Steve began as he sat on a nearby log, "As much as I want Arthur to be alright, I think we need to prepare for the worst. He's been out there more than three days. He's only six, and even if he could find something to eat and drink," Steve hesitated, "there's the wolves."

The captain nodded gravely, "I share your concerns Elder. I wish there was something I could do other than pray." He hesitated for a moment and then continued. "I haven't told this to anyone. I expect you to keep it confidential."

Steve nodded, unsure what the captain was going to tell him or why.

"I received word in the last town that saints from one of the earlier companies had Indian problems near the Missouri."

"Indian problems?" Steve wasn't sure he had heard correctly. Just how far back in time was he?

“It seems a few of the saints couldn’t keep up with the company and decided to accept the offer to travel with a Gentile wagon going the same direction. No one heard from them for days until their last camp was found. They were all killed by Indians.”

“Where was this?”

“They weren’t very specific. They just said near the Missouri. Not sure if they referred to the Iowa or the Nebraska side.”

“So even if Arthur could survive in the wilderness...” Steve left his question hanging and the captain nodded again.

“What about his dad? Did you tell Arthur’s dad?”

“I didn’t hear about it until after he left us.” The captain replied somberly.

Steve sighed. The little hope he had held on to was nearly gone. Not only was there little chance that Arthur would return, but he began to have serious doubts that his father would make it back. After thinking it through he spoke again.

“Well, you’re going to have to tell his mom sooner or later. And it better be sooner. The schedule she’s keeping--she’s going to kill herself. She never

sleeps, she hardly eats, and she pulls the cart almost by herself. She might as well know that it’s as good as over so she can go on with her life.”

The captain nodded again and spoke without looking up. “Thought of that. If we haven’t any word by tomorrow, I plan to speak with her.”

Steve suddenly felt very sorry for the captain. He stood and without saying anything put his hand on the captain’s shoulder and then walked back towards his tent.

“She can’t keep this up much longer.” Steve said to Annie as he took a seat on a log next to her. The tents were up again for the fourth time since Arthur was last with the company. Dinner was finished and a few minutes of sunlight were left before the sun disappeared to the west. From the log Annie and Steve could see Arthur’s mom keeping watch.

“The strength of a mother is great.” Annie replied. She hesitated for a few moments and then added. “But I must agree. This can’t go on much longer.”

They sat in silence for several moments, each considering the possibilities but unwilling to give words to the unpleasant thoughts. Unconsciously their

eyes searched the trail as far east as they could see, hoping to see movement, to see a boy and a man approaching. As Steve became aware that he was searching, his thoughts wandered back to his prior life. He remembered sitting on a hill covered with sagebrush and pockets of quaking aspen with his father and brother, Brian. Their searching for movement had been much less consequential, but at the time he could remember straining just as hard to see the movement of a deer on an opposite hill. Brian saw it first, he always seemed to be able to pick out a deer where Steve could only see sagebrush and rock.

“We need Brian.” He said matter of factly to Annie.

“Pardon me?” Annie replied without taking her eyes off the distant hill.

“My younger brother Brian. He could spot a deer a mile a way. We need him here now to help us watch.”

“I didn’t realize you had a brother Elder. You never mentioned him before.”

“Yeah, probably because until a few days ago you didn’t believe a word I said.”

Annie ignored the jibe, but didn’t take her eyes off the hill as she asked.

“Just one brother?”

Steve nodded, “Just one brother, but three little sisters.”

“You must miss them.”

“It only hurts when I think about ‘em.” Steve said half joking. He wasn’t anxious to let his emotions surface right now, but it did feel good to finally share some of his “secrets” with someone else so he continued. “My youngest sister is--or was, six. Her name is Jessica. Maeve reminded me a lot of her.”

“You were close?”

“We used to play this game she called the sock game.” Steve said with a chuckle. “When I’d come home from the gym after a workout I’d chase her around the house trying to rub her face in my smelly socks.”

“Um sounds pleasant--and she enjoyed this ‘game?’”

Steve was now in another world and came back with some difficulty to answer Annie’s question. “Yeah, no matter how often we did it. She would giggle and scream as if it was the first time. Heck, if I didn’t quit she’d laugh till she wet her pants. Mom didn’t like that much.”

“No I shouldn’t wonder. And your mother? You were close to her?”

Steve felt some pain at the thought of the pain he had caused his mom when he last saw her. “I wish I had been closer.” He managed to say after some hesitation. Annie raised one of her eyebrows and Steve quickly added. “Oh, don’t get me wrong. She was a great mom--is, is a great mom. It was me. I didn’t do exactly what she expected me to do.”

“And what exactly did she expect you to do that you did not?”

“Oh, I, well I--” Steve hesitated for some reason suddenly embarrassed to tell Annie about his mission decision.

“Elder!” Annie blurted out.

“Okay! Okay! I didn’t--”

Annie cut him off. “No Elder not that. Look! Look!” Annie had now jumped to her feet and was pointing to the trail.

“What--?” Steve turned and looked. The sun had nearly set in the west and only the crest of the far away hill to the east was above the shadows of dusk. Steve could clearly see a bright red dot in the last of the sunlight. “It’s him, he’s coming!” Steve shouted to no one in particular as he jumped to his feet.

“Not him, Elder. Them! They’re coming! Remember the red shawl? He

still has the red shawl!” Try as he might Steve could only make out one figure coming down the hill, but Annie was right, whoever was coming definitely had something bright and red.

Steve’s attention now turned to Arthur’s mother. She had risen from her seat and was standing, watching the approaching traveler. For several minutes time seemed to stand still. Word spread quickly through the camp that a traveler cloaked in bright red was approaching, but no one ran down the trail to meet him. Everyone, including the children, stood and watched and hoped.

As the traveler descended from the crest of the hill into the evening shadows, Steve could still only make out one person. Without the sunlight, what had looked like bright red faded to a reddish brown. Maybe they hadn’t really seen what they thought they had. Maybe they had wanted it so bad, they had made it bright red in their own minds.

“I don’t know Annie, maybe it’s not them.” Steve ventured cautiously. Annie didn’t say anything. The traveler now appeared to be a few hundred yards beyond Arthur’s mom and at that point stopped moving and appeared to bend over for a moment. He then stood erect and began waving the red shawl in the air. A little boy, who had been riding on the traveler’s back, ran towards the little hill and his waiting mother.

An audible and collective sigh of relief could be heard followed by a chorus of joyous shouts from the camp, but it was too much for the weary mother. She collapsed in an exhausted, but happy heap before her son ever reached her.

Steve, Annie and several others from the camp ran to her assistance. Her husband and Arthur got to her first and when the others arrived they found her cradled in her husband's arms looking up happily into the sunburned and dirty face of her six year old son.

For the first time in several nights the pioneers sang and danced around their campfires that night. They listened intently to the story of Arthur's rescue. They heard of the wandering, searching and praying of the faithful father. They heard of the kind woodsman and his wife who had found the wandering six year old, ill from exposure and fright. And they acknowledged the hand of God in the the mail and trading station which directed the father to the woodsman. That night the prayers of the pioneers were full of gratitude and thanksgiving.

Two days later, they loaded their carts on a little steamer and were ferried across the muddy Missouri to Florence Nebraska, the last outpost before proceeding across the plains.

Chapter 21

“Aye Elder! Ye’ve nearly starved yerself to death without me cookin’! A scarecrow ye’ve become!”

Steve immediately recognized the voice of Sister O’Malley and turned from the tent he was setting up with a grin. He tried to think of a witty come back but was too overwhelmed by the site of her familiar face and the happy tone of her voice. He hadn’t heard this since Maeve’s death. He just stood there smiling for several seconds.

A look of concern swept over the sun-burned cheeks of mother O’Malley.

“Are ye sick Elder? Can ye not speak?”

Steve began to stammer. “No, no--I mean yes, I can speak and no, I’m not sick. I’m just...” Steve finally got a grip on himself. “I’m just struck dumb with terror at the thought that I might have to eat your cooking again.”

The familiar towel flew off mother O’Malley’s shoulder. Like a striking cobra it lashed out and snapped with a crack on Steve’s arm. Rather than recoiling, Steve stepped forward and wrapped mother O’Malley in a bear hug and a laugh.

“Unhand me or I’ll have the captain put ye in chains I will!” Mother

O’Malley feigned anger but she gave Steve a good squeeze before tearing loose.

“Where’s your tent? Father O’Malley and the boys? Everyone is ok?”

Steve asked as he bent over and finished tying the tent line off to the stake.

“Yes, yes, fine we are Elder. A little more sunburnt than when we started but we’re all fine. Our tent is not far. A few Dublin city blocks to the east I’m thinking.” She pointed in the general direction.

“And yerself Elder? Other than nearly starvin’ to death how ‘ave ye been?” She asked.

Steve finished his knot and straightened up before answering. “I’m good. I’m still lost, but I’m good.”

“Aye Elder, yer head and me heart. A fine pair we make, we two.” She took him by the arm as they walked around to the front of the tent. “And yer heart Elder? Has yer sparkin’ lead to the flames?”

“My sparking?”

“Aye Elder. Yer as dense as me husband ye are! The lass Annie! Is she talking to you or has she given up on ye all together? Though I’m not sure

at this point that I'd blame her and that's the truth."

"Sparking?" Steve said again in mock disbelief. Mother O'Malley gave up on words, let go of Steve's arm and resorted to the cobra towel. Steve was laughing so hard he was having a hard time defending himself when Annie came around the opposite corner of the tent.

"Elder there's a--oh, hello Sister O'Malley, I--" Annie stopped in confusion, not sure what to make of Steve literally choking on laughter while Mother O'Malley worked him over with the towel.

Mother O'Malley stopped in embarrassment when she saw Annie. Steve gasped for breath and responded to Annie. "Hi Annie! Come on over. Mother O'Malley was just completing her interrogation."

"Impossible!" Mother O'Malley hissed under her breath at Steve and snapped him in the stomach one more time for good measure. Then with a broad smile she turned to Annie and said, "Sister Annie, 'ow 'ave ye been? Worried sick I've been knowing what kind of tent captain ye've had to labor under."

Annie responded without a smile. "We all have our cross to bear Sister. Mine just happens to be more grievous than most." She managed to keep her face straight for only a few seconds before giving up to a smile and a

wink at Steve. Steve chuckled and Mother O'Malley became giddy at the sight of Annie winking at Steve.

Annie continued, "Elder, before I forget, Captain Martin has called a meeting of the tent captains. You're expected at his tent this very moment."

"Ah yes, duty calls and I must bear my cross: the burden of leadership. Ladies I bid you adieu." Steve took a deep and sweeping bow, smiled, and turned to leave.

Sister O'Malley called after him. "Elder, after you've beared yer burden, would you and Annie care to come to our tent fer supper? I'll be cookin me stew tonight."

"OK with me, as long as I don't have to eat any of it. Annie?" Steve looked at Annie to see if she was willing.

"It sounds wonderful, Sister O'Malley. We'll bring our flour rations for the biscuits."

Steve found the other tent captains gathering near the center of camp and began searching the sunburned faces for O'Malley's. The portion of the

company that O'Malley's family had been assigned to arrived in camp the day prior and this was the first meeting of the combined group of tent captains since leaving Iowa City. After searching for several minutes, Steve found O'Malley but wasn't able to get over to him before Captain Martin's voice began booming.

"Brethren, you are to be congratulated! We made it across Iowa, a distance of nearly three hundred miles, in less than four weeks!" A cheer went up from the tent captains. Steve managed to find an empty rock and take a seat before Captain Martin continued. "For those of you not aware, President Richards and several other Elders returning from their labors in your beautiful home land arrived here yesterday. President Richards will now address us." For the first time Steve noticed seven or eight unfamiliar and less sunburned faces sitting slightly behind and to the right of where the captain was standing to speak. One of these now stood to speak.

Steve wasn't sure what President Richards was the president of, but he seemed young, at least in appearance, to be the president of anything. His hair was cut in what Steve had come to recognize as a common hair cut of the time--the young Brigham Young cut. Long and swept to one side on the top, just long enough to cover the ears and almost looked curled under on the sides. He was clean shaven and had a peaceful, almost dreamy look to

him. His voice was not as deep or booming as Captain Martin's but carried just as well. Steve had no problem hearing him.

"Brethren, I too congratulate you on your fine trek across Iowa. It does my heart good to pass along the line of your camp and see the smiles of your children and wives. Each of them bear record of the truths of the words of President Young, wherein he promised the handcart pioneers increasing strength along the way. The Lord's hand is definitely in this great plan for moving you, the faithful saints, to Zion in a timely and cost effective manner. Through your continued faith, obedience, and prayers I am convinced that the Lord will bless you and see you safely to Zion.

"Now brethren, not but a few days hence the Willie company held a meeting on this very spot to discuss the lateness of the season and the future of the trek. With only one exception, a brother Levi Savage, they all supported the plan to carry on to Zion this season and not establish a winter camp here to wait for next spring. You must now make the same decision for yourselves. Today is August 22nd, admittedly very late in the season. Yet I believe that though it might storm on our right hand and on our left, the Lord will keep open the way before us and we will arrive safely in Zion. Brethren, all those that are for continuing on to Zion now please rise."

All the tent captains rose enthusiastically. Steve sat still and undecided. He

hadn't realized when he came to this meeting that he would be asked to make a decision like this and do it so publicly. Every fiber of his body called out that they should not continue, but it was fairly clear that no one else at this meeting was having those kind of feelings. To stand now would be so easy, but maybe this was his message. Maybe this was why he was here. This was his opportunity to tell the leadership what was going to happen and change the course of history.

President Richards was now telling those standing to take their seats. He then said, "Brethren, it looks unanimous. Is there any one here who thinks we should remain in this camp for the winter?" Steve's legs suddenly felt like cement. As much as he wanted to, he could not seem to make them work. President Richards only hesitated for a moment and quickly moved on to the next topic. He was encouraging the brethren to work quickly repairing carts so that they could get back on the trail when Steve's legs finally started working again--not to rise in opposition, but to slink away unnoticed into the camp and then into the undergrowth that lined the banks of the Missouri river.

He walked for a long time up the bank of the river until he found a well-secluded sitting stone where he could be alone to swat mosquitoes and feel miserable in peace. He blew it! His big chance, perhaps the whole reason

he was here and he couldn't do it! He couldn't get off his rear and tell those brethren what was going to happen to them and their families! Maybe Annie was wrong. Maybe there was no purpose for being here. It was just some freak accident of time. Surely if God had a purpose for him to be in this place at this time, He wouldn't have let him fail at that purpose. Or maybe he would! Maybe the deal was if he failed he had to stay here forever! "Ahhh!" Steve groaned out loud. The pit at the bottom of his stomach opened wide and waves of fear and doubt washed over his heart and mind. He rolled off the rock he had been sitting on and curled up in the fetal position in the weeds next to it and gave up. There was nothing left to give. He was exhausted physically, emotionally and spiritually. Sleep finally came as a welcome respite from the burdens of being stuck between two worlds.

Despite the mosquitoes, Steve slept deeply and peacefully on the banks of the Missouri. Initially there were no dreams but when they came they were incredibly life-like and powerful. Oddly enough, he dreamed his standard 'win-the-basketball-game-with-a-shot-in-the-final-seconds' dream. The ref was calling Steve's team back onto the court at the end of the final time out. Steve's coach was outlining the final play, "Set the pick for Steve here at the top of the key." He turned to Steve. "I don't have to tell you what to do with the ball once you get it. You're good. You're the best, just do your

stuff.” Steve nodded, wiped the sweat from his face and together with his team, returned to the court. He setup on the baseline. The ball came in. Steve spun and ran to the top of the key. The pick on his defender was solid, the bounce pass was perfect and Steve had the ball in the open with only three ticks left on the clock. He didn’t think, he just felt and flowed. The opposing team’s center was coming out on him. There was no time to get around him. Steve pulled up for the shot. The center was closing fast. Steve could see his shot wouldn’t clear the extended arms of the defender. In mid-air he shifted the ball to his left hand and let it go. The ball narrowly missed being blocked before swishing cleaning through the net. The buzzer sounded. Steve’s team won and he was a hero. The crowd began chanting, “Steve! Steve! Steve!” They came off the bleachers and surrounded him. “Steve! Steve! Steve!” Steve hugged his team mates and anyone else that didn’t mind the sweat. He was about to get a hug from his favorite cheerleader when the chanting changed. “Elder! Elder! Elder!”

Steve fought to keep the dream alive. Time for the instant replays and the after game interviews. “So Steve--that was some shot you made. Did you ever have any doubt that you could do it?” Steve nodded. “Yeah, when the coach called the play to me I thought, ‘no way I can do this, give the ball to Jones or Gilbert or somebody else.’ But I didn’t have time to argue so I just went along with it.”

The interviewer looked a little stunned, but regained enough composure to continue the interview. “Once you got on the court those doubts must have vanished. It looked like you really wanted the ball.”

“Me? No way! I didn’t want the ball. There was only three seconds left! What if I screwed up, then the whole team would hate me. I was trying to get Gilbert to switch with me when the ball came in.”

The interviewer was becoming incredulous. “But what about that shot. You must have practiced that shot a million times. It was pure poetry.”

Steve shook his head again. “It was a brick, a lucky brick. Stuff happens.”

The interviewer gave up and wandered off with a dazed look on his face. The chanting began again, “Elder! Elder! Elder!” This time it was loud and clear and someone was shaking him. Steve opened his eyes and slowly came out of the haze of his dream. Annie was kneeling next to him shaking his shoulders.

“Elder! Wake Up! Wake Up! We have been looking everywhere for you! Are you sound?”

“I was sound asleep, that’s what I was. Am I still here?” Steve pulled himself up to a sitting position and looked around. The sun had nearly set in

the western sky and the few wispy clouds in the sky had a pinkish-orange tint to them. Steve shook his head again. “Boy, I was out cold.”

“Elder, I’ve--I mean we have been worried sick about you. Is there anything amiss?”

“Uh?” Steve continued to shake the cobwebs from his head.

“Have you hurt yourself Elder?” Annie asked pointedly.

“No I don’t think so.” Steve shook his arms and legs to prove it and then as his memory of the meeting returned added, “At least not physically.”

“Did you lose your way?” Annie continued her line of questioning.

Steve yawned. “No, no I know exactly where I am.”

“Then what on earth are you doing here Elder? We were supposed to eat with the O’Malley’s hours ago.” Annie was losing her patience.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I forgot all about that. I came out here to mourn the loss of my 'big opportunity' and I guess I fell asleep.”

“And what opportunity might that be?” Annie asked as she moved from her kneeling position to a more comfortable seat on a fallen log.

“Didn’t you hear about the big meeting?” Steve rose from the grass, walked down to the water’s edge and splashed some water on his face.

“I understand that a vote was taken and that not a single soul voted against continuing on to Zion immediately.”

“That’s right.” Steve returned to his rock and slumped down on it. The weight of his failure earlier in the afternoon returned fully to his shoulders.

“Not a single soul. Not even somebody who knows this trip is going to end in disaster--somebody who was beginning to believe that his purpose for being here was to avoid the disaster.”

“Oh, I see. You are angry with yourself for not standing up and voting against continuing?”

“Brilliant deduction, Sherlock.”

Annie had learned to ignore comments from Steve she didn’t understand. She didn’t even waste a moment thinking about it. “Why would that make you angry Elder? Perhaps it is the right thing to go to Zion immediately.”

“How can it be the right thing for hundreds of good people to die? It’s not the right thing! I was just too big a wimp to do anything about it. You know what the worst thing is? I’m not even as worried about all the people dying

as I am about getting back to my time and family. If my purpose was to come stop the disaster and I've blown that purpose, what happens to me? Do I have to stay here forever like some cast off loser?"

Annie stood now and put her hands on her hips. "Stop it Elder! God doesn't let his messengers fail! Have you never read the story of Jonah? Did God let him fail? No! And what about Nephi returning to Jerusalem for the gold plates? He failed several times, but ultimately he was successful because he didn't give up!"

Steve was silent for a few moments and then replied sullenly, "Both Jonah and Nephi knew exactly what their mission was--I don't, I thought I did, but I don't."

"Nor do I Elder, but I am quite certain that it is not to lay on the banks of this river feeling sorry for yourself." Annie's tone softened and she sat down next to Steve as she continued. "Have you heard about the meeting the Willie company had when they passed through here a few days ago?"

Steve nodded. "I heard they took a vote and decided to go on."

"Yes that is right, but one of the Elders that was there told me that the vote was not unanimous. A brother Savage, I believe was his name, voted against continuing. When he saw that the company was determined to continue, he

didn't leave them, or curse them, or even feel sorry for himself. I'm told he stood and told the company that as they were determined to go forward he would go with them and help them all he could, including dying with them if he had to."

Annie paused for some time and Steve pretended to be very interested in a particular blade of grass at his feet. Annie reached over and put her hand on Steve's arm.

"Perhaps Elder your mission is not to keep us from continuing our trek this season, but to help us arrive safely."

Steve looked up at Annie. His anger melted away and was replaced by a warmth and slight hopefulness. "I wish I knew Annie. I just wish I knew."

Chapter 22

Once the decision was made to carry on to the valley this season, the company wasted little time in Florence. Carts that needed repair were given top priority. Steve was asked to help the blacksmith make repairs to those family carts that had thrown a rim or needed other repair. Though Steve could now walk and even pull a loaded handcart for miles without breaking a sweat, he noticed as he pounded the hot iron against the anvil that his upper body was not what it used to be. As sweat began to trickle down his chest he remembered that day long ago when he sat in the Jacuzzi with Hank and watched the sweat run over his rippling pectorals. There was nothing to run over now. Steve couldn't help but chuckle as he thought about how much he used to worry about his muscles. A diet and fitness shop would not do well on the plains of Nebraska in the 1850's that was for sure. Steve could hardly remember now what it was like to have a choice when it came to eating or exercising. He could also hardly remember what it felt like to feel full. He rarely felt that any more. To think he used to have to "watch" what he ate and go out of his way to get exercise. Now the only watching he did was to make sure none of the crumbs of his humble biscuits slipped onto the ground. Exercise, of course, was a way of life--there was no choice. You didn't have to make a New Year's resolution to get enough exercise--that just happened. No, Steve concluded, if someone wanted to be successful with a

business on the plains of Nebraska what they needed to open was a couch potato parlor. Steve envisioned row upon row of big leather recliners. Next to each recliner would be a table loaded with bottles of ice-cold soda pop, big juicy steaks, and baked potatoes with all the butter one could slather. Dessert would be served around the clock--cheesecake, hot fudge sundaes, brownies so gooey that you had to eat them with a spoon. And, best of all, big frosty chocolate milk shakes with cream and a bright red cherry on the top. Man that sounded good. Steve had just decided on a tag line (Give us an hour, we'll give you a waistline) when he was jolted from his reverie by the voice of the captain.

"Elder? Elder? Are you alright?"

"Uh? oh yeah I'm fine captain. I guess I was just day dreaming."

"Well you are pretty good if you can day dream with all this racket." The captain responded with a shout so he could be heard over the clatter and bang of the blacksmith work that was going on.

"Yeah, I guess you just get used to it." Steve shouted back at him.

"Elder, can I talk to you for a minute?" The captain motioned for Steve to follow him. Steve nodded, put his hammer down, took off his leather apron, grabbed his shirt and followed the captain away from the makeshift black-

smith shop.

They found some shade under a couple of big old cottonwood trees and the captain offered Steve a drink out of a leather canteen he was carrying. Steve gratefully accepted, took a long swig and then pulled his shirt on and began doing up the buttons.

The captain settled down on a log and waited for Steve to finish buttoning his shirt and sit beside him.

"We'll be pulling out in the morning Elder. You and the others have done a great job on the repairs. Everything looks ready for a propitious journey."

Steve wasn't sure what propitious meant but he had a feeling it meant something good. He just nodded and let the captain go on.

"Based on prior experience and some calculating I have done, we are going to need more flour to make it to the valley than what the oxen can pull."

"Is there anyplace we can get more flour around here?" Steve cut in, trying to get to the point faster.

"Finding the flour is not the problem Elder. We've secured all the flour we need. The issue is how we take it with us. The oxen can only pull so much,

and it will not be enough to get us all the way to our destination. Our only option is to add a bag of flour to each cart."

Steve had helped load and unload the supply wagon a number of times and knew exactly how much a bag of flour weighed and it wasn't light--ninety-eight pounds to be exact. He thought of how much difference that weight would make on his cart and felt his temperature rising. He took a deep breath and tried to remain calm before speaking again. He wasn't very successful.

"So the precious oxen can't pull another pound, but no problem--just load up the pioneers. They can pull another hundred pounds. Is that the deal?" The captain seemed to have been expecting such an outburst from Steve and his reply was calm.

"Elder, I know this won't be easy for the people. But we're talking about nearly one hundred and fifty bags of extra flour. If we load it on the wagons and kill off the oxen each cart will end up carrying two or three bags instead of just one. We could decide to leave it here and travel light, but I think I would rather work a little harder and make sure I have enough to eat than take the chance of starving to death. Wouldn't you agree?"

Steve hated it when he was wrong, and still didn't know why the captain was

having this discussion with him. He nodded his head and replied, "Yeah, you're right. But can we at least make sure we use the flour off the carts first so we don't have to pull it a step further than necessary?"

"Absolutely, Elder. Absolutely. Now let me tell you why we are having this discussion. I need someone to distribute the flour to the families, explain the situation, and keep a record of where the supplies have been distributed. Remembering how well you and Annie did with the last weigh in you both immediately came to mind. I've already taken the liberty of talking to Annie and she has agreed to keep the record if you will accompany her and distribute the bags."

Steve just chuckled. He knew he had been had. If he tried to get out of it now, not only would the Captain be disappointed but also Annie would probably be offended. Steve had to admit to himself that he'd missed Annie's company over the last few days while he was working and liked the thought of spending some time with her even if in a not so pleasant task. The captain must have sensed Steve's hesitation and threw in a sweetener.

"You can tell the people that we're going to increase rations to a pound of flour a day and two pints of milk a day. We'll also be killing beef at least every three to four days for fresh meat. That should help with the burdensome news."

Steve had to admit that it would help and could almost smell a nice rib eye steak on the barbecue just thinking about it. "Alright captain, you've got yourself a deal. We'll tell them we're going high protein on the diet. A little ahead of our time, but it's going to be big some day believe me." Steve rose from the log and extended his hand to the captain. The captain took it with a bit of a quizzical look, but was too glad that Steve had accepted to ask any more questions.

He stood and said, "Great! I'm glad you willing. The flour is loaded on a wagon over by my tent. When you and Annie are ready you can come by and hitch up a team. Since we're leaving in the morning you'll need to get it taken care of before nightfall. I'll let the smithy know that I've asked you to help on another project. You best go find Annie and get started."

"Ok, I just need a couple of minutes to wash the sweat off then we'll get started." Steve turned to leave the captain, then thought of one more thing. He turned quickly around and caught up with the captain who was headed back into the clanking of the blacksmith's work. "Hey, sorry I forgot one thing!"

The captain stopped and waited for Steve to speak. "Medium rare." Steve said. The captain again looked puzzled. "I like my steaks medium rare--a nice stripe of pink right down the middle. Whatever you do, don't over cook

it. I hate that." Without waiting for a reply, he turned and headed for the creek to splash off.

The captain looked after him and shook his head slowly before turning back toward the blacksmith.

Annie found Steve before he was done at the creek. "The captain said I might find you down here. Are you ready for our new assignment?"

Steve was just finishing with his shirt buttons again. "Ready as I'll ever be to be the least popular guy in the camp. At least I get to do it in the company of a hot chick."

Annie seemed to blush a little but didn't lose her composure. "I assume by 'chick' you are referring to me Elder, though I'm not at all certain what I have in common with a small fowl."

Steve took her by the arm and they started back through the camp. "You see Annie, in the future we have so much time on our hands to get educated in order to think up different uses for everyday words. A 'chick' is a good looking girl--or at least it was in the 70's--the 1970's that is. My dad used to always say it. Sometimes he'd call my mom his 'chickee babe.' He stopped doing that when my brother and I threatened to throw-up the next time he said it."

"Did your mom like it when your dad called her his 'chickee...babe?'" Annie asked.

"I can't say for sure," Steve responded, "but I know she liked it better than 'the ole' ball and chain.'"

"Ball and chain?"

"Yeah, you know, like the prisoners wear to keep them from running away."

"Your dad called your mom the 'ol ball and chain?'" Annie asked incredulously.

"Only jokingly." Steve laughed. "Next morning mom put salt instead of sugar in dad's cereal. I think he got the point."

"Sounds like your parents love each other very much." Annie said thoughtfully.

"Yeah I guess so. I never really thought of it that way." Steve responded. They were just his parents and that is how they acted. Most times Steve thought their little tricks and sayings were cornball, but as he thought about it he realized just how much they loved each other.

"Elder you never finished telling me about your relationship with your

mom."

"Huh?" Steve was jolted from his thoughts and wasn't sure what Annie was talking about.

"Remember the night that Arthur returned to camp? You were about to tell me why you weren't as close to your mother as you wished."

"Oh that." Steve replied quietly remembering once again the pain he had caused his parents.

"You said something about not doing what she expected?"

"You've got a good memory Miss Annie. I had forgotten all about that conversation and was hoping you had too."

Annie noticed the change in Steve's demeanor and offered him an out, "If you wish not to discuss it Elder..."

"No, no it's Ok." Steve replied, "It's probably good for me to talk about it. You see my parents are very active members of the church. Ever since I was little they told me how I was going to go on a mission and how great it would be."

"How lovely." Annie offered trying to be supportive. Steve looked at her

and smiled weakly.

"Yeah, I guess so. For the first seventeen years of my life I believed them, but then as I got older and thought more about it I decided a mission wasn't right for me. The morning of the accident--when I landed on the train next to you--I told my parents I wasn't going on a mission."

Steve paused for a moment. Annie didn't say anything, just kept walking and listening.

"They didn't take it very well. The last time I saw my mom she had tears running down her cheeks and ran from the room sobbing. My dad just sat there but I could tell from the look on his face that he was broken hearted. So there you have it. Not only am I hopelessly lost in the past with no idea what I'm doing here, the last time I saw my parents, I broke their hearts. Now can you see why there is no way I could be a messenger from God? Not only am I unprepared, I'm not worthy."

Annie hesitated for only a moment before responding. "Elder we can talk about the need to be worthy to be called later, though if memory serves it certainly wasn't a prerequisite for Saul or Alma the younger--but what I would really like to know is why you decided not to serve a mission in the first place?"

Steve thought for a moment to remember his logic. "I guess it came down to even if the church is true, I wasn't comfortable imposing my beliefs on others."

"And do you still feel that way Elder?"

"I guess so, yeah." They were now within a few yards of the captain's tent. Steve breathed an inward sigh of relief. Annie's line of questioning was beginning to make him feel uncomfortable. He had been around her long enough to know when she was getting "warmed up" and all the signs were now present.

"Hey look, the captain has already got the team hitched up for us!" He said hoping to change the subject.

It seemed to work. Annie just smiled and followed Steve over to where the captain was finishing the hitching.

"Oh there you are. I figured if I got the team hitched you could be on your way a little quicker." The captain said straightening up as he turned to greet them.

"Annie you will find the ledger book there on the seat. Please just note the name of each family that ends up with a bag on their cart. Thank you both

again for your help and good luck." He handed the reins to Steve and then stood back to let Annie and Steve climb up on to the seat of the wagon. Steve had had a little practice with a team since the commotion in the lumberyard on his first day. He gave the reins a slap, waved goodbye to the captain, and pulled the team around toward the center of the camp.

The distribution of the flour actually went much better than Steve had expected or hoped. Very few of the saints murmured and those that did seemed to murmur about everything so it didn't bother him much. News of the extra rations generally cheered up everyone. Steve also noticed that the month on the trail had done wonders for most of the saints. They were no longer pale and frail looking. Most were now trail-hardened and anxious to be moving again.

Steve also felt much more comfortable moving among the saints than he had a month ago. He knew most of their names now and at least a little something about each of them. Luke and William, the odd couple, hadn't changed a bit. Luke was as jolly as old St. Nick and assured Steve that nothing would make him happier than hauling an extra hundred pounds across the plains. William, on the other hand, was rather dour and continued to keep a close eye on Steve just in case he happened to have a "fit." He also asked no one in particular if there weren't some younger "chaps" that would be better

suited to pull the extra weight. Annie politely assured him that everyone was doing their part. Steve faked a sneeze to add finality to the discussion and they moved on to the next tent.

By the time the last bag of flour was distributed, the wagon was full of children who had joined the parade as Annie and Steve made their way through camp. Steve had taught them several "camp" songs along the trail and he now lead them in a rousing rendition of "Sippin Cider" as they made their way back to the captain's tent. Just as they finished the last verse, Steve yelled "whoa" to the team and pulled them up in front of the captain's tent. The captain came out of his tent and had to yell to be heard over the laughter and shouting.

I'm glad to see your popularity hasn't suffered any Elder! He shouted with a smile and held out his hand to help Annie down. The loud voice of the captain quieted the children who began to scramble down over the sides of the wagon.

"We start early in the morning children. Be off to your families now and get some sleep!" The captain added. There was a collective groan from the children and they began to shuffle off through the dust.

"Last one to their tent is a rotten egg!" Steve yelled to add urgency. He

jumped from the wagon bed with one leap and pretended to chase the nearest child. There was a chorus of screams and within seconds all the children had disappeared. Steve turned and jogged back to where Annie and the captain were talking. Annie returned the logbook to the captain and Steve began to unhitch the team.

"Elder, don't worry about the team. I've asked some other brethren to get the wagon loaded in preparation for our start tomorrow. They should be here shortly. You go ahead and get

"No problem." Steve replied. "Are you sure I can't help get the wagon loaded?"

"No. No, you've done your part for the day. Be on your way now."

"Alrightee. Miss Annie, shall we?" Steve put out his arm for Annie. She took it with a smile and they set off for their tents.

Chapter 23

Despite the captain's urgings to get plenty of sleep and be ready for an early start the company didn't roll out of the Florence camp until nearly one in the afternoon on the 25th of August. Steve tried to avoid thinking about dates. Even though he knew that ignoring the calendar wouldn't hold time back, it kept his mind off the inevitable. At home, he had always looked forward to fall. He liked football, he loved the smell of burning leaves, and he liked the chill at night. The heat and humidity of the midwest were at times stifling, but he hoped this particular summer would never end.

After only resting a few days in Florence, it felt good to be back on the trail and spirits were high. Rather than dividing into two separate companies as they had on the first leg of the journey, the entire company of 132 handcarts now traveled together and made quite a procession as it snaked along the trail west.

Steve's handcarts were somewhere near of the middle of the snake. He had been concerned that the extra hundred pounds per cart would really slow them down and was pleasantly surprised at the pace the captain was setting. Lost in his thoughts, Steve was in the traces of the sisters' cart looking down at his feet when a shout from Lydia woke him up.

"Whoa Elder! The company is stopping!"

Steve looked up just in time to stop before running into the back of the cart in front of them.

"What the--?" He said out loud and then noticed that everybody in the train in front of him was leaving their cart and walking away from the trail toward the north. An unusual hush had come over the typically social pioneers.

"Where's everyone going?" He asked as he laid the handcart handle down and jumped over it to join the others. He grabbed Annie by the elbow.

"Hey, where is everyone going and why am I whispering?" He hissed in her ear.

"Look Elder," she said pointing to the north. Steve followed her hand and saw a large field cleared of most trees. The field was uneven with many grass-covered mounds and several depressions. Here and there a few grave-stone protruded out of the grass.

"What is it?" Steve asked again. They had now come under some trees adjacent to the field and the entire party was standing quietly.

"This is the Winter Quarters cemetery Elder. Have you heard of Winter

Quarters?”

Steve thought hard. He knew he had heard of it and that it was a pioneer thing, but he had no idea when it happened or what happened there. Opting for the honest approach he responded, “I’ve heard of it, but I don’t know what happened here.”

“When the saints were driven from Nauvoo ten years ago, they came here. Rather than attempt to make the journey to the west that year, they set up settlements here to spend the winter. More than 300 died from the cold, starvation and disease before they could finish their journey to Salt Lake. This is where they were buried.”

Steve didn’t ask any more questions and stood quietly with the rest of the saints. He couldn’t tell what they were thinking, but he was overwhelmed by the sheer number of graves, most of them unmarked other than a slight depression in the ground. Saints and pioneers just like those he was now responsible for. He shuddered at the thought.

Gradually, without words, the company slowly made its way back to the carts and started moving again. Steve stepped into the pull bar of the sister’s cart and Annie joined him. For some time there was no laughter and only hushed speaking up and down the train. Even the children that had just a

few minutes earlier been running and playing seemed to sense the reverence of the area.

As Steve trudged along thinking about the unmarked graves it suddenly came to him what he knew about Winter Quarters.

“There is a temple there now.” He said quietly to Annie.

“Pardon me?” Annie replied.

Steve looked around to make sure no one else could hear him. “There is a temple in Winter Quarters now--I mean in the future. In my time there is a temple right there by those graves.”

Annie looked at him with her penetrating eyes. Steve kept walking and let her think.

“You are serious, aren’t you?”

“As a heart attack.” Steve nodded. “I went to the dedication. President Hinckley said the dedicatory prayer.”

“So you came here? In your time you came here for the dedication?”

Steve sighed, wanting to share but also wanting her to believe. “I saw the

dedication but I didn't come here." He replied, hoping that Annie would just let it slip by. She didn't.

"So you saw it in a vision?"

Steve thought for a moment. "You could call it that. At least you would think it was a vision if you were to see it the way I saw it."

"Elder, why don't you want to tell me how you saw it."

Steve turned and looked at her for as long as he dared take his eyes off the trail. Finally he turned back to the trail, sighed and said, "Look, I really want to tell you. But every time I have told you something from the future, you seem to get mad at me. I don't want to make you mad, that's all."

"I'm sorry Elder. Sometimes I just don't know what to think of you and the things you say. I'd really like to understand how you saw the dedication."

Steve looked at her and smiled. "Are you sure, because this is going to blow your mind?"

"Bring it." Annie replied coolly, using one of Steve's pet phrases.

Steve laughed out loud. "Bring it? Girl you gotta quit hanging with me!"

They both laughed for a moment as they continued to trudge. Finally Steve said,

"So in the future men fly to the moon."

"Elder! I want to know about the temple, not some whimsical story about the moon." Annie scolded.

Steve replied quickly. "No, I'm serious! Men do fly to the moon! Stay with me. I promise this does have to do with how I saw the dedication of the Winter Quarters temple and the Nauvoo temple."

"The Nauvoo temple?" Annie shouted the words and several of pioneers pushing the cart in front of them turned around to see what the commotion was all about. Steve waved and smiled. The other pioneers just rolled their eyes when they saw Steve was the cause of commotion and returned to their thoughts.

Steve turned and hissed at Annie. "Keep it down! You want these people to think I'm crazy?"

"I'm sorry Elder. It is too late." Annie giggled at her own joke. Steve acted exasperated.

“Do you want to hear about the temples or not?”

“Of course I do. Of course I do. The Nauvoo temple burned down some time ago. How is it that you were able to see the dedication?”

“I’ll get to that. But let’s start with the moon. This is going to sound crazy to you, but let me tell you the story and then you can make fun of me ok?”

Annie nodded her head.

Steve continued. “So in the future, the United States and Russia get in a big race to see who can put a man on the moon first. The U.S. eventually wins and men actually land on the moon. I’m not sure exactly when it happened. I think it was sometime in the 1960’s or ‘70’s. About the same time as hippies.”

“Hippies?” Annie asked.

“Not important.” Steve replied, “Sorry I’ll try to keep it simple.”

“And England? Was England not in the race to the moon?”

“Uh, no. England has some famous royal people and they make these cool little cars called Mini Coopers. Other than that they don’t do much--at least not that I knew about. Some would probably say the Beatles, but I was

never a big fan.”

“England is famous for its beatles?”

“It was a music group—a band. They were some of the first to do rock and roll.”

Annie just shook her head and Steve continued. “Anyway, as part of the big race into space, they learned how to make and send up satellites. Satellites are like a big balls that get sent into space and end up orbiting around the earth.”

“Orbiting?”

“Oh, sorry. That means they go around and around the earth. Like the moon.”

“So in the future men make their own moons?”

“I guess you could say that. They are a lot smaller. In fact, unless you know when and where to look you would never see them in the sky. But they are up there.”

“Do they ever run into stars?”

Steve looked up quickly at Annie to see if she was just messing with him, then realized she was completely serious.

“No the satellites are much closer to the earth than the moon or the stars.”

“So what do they have to do with the temple?”

“Well, using these satellites men in the future can communicate with each other instantly all around the world. Just like I’m talking with you, I could have a little thing in my hand called a satellite phone and I could be talking from here with your family in England or my family in Utah.” Steve walked in silence for a few paces to let that sink in.

Annie spoke first. “How loud must one yell to be heard from here all the way to England?”

Now it was Steve’s turn to giggle. “No, it’s not like that. What happens is your voice gets turned into bits and bytes and then it gets sent up to the satellite. The satellite then shoots it back down to England, say, and the phone on that end turns it back into your voice. So the person on the other end hears you just like you sound.”

Annie stopped walking and looked at Steve in confusion. Steve had to grab her by the arm and pull her forward to keep her from getting run over by the

cart.

“Don’t worry about the details. All you need to know is that man figured out a way to talk all around the earth.”

“So is that how you were ‘there’ for the dedication of the temple? You heard it on a little thing in your hand, a --”

“Phone.” Steve helped her find the word. “That’s part of it.” Steve sighed and added, “This is harder than I thought it would be. A lot of stuff has been invented in the last few hundred years.”

“Go on Elder. I’m already drowning in the future you describe, no harm in raising the water level a few more feet.”

“Right. So sending sound was the first thing, then they figured out how to send pictures.”

“Pictures?”

“No, not just pictures. Moving pictures. So I could have another little thing in my hand called a video camera. I could point it at you and push the button and it would take a whole bunch of pictures of you. Then we could play those pictures back really fast one right after the other and it would look just

like you were moving. Add sound, and wallah you have a movie!”

“A picture like someone draws?” Annie asked.

“No, that would be a cartoon. These are like photographs. Do you have photographs in--what year are we in again?”

“1856 and yes we do. In London, on Regent Street there are any number of photography salons where the wealthy go to have their portrait taken.”

“Right. So that’s what I’m talking about, but the pictures are in color and the people move in the pictures.” Annie nodded though still looked confused. Steve pushed forward.

“So with a movie camera and the satellites, they filmed the dedication and broadcast it to all the stake centers in the church.”

“Elder, I’m trying to understand. Truly I am, but these words. I’ve no idea what they mean.”

“Sorry. To film is just to point the movie camera at you and capture what you are doing and saying. Broadcast means to send it up to the satellite so that others can watch it. And a stake center is a church building. You have wards and stakes right? “

“We had branches in England, but I have heard of wards and the stakes of Zion.”

“That’s right. So a stake center is a big chapel that a stake uses to hold its meetings. Most of them have satellite dishes--the thing that talks to the satellite-- so that they can receive what the satellite sends down.”

“How many stakes are there in the church?” Annie asked.

“I don’t know, I think I heard in conference five thousand or something like that. They are all over the world.”

“Even in England?”

“Sure. In fact, now that you mention it, one of the priests from my quorum got called to a mission in England. He went straight to the MTC over there. Didn’t even go to Provo.”

“MTC?”

“Oh sorry, that stands for Missionary Training Center. That’s where the missionaries go for the first few weeks of their mission to learn how to teach the gospel, and also a language, if they are going foreign.”

“Does England have a temple in the future?”

“I know they have at least one. They might have a couple.”

Annie reached over and hit Steve on the arm. “Ouch, what was that for?”

Steve looked at Annie and demanded.

“You said England only had royal people and little carts in the future. Why didn’t you tell me we have stakes and a temple?”

Steve thought quickly. “Uh, I guess I just wanted to save the best for last.

You want me to keep going?”

“Yes, yes please do. A temple in England--are you sure Elder?”

“Quite sure m’ lady, quite sure.” Steve attempted to imitate her accent then continued.

“I was only about twelve at the time. I remember I had to meet with the bishop and get a recommend to go to the dedication. Then my mom, dad and I and most of the members of the stake went to the stake center and watched the dedication up on a big screen--sorry, you probably don’t know what a screen is. It is a like a big white sheet hung on the wall and the movie is projected on it. Are you understanding any of this?” Steve turned and looked at Annie. She smiled a weak smile in return and nodded. Then to prove it she said:

“So everyone in your stake in Utah went to the building where you meet and watched a vision on a sheet that you hung on the wall and the vision was the dedication of the temple here at Winter Quarters.”

Steve nodded. “Yeah, I guess you could call it a vision, but a man-made vision. I mean there were no miracles involved.”

Annie shook her head. “No miracles Elder? For someone in Utah to see and hear what others are doing here in Winter Quarters is definitely a miracle. And for a whole congregation to do it at the same time? The saints must be very faithful in the future to experience such miracles.”

Now it was Steve’s turn to shake his head. He thought about going back to review how satellite transmissions work, but decided it wasn’t important. Just at that moment the train pulled off the road and began to set up camp. Annie spoke again.

“Thanks for sharing with me Elder. Though it is hard for me to understand all you have said, I enjoy talking with you and you have given me great hope for the future.” She stood on her tippy toes and gave Steve a quick peck on the cheek before hurrying off to begin unloading the cart. Steve just smiled.

Chapter 24

As Steve was pounding the last stake of the sister's tent into the ground, Samuel came up running at full speed.

"Elder, quick! I just heard they are killing a cow--a pound for each of us! Tent captains have to go get. Quick, Elder quick! I'm dying for meat!"

Steve didn't have to be told twice. He tossed the mallet at Samuel and sprinted for the center of camp where Captain Martin usually setup his tent. Though he was out of breath when he got there, Steve was one of the first in line. The captain and two or three other brothers were bent over a carcass with blood up to their elbows.

The captain stood up and stretched his back with a groan as Steve ran up.

"Hello Elder! You smelled our beef did you?"

"Yes sir!" Steve replied.

"How many do you have in your party, Elder? I'll get you taken care of."

Steve started naming names and counting out loud, "Let's see I've got Elizabeth and her four children. That's five. Plus John's family of five that makes nine. Do babies get some?" He asked the captain.

"If they can eat it, they can have it." The captain replied.

"Ok, better make that eight then. Plus Aaron's family of five, makes." He thought for a minute as he counted in his mind. "Makes thirteen, plus me is fourteen in the family tent. Then there are ten sisters in the single sister's tent so that makes twenty-four. I need twenty-four portions." Steve said with finality.

"Coming right up!" The captain bent over the carcass and began cutting pieces off and handing them to Steve. The first eight were no problem for Steve to balance on his two hands. After that it started getting a little tricky.

"Could really use some grocery sacks." Steve thought. Other tent captains were now arriving and lining up behind Steve. Most of them had thought to bring old flour sacks to carry their portion in. He briefly considered giving the meat back to the captain and running to get a bag of his own. But after looking at the line forming he thought better of it. His shirt would wash. He leaned the stacks of beef over against his stomach and had the captain continue to pile it on till he got to twenty-four.

"That's it Elder! Enjoy your supper!"

"Thanks!" Steve replied, his chin nearly touching the beef that he cradled in his arms. Carefully he made his way back to his tents.

“Fire up the barby!” Steve shouted as he walked back into camp. A central fire had been started and the families and single sisters rushed to Steve to take the meat off his hands.

“You’ve made quite a mess of yourself Elder!” It was Margaret, little Steve’s mom. Steve looked down at his brownish shirt that was now brownish/black with blood that had seeped out of the meat. He smiled back at Margaret.

“It’ll wash! Save me some fire. This chunk of meat is calling my name.” He held up the last remaining piece of beef in his hand and started for the cart where he had left his bag of belongings.

“Leave your meat here, Elder. I’ll cook it with ours and it will be ready when you return.” Margaret offered. Steve smiled again.

“That is very nice of you to offer, Margaret, but tonight I’m going to cook it myself.” He found his bag and headed for the creek to wash. He’d had experience with the way these folks cooked their beef. Tonight he was looking forward to something medium rare and a little juicy--not cooked until it didn’t have anything left to drip.

He quickly made his way to the stream, carefully laid a hanky out flat on a rock near the edge of the stream and placed his beef on the hanky. Then he

stripped off his bloody shirt and submerged it in the water. Keeping his eye on his beef, he reached back with one hand and fished the brick of sand-like soap out of his bag and began rubbing it back and forth over the dark blotches on the shirt. With considerable work the dark splotches lightened, but try as he might he couldn’t get them to disappear. Finally, just before it got so dark he couldn’t see, he rinsed the last of the soap out of the shirt and flung it over the limb of a nearby tree to dry.

Never straying more than a few yards from his precious meat, Steve worked his way along the creek to a stand of nice green willows and cut a few off at the base with his pocket knife. He quickly trimmed the leaves off the willows and then laid them along side his bag while he pulled on the Sunday shirt--the only other shirt he had. Once he got the sleeves rolled up and the long ends tucked in his trousers, he grabbed his beef, rinsed it off quickly in the stream, picked up his bag and willows with the other hand and headed back to camp.

As Steve neared the camp, he was surprised to hear an unfamiliar voice. It was loud and deep. Though he couldn’t yet make out the words, Steve guessed whoever was talking was either very excited, in a big rush, or just had a lot to say. Curious, he picked up his pace and jogged the last few hundred feet to the fire.

As he came around the tent and into the circle surrounding the fire, Steve was greeted by several of the saints. Then the loud unfamiliar voice boomed out,

“Well, hello there young man! Goin fishin?”

Steve looked toward the voice that came from the opposite side of the fire and said, “Huh?”

“Well, you’ve got your fishing sticks and a hunk of bait there. I thought maybe you was going fishing. Though you are dressed up mighty fine for a late night trip to the fishing hole.”

Steve looked down at the willows and the beef in his hands. He forced a smile though he still couldn’t see who he was talking to and said, “Oh, these?” Steve held up the willows a little, “No these aren’t fishing poles. These are wienie roasters--or, in this case, steak roasters.”

He set his bag down near the fire then walked around to meet whoever he had been talking to. A man stood up as he came around and Steve stuck out his hand. The man took it and said. “Good evening. I’m Almon Babbitt.” The man hesitated for a minute and acted as if Steve should recognize his name. Steve looked around quickly to see if Annie were nearby and could rescue him. Instead the captain’s voice came to his rescue.

“Brother Babbitt was just telling us about his duties as the Secretary of the Territory of Utah. He’s on his way back to the territory now after taking care of governmental duties in Washington DC. Your fire was the closest so I invited him to come and set a spell.”

“Sure no problem.” Steve replied to the captain and then turned back to Secretary Babbit and said, “It is an honor to meet you.” He pumped secretary’s hand more than necessary. “A real honor.” Not knowing what else to say, he threw in, “How did you find Washington DC?”

“It was easy. I just pointed my team east and kept going till I ran out of country!” Babbit laughed loudly, slapped Steve on the back and returned to his seat.

“Thanks for sharing your fire. Not planning to spend the night, just resting my team a little. I’ll see the valley of the Great Salt Lake in less than fifteen days or my name is not Almon Babbit!”

Steve was about to respond, but Babbit just kept right on going.

“Since you asked Elder, the capitol city is all a stir with the elections. James Buchanan and the Democrats are likely to win, but I reckon it won’t be too many elections before the new Republican party will be able to put a man in the white house.”

“The Republicans are new?” Steve blurted out while Babbit took a breath.

“Sure are. Trying to replace the Whig party that fell apart because they couldn’t decide what to do about slavery. The Know-nothings are also trying to replace them.”

“The ‘Know-nothings?’” Steve was now trimming down his willow sticks and trying to figure out a way to secure his hunk of beef to the end.

“That’s what they call themselves. The ‘ostrich’ party might have been a better name since they’ve got their heads in the sand about slavery.

“At least they are honest.” Steve interjected. He had decided to bend both willows at about the middle of their length, put the beef right at the bend, and then use some green willow bark to tie the willows back onto themselves to hold the beef securely in place.

“What’s that?” Babbit asked about his honesty comment.

“I was just thinking that at least they are honest. I’ve never heard of a politician that was willing to admit they ‘know nothing.’”

Babbit chuckled a little. “Point well taken Elder. Point well taken. Well, we’ll see how they do. They are running Millard Fillmore on their ticket

and the Republicans are running John Fremont.”

“Millard Fillmore?” Steve again blurted out without thinking, “Isn’t he the one that the city of Fillmore was named after?” After saying it, he wished he hadn’t. Maybe the city of Fillmore didn’t even exist yet.

“That’s right Elder. Old Millard got us twenty thousand dollars to build the territorial statehouse in Fillmore, but we haven’t been able to get a dime more. Even if he gets elected this time, which is not likely, he’s too late. We’ve abandoned the statehouse in Fillmore for Salt Lake City. Maybe someday Fillmore will be the hub of territorial business, but right now Salt Lake is indeed ‘the place.’”

“Don’t worry about that.” Steve jumped in again. “Fillmore’s got a couple of gas stations and that’s about it.”

“What’s that?”

“Oh nothing. I was just saying I don’t think you have to worry about Fillmore becoming the ‘hub’ of the territory.”

Without warning, Babbit jumped to his feet. “Well, I’ve jawed enough for one night. I’ve got a carriage full of mail and money bound for the territory. I’ll be sleeping on the wind tonight. Best of luck to all of you. I’ll save you

a place in the territory.”

Steve dropped what was he was doing and jumped up to offer his hand to Babbit. The other pioneers jumped up as well and Babbit made his way around the circle shaking hands. When he was done, he donned his felt, stovetop hat and walked into the dark. A few minutes later they heard him yell to his horses and then gallop off into the night.

“Boy I’d love to ‘google’ that guy.” Steve said to no one in particular, as he went back to work on his beef roaster. Most of the pioneers said their good nights and headed off to their tents. The captain settled back down on his log. Annie, Lydia and Samuel also took their seats again.

“What do you mean by ‘google’ Elder?” the captain asked. Steve now had his beef strapped into place. He took a stick from the fire and moved some logs over to reveal a white-hot bed of coals. He positioned a rock near the fire and leaned the willow sticks on the rock so that the beef dangled three or four inches above the coals. Then he settled back to keep an eye on its progress.

“I’d just love to know more about him. I mean here we are pushing and pulling our handcarts across the plains and all of sudden a guy is warming himself by our fire wearing corduroy’s and an Abe Lincoln hat and talking

politics? Maybe it is different out here, but where I come from it is not very smart to be telling people how much money you have in your car—I mean, carriage.”

The captain nodded. “I’ll agree with you there Elder. Not very wise--not wise at all. But not too surprising coming from Almon.”

Steve turned his beef and Annie asked, “Why do you say that Captain?”

The captain thought for a minute and then responded slowly, “Brother Babbit has a long and interesting history. In fact if I remember right, he visited the prophet Joseph in Carthage jail the day he was killed.”

“Really?” Steve perked up a little thinking he had just met someone who knew the prophet personally.

The captain nodded again. “He was a member of Zion’s Camp and was the Stake President in Kirtland for a time. But, he hasn’t always put the kingdom before the world.”

“How do you mean?” Steve asked.

“Samuel, do you have a copy of the Doctrine Covenants?” The captain asked Samuel.

“My mom does.” Samuel replied.

“Can you get it?” The captain asked.

“Yes sir.” Samuel jumped up and ran to their tent.

Steve decided his beef had reached medium rare. He pulled it off the fire, set it on his tin plate, and began to cut the willow bark that held it in place. He sliced off a corner, stabbed it with his knife, blew on it a few times and popped it in his mouth. It certainly wasn't grain fed. In fact, it tasted a little “gamey” and even at medium rare, it wasn't very juicy but it tasted much better than corn stir-about. He was three bites into it when Samuel returned. He handed the book to the captain. The captain put a few more logs on the fire and moved closer so he could read. He flipped through the pages for a few moments then said, “Ah, here it is. Section 124 verse 84.” He then began to read it.

“And with my servant Almon Babbitt, there are many things with which I am not pleased; behold, he aspireth to establish *his* counsel instead of the counsel which I have ordained, even that of the Presidency of my Church; and he setteth up a golden calf for the worship of my people.”

“Ouch!” Steve said, and then popped the last chunk of beef in his mouth.

“Do you know what he had done captain?” Annie asked.

“I know a little about it.” The captain replied, “Almon was the President of the stake in Kirtland. The Lord had designated Nauvoo the gathering place for the saints and had commanded that His Temple be built there. Kirtland was to be only a temporary dwelling for the saints as they moved to Nauvoo. Babbit had a business in Kirtland and saw things a little differently. He encouraged the saints to gather and remain in Kirtland rather than moving on to Nauvoo in direct contradiction to the prophet.”

“I see,” Annie responded. “Why the reference to the golden calf?”

“Are you familiar with the story of King Jeroboam?”

Nobody answered so he continued to tell the story. “Jeroboam was the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel. His kingdom didn't include Jerusalem and rather than encourage the ten tribes to travel to Jerusalem he erected golden calves in a couple of his own cities and corrupted the priesthood. He put his own interests--strengthening the power of his kingdom--above the Lord's commandments.”

“So Brother Babbitt must have repented?” Annie continued to ask the questions though the others were listening intently.

“That he did sister. I left Nauvoo with the main body of saints, but I understand the apostles turned the management of the city over to committee of three--Almon was one of them. He has stayed with the saints and provided valuable service.” The captain paused for a minute then said. “Who are we to judge? We all have golden calves of one kind or another.”

There was general head nodding around the fire. Steve was busy stirring the fire with the remainder of his willow sticks, struggling with the thoughts going through his mind. These pioneers knew nothing about golden calves. How could they? They had no material possessions.

“Pardon, Elder?”

Steve looked up quickly, had he said what he was thinking out loud?

“Huh?” Was all he could muster.

“You said we know nothing about golden calves.” Samuel stated. All eyes were on Steve. He stopped stirring the fire and considered the best way to get out of this one. He started slowly.

“Oh, I was just thinking about a kid I knew once. He had everything--the gospel, a family that loved him, all the food he could eat. It was a perfect existence. Instead of being grateful to his parents or to God all he could think of was himself and what he wanted. He was like a rancher running a

whole herd of golden calves and he couldn't even see it. I look around here, and I don't see too many golden calves running around.” He paused for a moment, then added, “Which is great cause I don't think gold would taste nearly as good as that steak I just ate.”

Chapter 25

Two days later the entire company was ferried across the Elk Horn on flat-boats. The captain asked Steve to keep count and direct traffic on the east side of the river while he passed across and organized the saints as they arrived on the west. When Steve and his handcarts finally made it to the west side he reported to the captain that 132 handcarts, 8 wagons, and 180 head of cattle had safely made the voyage.

The company settled into a pretty steady and consistent routine. Usually on the trail by 7:00 or 8:00 am, Lunch (or dinner as Steve learned the pioneers called it) was usually eaten at 1:00 or 2:00; and then the company would do a few more miles before calling it a day at 6:00 or 7:00 at night. There were exceptions of course depending on the weather and the availability of water.

Just a few days past Winter Quarters Steve suddenly realized he was sweating all by himself. He happened to be helping Aaron and Elizabeth with their cart when he suddenly realized it was no longer humid.

He stopped in his tracks and stood up. "It's gone!" He shouted.

The Jacksons stopped pulling and turned and looked at him, as did their two-year-old son Aaron Jr. who was riding in the cart.

"What's gone Elder?" Aaron asked between heavy breaths.

"The humidity! It's not humid any more! We're sweating by ourselves!" Steve held up his empty hands as if to show them there was no more humidity. The single sisters were pulling the cart behind the Jackson's and were quickly approaching. Aaron smiled at the Elder and leaned into the pull bar once again. His wife joined him. Steve grabbed a hold of the back of the cart and start pushing as well. The sudden movement toppled Aaron Jr. over onto a bundle of clothes. He laughed and sat back up.

Steve continued, "Do you know what this means?"

"What does it mean Elder?" Sister Jackson seemed willing to humor him but not too excited.

"It means we're in the west! Utah is dry. It never feels sticky in Utah. We must be getting close because it's not humid anymore!" Both the Jacksons smiled but didn't stop pulling.

Steve was perhaps the only one to be excited about the increasingly dry conditions. The green wood of the carts now began to dry out quickly and repairs became more and more common. In addition, the high-pitched screech of dry wood rubbing on dry wood began to accompany the saints as they marched along. To avoid the screeching some used bacon fat or soap as

grease. Others sacrificed a bootleg or tin plate to wrap their axle with the hopes of reducing the noise and making it easier to pull. None of the solutions worked well and more often than not wheels would start to wobble as the axle wore down and eventually broke, requiring repair.

Steve did his best to spread his help around whenever he could. When the company crossed a particularly sandy or difficult stretch of trail he would often help the sisters pull their cart through and then go back to help Aaron or John or Elizabeth with their family carts. Sometimes he would go and look for the O'Malleys and give them a hand for a while until Mother O'Malley would chase him off with a towel to go help the single sisters again. The work wasn't easy but Steve was still in better shape than most of the pioneers. He also found that moving from cart to cart was less monotonous than trudging along with the same cart all day.

One day a few weeks out of Winter Quarters was particularly tough. The company had been unable to find any good water the day before and had pulled their carts from 8:00 AM till 10:00 PM with only a one-hour break for lunch. They covered twenty-four miles but found very little water. The next day they were on the trail again by 8:00 am with high hopes for water and easier trails. They were disappointed in both.

They crossed what seemed like endless sand dunes--up and down and up

and down. At a very different time and place, Steve actually loved the sand. Each spring his family made its annual trek to the sand dunes. The last few years, his dad had conceded to let the boys rent four wheelers. There was nothing quite as fun as spraying a rooster tail of sand thirty feet into the air and then shooting off across the dunes. The wide rubber tires of the four wheelers easily floated over the driest of sand. The narrow wooden wheels of the handcarts, on the other hand, sliced deep into the sand making it even more difficult to pull. Footing was also a problem. Only about half of the energy exerted moved the cart forward. The rest was wasted slipping in the sand and then lifting the foot from the sand to start over again. Even those not pulling carts struggled along at a dismally slow pace.

Steve's carts lead the company that day. He was glad they did because every foot and every cart wheel lofted fine sand particles into the air that were then blown into the faces of those that followed. Breaking the trail through the wind blown sand wasn't much fun either but it was better than pulling through a sandstorm.

Twelve o'clock came and went with still no sign of water or firm ground. The afternoon brought more heat and even bigger hills. John's cart was in the lead and with Steve's help from behind they topped out on the largest hill so far that day. The captain was at the top waiting for them. The other

carts were still far down the hill. As they crested, the captain pointed to the west. “Water holes not far. Should be there in a half hour or so. We’ll stop there for dinner.”

Steve dropped to his knees, shaded his eyes and squinted in the direction the Captain was pointing. There was a still lot of sand, but he could just make out some dark spots. Water and a rest sounded wonderful. He collapsed on his stomach and then rolled over to his back.

“Shouldn’t an oasis be surrounded by palm trees, camels and big tents filled with belly dancers?” Steve asked no one in particular. No one answered. “Could use a magic genie right now, that’s for sure.” He said to himself and then sat up.

“I’m going to head back down and help the others. Save some of that water for me.” He stumbled over the edge of the crest and let gravity carry him down the hill. Samuel and his family weren’t too far from the top. Steve decided to go on past them and help the sisters that were just approaching the hill.

Sam’s six-year-old brother called out to Steve, “Hey dude you are going the wrong way!” Steve chuckled but Sam’s mom wasn’t amused.

“You’ll be calling the Elder ‘Elder’ Richard. His name is not ‘dude.’”

“But that’s what he--” Richard started but Steve cut him off trying to save any more grief with the mom.

“Good news! There is waterhole visible from the top of this hill. Mostly downhill from the top, so you are almost there!” Had Samuel’s family had the energy, they might have cheered. As it was they all just smiled big smiles and leaned into their pushing and pulling with a little more energy.

Steve found the sisters’ cart at the bottom of the bluff and fell in behind to help them push.

“What up my sistas?” He asked with a little too much juice as he began to push. Annie was the closest and was the only one to respond with more than a polite nod.

“The hill is up Elder and we are down, very far down. Have you any more nonsensical questions?”

Steve smiled. “My we’re in a ‘jolly good’ mood this afternoon aren’t we?”

Annie let go of the back of the cart, stood up straight, closed her eyes and slowly tilted her head back and rolled her shoulders to stretch. “Sorry, Elder it has been a long day and I’ve no patience for foolishness with this long hill in front of us.” She took a few quick steps to catch back up with the cart

and began pushing again.

“I know.” Steve felt sorry for giving her a hard time and adding to her burdens. “I just about didn’t make it up this hill myself, but trust me--this is the last one. I have seen the other side and there is water--well at least a watering hole.”

The incline of the slope sucked all their energy and they pushed on in silence until about the middle of the hill when Lydia called for a break.

“Sorry I can’t take another step without a brief rest.” She gasped. They turned the cart sideways on the hill and sat down looking back on the company stretched out for some distance behind them. The nearest cart, John and Margaret’s, was just approaching the start of the incline below them.

After a few minutes of resting, Annie asked, “Do they look imposed upon Elder?”

“Huh?” Steve didn’t understand exactly what she was asking.

“The saints you see there. Do they look imposed upon?”

Steve looked again back at the long row of pioneers struggling to pull all their earthly belongings through the deep sand. “Actually, they do look a

little imposed on don’t they?” He responded innocently.

Annie said, “Look again. Do you see anyone in that line that is not working hard? Anyone that is not exerting all his or her energy?”

Steve wasn’t sure where this line of questioning was going so he was very careful in how he answered.

“No, it looks to me like everyone is giving it their all.”

“So Elder tell me, do you know anyone who would be willing to reduce their earthly belongings to seventeen pounds and then be willing to drag those belongings across thousands of miles in support of beliefs that had been ‘imposed upon them? Do you see any task masters driving them with whips, forcing them to give their all?”

The light was beginning to dawn in Steve’s tired mind as he remembered his words to Annie about his mission decision. Annie didn’t wait for the sunrise but drove her point home.

“The fact is Elder no one would be willing to make the sacrifices that we all have for anything less than the truth. You said you chose not to serve a mission because you didn’t want to ‘impose your beliefs’ upon someone else. Did it ever occur to you that what you have--your beliefs--are of great

worth? When the missionaries taught us, it was like a new day dawning. I had never heard anything so wonderful in my life. God is speaking to a prophet again! Elder, if a wealthy individual set out to share his wealth with those that had none, would you object on the grounds that he is imposing his wealth on others?"

Steve tried to answer but only got a chance for a shake of his head before Annie answered for him.

"No, of course not. What you have Elder--your knowledge and testimony of the gospel--is worth more than all the money in the world. No, Elder, you would not be imposing at all but would be greater, far greater than the rich man sharing his money. The Lord himself calls the gospel 'tidings of great joy' and says that the feet of those that publish will be beautiful upon the mountains."

Steve looked at his worn out boots but didn't say anything. Annie finished him off.

"Elder you are worse than a miser. You have the greatest treasure in the world that would only increase as you share it, but you have been selfish with it. Tis a shame Elder. Tis truly a shame."

It was suddenly quiet on the side of the hill. Steve looked around at the

other sisters but they all averted his glance. Lydia mumbled something about getting started again and they all got to their feet and quietly took their place at the cart.

Steve hardly noticed when they reached the top of the bluff and started down the other side. What Annie had said had been painful. He liked Annie and didn't like the thought of her being ashamed of him, but he was also once again ashamed of himself. He wished he could go crawl under a rock somewhere and think things out--or better yet, he wished he had never blown up at his parents and taken the ski trip with Hank. If he just had that one moment back!

He'd been down that path a million times before and it never lead anywhere but right back to 1856, so he pulled his mind back to the question of his attitude about the gospel. He had never really thought of the gospel as a great treasure. To him it had always been just another chore to go to church with his family, but Annie was right. Nobody would sacrifice everything these people were sacrificing without a darn good reason. It certainly wasn't money. Maybe some of them could have been fooled into being baptized by a very persuasive missionary, but Steve had to admit that the power of that missionary over any of these saints would have worn off about five miles into this trip. No, this had to be the real deal. Suddenly it struck Steve that

these pioneers had something he didn't have. Sure he believed the church was true, but did he know it enough to be willing to make the kind of sacrifices these people were? Apparently not, or he would have seen it for what it was- - a treasure and not a constraining belief system to be imposed on others. He remembered with some chagrin the fact that Annie had sacrificed her entire family for her beliefs. What a selfish fool he was! All these people sacrificing so much and him with so much and yet unwilling to share even a little. The thought struck him force to his very core. He wasn't left to contemplate long. The rumble and bleating of stampeding cows combined with angry shouting tore him from his thoughts.

He looked up just in time to see the whole herd of cattle racing pell mell for the water hole. Saints were chasing after them yelling and the few saints ahead of Steve, including the captain, were waving their arms and trying to change the course of their charge but it was all to no avail. The cattle smelled the water and would not be turned away.

Had Steve not been so tired and so deep in somber thoughts, he might have thought the spectacle funny--but only until he reached the water holes and found little more than black mud left by the cattle.

Dinner that afternoon was black: the biscuits, the porridge, the stirabout, the hasty pudding and the sludge they tried to drink--it was all black, nearly as

black as the mud they used to make it but not nearly as black as Steve's mood. He sat with Samuel and his brothers for a while. They begged him to tell them stories about the four-wheeled carriages that could go faster than a horse and spray sand forty feet in the air. He tried, but he couldn't shake the dark and disappointed feeling that was taking him over. Finally, he told them he was too tired to talk, found a little shade under a cart, and tried to fall asleep.

If he slept, he didn't know it. By the time the word came for the camp to move out, his mood had not improved. He went through the motions of getting his carts on the trail again, but spoke no more than was absolutely necessary and tried to keep to himself as much as possible. He fell in behind Aaron and Elizabeth's cart knowing that they wouldn't ask him questions and wouldn't expect him to talk.

Sand and the lack of water, the two topics that had consumed his thoughts for the past two days were now just minor irritants compared to the feelings he was experiencing for the first time in his life. "How could I have been such a loser?" He asked himself over and over again without ever finding an answer. "Why couldn't I see what I had?" He mulled over the hundreds of Primary, Sunday School, Priesthood and Family Home Evening lessons he had participated in. He thought about his Seminary teachers. "I learned

stuff. I know I did. But I never ‘got it.’ I was too stupid and too worried about what others were thinking about me.” It hurt most when he thought about his parents, especially his mom. For the first time in his life he could actually sense the pain he had caused her. It took his breath away like a great weight pressing on his chest. He stumbled.

“Are you alright Elder?” It was Aaron who had felt the jerk on the cart when Steve stumbled.

Steve looked up. “Yeah. Fine. Just tripped.” He returned to his self-inflicted misery.

The sun set that night with the company still on the trail in search of good water. Steve hardly noticed. He had nearly convinced himself that the only escape from the pain, shame, and misery he felt was to go crawl under a rock and die when the captain shouted, “Prairie Creek ahead. We’ll be camping here for the night!”

The news spread quickly down the line and the pace quickened as they covered the last half-mile to the creek.

The sound of the running water was too much for even the bone-weary saints to resist. Many left their carts and ran to the creek to soothe their hot, tired feet and drink the cool, clear water. Steve decided his plan to die could

wait until after he got a drink and headed up the creek a ways to find a private place to enjoy the water. He found just what he was looking for and dropped down on his stomach on the grassy bank of the creek and began to slurp the cool clear water. He could feel the first few swallows make their way all the way to his stomach. He enjoyed the brief moment and then the blackness returned. He submerged his whole face in the water and held his breath as long as he could before pulling back and flipping his wet hair to the side.

“Trying to drown yourself Elder?”

Steve didn’t even turn to look. He knew the voice and wasn’t very excited to hear it. He didn’t respond. Annie didn’t need him to.

“The water is wonderful isn’t it?” Again Steve didn’t reply and Annie kept going.

“Running water is so much better than stagnant water. I nearly choked on our black dinner this afternoon.” She paused for a minute.

“I’ve been thinking people are like water.” Steve turned and looked at her but didn’t say anything.

“Selfish people are like the black water hole. They try to keep everything

and everything turns black and sour.”

“I get it Annie. I get it!” Steve said quietly and sighed. “You’re right. I’m a loser. I’m not going to lie to you. I screwed up big time. I AM the black mud puddle.” He sat up on the bank and leaned against a nearby tree. Annie didn’t respond and they both just sat and listened to the creek run by. Finally Steve said,

“The thing is, I don’t know what to do about it. I feel so crappy. For the first time in my life I can see what a jerk I am, and there is nothing I can do about it! I can’t go apologize to my parents. I can’t go back and live that morning over. I can’t do anything--not while I’m stuck here.” He picked up a nearby rock and slammed it into the creek to emphasize his last point.

Annie, who had been leaning against a nearby tree with her arms folded now came over and knelt by Steve in the grass. She put her hand on his shoulder so that he would turn and look at her.

“None of us get to go back and change what we have done, Elder. None of us. But the Savior can turn us from black mud to clear running water. That is what the atonement is all about. You are half way there.”

Steve resisted, but thoughts of the black despair he had been experiencing changed his mind. He wanted to believe. He simply asked, “What do you

mean?”

“You remember King Benjamin?” Annie asked. Steve thought for a moment

“I think so. Guy with the tower, right?” He asked.

“That’s him. His people had a mighty change of heart while listening to him preach. In the end they had no more desire to ever sin again. To get there, they had to go through exactly what you are going through. The scriptures say they fell down because they had seen themselves in their own carnal state--less than the dust of the earth. My point is Elder, we all have to see ourselves honestly before the atonement can be applied. It’s painful, but it is necessary.”

Steve nodded, it certainly was painful. Annie stood up. “It’s up to you Elder. You’ve seen yourself for what you are. You can either continue to wallow in your self-pity or turn to the only one that can turn it to joy.” She started back to camp. Steve called after her.

“Annie!”

She paused for a moment and turned to look at him.

“Where is King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon?”

She smiled. “The opening chapters of Mosiah.”

“Thanks.”

Chapter 26

“Fort Kearney ahead!” The call came down the line at about 10:30 a few days after the black day. Steve and his carts were near the middle of the train. The going had been much easier since reaching Prairie Creek. Water was plentiful and the trail was lined with grass. Spirits in general were high.

The only exception to that seemed to be brother Luke and brother William pulling the cart in front of the single sisters that day. Steve couldn't tell exactly what they were upset about it, but it was obvious from their tone of their voices when they talked to each other that they were not happy to be together that day. Steve tried to be sociable and ease the tension, but even the typically jovial brother Luke seemed less than excited about chatting with Steve as they walked along.

The tension between the two seemed to escalate as they neared the fort. Their voices were raised and Steve noticed other members of the company looking back straining to see what the commotion was. In an attempt to overwhelm the arguing and hopefully ease the tension he started singing at the top of his lungs:

For some must push and some pull
As we go marching up the hill,
As merrily on the way we go
Until we reach the Valley, oh.

With the anticipation of reaching the fort soon, the pioneers up and down the line quickly joined in the singing and the company sang its way the last half mile to the fort.

“They call this a fort?” Steve asked out loud as he straightened up and stretched his back. There was no big wall, no gate, nothing that would give one the impression that this was supposed to be a fort. All that existed were several small buildings, a few made of logs and the rest made of sod. Even the log buildings had grass growing on their roofs. It certainly didn't give one a sense of security or safety.

“I guess if this is a fort, those must be soldiers.” Lydia responded as she untied her apron string and took off the teapot she carried there.

“Not much to look at.” Steve agreed. “And it looks like they are headed this way.” A few of the soldiers that had been loitering in front of the nearest building separated themselves from the group and sauntered in Steve’s direction.

Their uniforms were barely recognizable due to the accumulation of dust and the number of patches that had been roughly sewn into place. Neither soldier was wearing shoes. They were unshaven and as they came within smelling distance it became obvious that personal hygiene was not high on their list of priorities.

“Hey all!” They said as they sauntered up. The hair on the back of Steve’s neck bristled as he watched them checking out the single sisters.

“How are you?” Steve replied trying to sound cheerful and positive. “Is there a place we can fill our cups with water?”

“Shore is, the well is right there to the north of the buildings.” The soldier speaking turned and pointed. Steve thanked him and turned to the cart to find his cup.

“Ya’ll heading to Utah?” The other soldier asked.

Lydia replied this time, “Yes we are.”

“You ladies pulling this cart the whole way?”

“We are.”

The soldier whistled in amazement. “I’ll bet old Jonesy here couldn’t even do that.” He punched his fellow soldier in the arm and laughed. Jonesy took the ribbing good-naturedly. The sisters now had their cups in hand and were heading for the well leaving Steve with the soldiers.

As soon as the sisters were out of earshot, Jonesy asked Steve, “Anyone in this train have any whiskey? We’re paying a dollar for a half pint.”

Steve shook his head. “Wish I could help you, but we’re all Mormons. Mormons don’t drink alcohol.”

“Dadgum!” The soldier swore, “That’s what the last bunch of them said too.”

“What do you folks do fer fun if ‘un you don’t drink?” Jonesy asked.

Steve was now headed for the well and Jonesy and his buddy were walking

along with him. “Well for one thing, we never have hangovers.” Steve replied without thinking too much about it.

“What’s a hang over?” both soldiers asked.

“You know after a night of drinking when you wake up with a headache?”

The soldiers both nodded vigorously. “We never get those.”

“Never?” Jonesy’s buddy asked incredulously.

“Never.” Steve replied. One of the soldiers headed back over to the group loitering by the building. The other one, Jonesy, let him go and then turned to Steve.

“There’s one thing I can’t figure out.”

“What’s that?” Steve replied.

“This summer we’ve seen thousands of settlers heading for Oregon or California or Utah. Most of ’em with much better rigs than what you all got here.” He waved toward the carts. Steve smiled and nodded. “And?”

“Just wondering why you all are so much happier than the others?”

Steve stopped and looked at Jonesy. He seemed sincere. Steve forgot about

his drink.

“Have you ever heard of the Book of Mormon?”

Jonesy shook his head. Steve motioned to the shade of a large poplar tree.

“Meet me at that tree. I’ll go get one and tell you why we are so happy.”

Jonesy nodded and headed for the tree. Steve sprinted back to his cart and dug through the bundles to find his Book of Mormon. He found it and was heading for the tree as the single sisters returned with their drinks. They called after him.

“Where are you going Elder?”

He turned quickly with a smile and yelled back, “On a mission!”

The company stayed at the fort less than an hour but Steve had time to tell Jonesy what he could remember of the Joseph Smith story, why God needed prophets, and about the Book of Mormon. He showed him where it talked about King Benjamin’s people being filled with joy and was able to pull from his seminary memory the reference for “wickedness never was happiness.” Jonesy ate it up. When the call came for the company to pull out Steve was torn. There was so much more to tell.

“I’ve got to go Jonesy.” He stood up.

“You can call me Bill and thanks for talking to me.” The soldier replied.

“Listen Bill,” Steve said, “I want you to have this Book of Mormon.” He held the book out for Bill to take.

“I, I can barely read.” Bill replied.

“It’ll come. Use this to practice and don’t forget to pray like Joseph Smith did.” The company was now moving and Steve shoved the book into Bill’s hands and ran. He yelled over his shoulder, “When you get out of the army go to Salt Lake and tell them you want to know more!”

Bill nodded and waved good-bye.

The end of the train had left the Fort by the time Steve reached it. He didn’t care, he felt like he could fly. He yelled greetings to all the saints as he passed them. He’d spend a few minutes helping any one push that looked like they could use a hand and then would jog forward to the next cart. About a half hour later he caught up with the single sisters again and fell in next to Annie who was pushing from behind. He was panting but had a smile from ear to ear.

“You were right!” He said between gasps to Annie.

“Pardon?” Annie replied a little surprised at his sudden appearance.

“It’s not imposing! It is the greatest thing ever!”

“What are you talking about Elder?”

“I just shared the gospel Annie! It was great! At first I was worried about what I was going to say but then it just started coming and Bill loved it! He was eating it up! I remembered scriptures and everything! It was so cool! He let go of the cart and danced a little jig before returning to his position.

“Oh, one thing.” He became suddenly serious and Annie waited to hear what he was going to say.

“Can I borrow your Book of Mormon sometimes? I gave mine to Bill and I still want to read.” Steve waited seriously for Annie response.

“Of course Elder, of course you can borrow my Book of Mormon anytime. So Bill was the soldier?”

“Yeah, the one they were calling Jonesy. His real name is Bill. He’s really a nice guy. At first I thought they were all just drunks but he really wanted to know why we are so happy even though we are so poor.”

“What did you tell him?” Annie asked.

“Well, I started with Joseph Smith. I couldn’t remember exactly which year it happened, but I told him the story. He said he was always wondering too, just like Joseph Smith. Then I--”

Steve got cut short by shouting from the cart ahead.

“Oh quit your complaining! You’ll be all right again when we get a bit of dinner at noon!” Luke was yelling at William who was in the shafts pulling.

“Uh oh, are those two still at it?” Steve said quietly to Annie.

“I’m telling you I can’t go a step further! Let me get out and die!” William retorted. Their cart immediately stopped.

“We better go see if we can help.” Annie quickly said, “Lydia, Elizabeth, pull our cart off to the side of the trail there.” Annie headed for William and Luke. Steve helped the rest of the single sisters get their cart off the trail. He then motioned to Samuel who was helping pull his family’s cart behind to go around.

“We’ll catch up later,” he said to them as they went past. Then he turned his attention to Luke and William.

Luke was tipping the cart back to let William out of the shafts and yelling,

“Well, get out and die then!”

William left the trail, walked out in to the prairie grass and laid down. Annie started to follow him. Steve grabbed his cup from the cart, scooped a little water from the bucket, caught Annie quickly and handed it to her.

“Here, he might need a drink. I’ll stay with Luke.”

He walked over to Luke who was sitting on a bank of prairie grass next to the trail with his head in his hands. Steve was just trying to figure out what to say to him when he heard a shout from Annie.

“Elder! Get the captain quick! William is dead!”

Steve jumped up, hesitated only for a moment and then sprinted to catch up with the carts at the front of the train. The adrenalin carried him and it didn’t take long until he and the captain were jogging back down the trail.

When they arrived at Annie’s side, William’s eyes were still open and staring off into the distance. The captain kneeled down next to him and gently closed his eyes. Standing he walked over to Luke who had obviously been crying and put his arm around him. Steve, Annie and the other single sisters waited quietly by William’s body. After a few minutes the captain returned to them.

“Elder, can you make room on your cart for William’s body? It is nearly noon. We’ll be stopping for dinner and will make a grave for him there.”

Steve nodded. The captain continued, I’ll help Luke get his cart into camp.” He turned, took Luke by the arm and together they walked back to Luke’s cart and began to make their way up the trail.

Steve looked down at William, then at the faces of the single sisters, then at their cart. He still wasn’t very comfortable with death, nor did he ever want to be but somehow he had to get William’s body onto the cart and into camp.

“Uh, do one of you sisters have a blanket we can use to cover William?” He asked weakly.

“Why don’t we bring the cart over here to load him, rather than carrying the corpse over there?” Lydia asked.

“Great idea!” Steve replied and ran for the cart, glad to have something to do.

They quickly pulled the cart alongside William’s body. Annie dug a quilt from her belongings, which they used to wrap him in, then the sisters lifted at the ends and Steve picked up the middle. It was a bit of a challenge to get him up over the wheel and Steve dropped him a little as he set him down.

“Sorry.” He said a little sheepishly. No one replied and they all returned to their pushing and pulling spots and started down the trail.

Digging graves was something Steve had never even thought about doing before. There was only one shovel in the company and it was short handled. Thankfully the soil under the prairie grass was soft and moist with very few rocks. Steve took his turn with the shovel several times before the hole was deep enough. In fact, Steve took his turn digging graves several times over the course of the next few days. On September 17th an older sister named Sarah died and the very next day another older sister named Sophia passed away.

Death certainly made the pioneers sad, but somehow they didn’t seem to fear it as much as Steve nor were they as uncomfortable with it as he was. It was a part of life and they had obviously had many more personal experiences with it than he ever had.

If the deaths weren’t enough of a reminder to the company that their lives were in God’s hands, the weather certainly got their attention. The day Sarah died a cold wind blew that reminded them all that winter was on the way. As Steve crawled into his bed that night he hoped it was just a fluke and not the beginning of winter.

Chapter 27

Steve had driven across the U.S. once before with his family. He remembered always anticipating the next stop, playing the alphabet game for hours, and trying to fall asleep so that they would “hurry up and get there.” He did remember being amazed by the miles and miles of cornfields they drove past but it was nothing compared to the prairie. The grass and rolling hills went on forever. There were no trees to be seen anywhere. In fact, for the past several weeks they had been gathering buffalo chips to burn because there was no wood.

The smell of burning buffalo chips was less than pleasant, but they did give off heat and they were certainly plentiful in most places. So far the company hadn't come into close contact with any buffalo but they had sighted massive herds two or three miles in the distant.

On the 21st of September the company didn't get on the trail until 2:00 pm due to a drizzling rain. They camped at 7 :00, but there was no wood and the chips were wet so they went to bed that night without any cooking. The next morning dawned clear and bright and they were back on the trail at 8:00 am and made good time until they came to another river crossing.

Steve hadn't realized it at first, but the company was following a river, the

Platte River, in a generally western direction. The trail would leave the side of the river and make it's way across open prairie, but it always seemed to come back to the Platte. Many times the trail would cross from one side of the river to the other. Today's crossing place was wide and shallow. Steve estimated it at about a half a football field wide and at its deepest it came just above his knees. The saints had become experts in river crossing, but as the weather cooled and the temperature of the water dropped the crossings became less fun and something to endure. Steve was glad as he made his way across that the bottom was sandy--much easier to walk across than river stones. The captain called for camp as soon as all the carts were across. That night they danced a little in camp and Steve learned a few new steps from both Sister O'Malley and Annie.

The next day the company was pulling and pushing through deep sand again. Every step required immense effort. Progress was slow and painful. Steve spent most of the day helping Aaron and Elizabeth. He had noticed they were having a hard time keeping pace and so he tried to help out as much as possible. He enjoyed playing with their children as he walked along. Martha was seven, Mary was four and little Aaron was only two. He wasn't talking much yet and spent most of his time riding in the handcart. He and Steve had developed a little game. When Steve was pushing from behind Aaron would crawl over the bundles to where Steve was and pound

with his little fists on one of Steve's hands until Steve moved it somewhere else. Just like his little sister Jess and the sock game, little Aaron never seemed to tire of it. For Steve it helped pass the time.

The dinner stop came a little earlier than normal that day due to the heavy going all morning. At noon the captain called the carts to a stop. Steve's carts were nearly at the end of the train that day and Aaron and Elizabeth's cart were behind the others so most of the rest of the company was already settled down and working on meal preparation when they rolled into camp.

Steve lifted little Aaron down off the cart, gave him one last tickle, and sent him trotting off towards his mom. He waved good-bye to Elizabeth and made sure she saw her toddler coming towards her before he set off to find his gear on the single sisters' cart.

The sisters were already seated near their cart making a lunch of leftover biscuits from that morning. Steve said his hellos, grabbed his cup from his bag and headed for the nearest bucket of water. He was just raising the cups to his lips when a cry went up.

"Captain! Captain! Come Quick!" One of the brethren from the company that Steve didn't know very well was a hundred or so yards off the trail on the top of a bluff yelling and waving his arms. Steve drank the water in his

cup, scooped another cupful and decided to go see what the brother was so excited about. A good number of the saints must have had the same thought. By the time Steve and the captain reached the bluff where the brother had been yelling, several dozen others had as well. The brother was now farther away on yet another bluff.

"I wonder what he is up to." The captain murmured as they set off at jog down the incline. They reached the brother in a few minutes and were about to ask what he was so excited about when he pointed down the backside of the hill he was on. All eyes focused where he was pointing. There was about a fifteen-foot circle of burned prairie grass. In the middle of circle were the remains of a burned out buggy. As they walked closer Steve could make out a couple of wagon wheels, the big metal springs from the buggy and parts of a harness.

"I wonder what happened?" Steve asked the question that everybody was thinking. They were now walking in the burnt grass. The captain bent over and examined the harness pieces that were still left.

"Looks like Indians to me." He said.

"Right." Steve laughed and then looked at the captain to see if he was really serious. He was.

“You’re kidding right?” He asked incredulously.

“I wish I was.” The captain replied and walked over to look at the springs and the wheels. “We’ve seen these wheels recently.” Now everybody turned to look at the captain.

“These are the remains of Almon Babbit’s buggy.” He said without any hesitation.

“Are you sure?” Several asked at the same time.

“I was admiring his buggy when he came through camp. Not many wheels like those out west. I’m sure they are his.” The captain answered.

“So what happened to Almon?” Steve asked. The captain just shrugged.

“Are there tracks or anything? Can’t we follow the tracks and see where he is?” Steve asked remembering all the westerns he’d seen.

The captain kicked the blackened grass. “Fire’s been cold for days Elder. It’s also rained several times. There is nothing left to follow. We best get back to our carts and get on the trail. We’ve got a lot of ground to cover before we sleep tonight.” He turned and headed for the carts. Most of the others followed him. Steve stayed put. As comfortable as he had become

with these saints, some things still blew him away. Indians? He’d just been talking with Almon a few days ago. What a crazy world.

Samuel and his little brother had stayed back with Steve. Samuel now said, “C’mon Elder, we better get going or we’ll get left.”

Steve looked up not realizing anyone else was still there. Seeing Samuel and Robert he replied, “Yeah, you’re right. Just seems crazy that’s all.” Steve kicked one of the springs. It fell over. “You know,” he hesitated, “We could make a killer four-wheeler with these springs.” He looked from Samuel to his brother. They both smiled. Steve and Sam each grabbed a spring and they set off back toward the carts.

The captain’s hunch about Almon was confirmed just few hours later. The company came upon three men with horses bent over the carcass of a recently killed buffalo. Because Steve’s carts were still at the rear of the train it took them some time to get to where the commotion was.

“No different than I-15 at home.” Steve muttered. He had been helping the sisters with their cart since noon. He figured they deserved his help since one of the springs he and Samuel had rescued was nestled safely under their belongings.

“Should I ask what I-15 at home is Elder?” Annie asked Steve as their walk

slowed to a complete stop.

“I-15 is the name of the Freeway that runs north and south through Utah.”

“Freeway?”

“Sorry, it’s a road, a big road with enough lanes for three or four cars or carriages to go both ways at the same time. Freeways are supposed to be fast, but when too many cars get on them everybody slows down. Especially when there is an accident or something. Just like this.” Steve waved at the carts ahead of them.

“Hey Sam, is it spring up there yet?” He yelled two or three carts ahead to where Samuel’s family cart was on the trail. Samuel looked back at Steve and put his finger to his lips. Steve laughed. He knew that Samuel had slipped the spring in his cart without his mother knowing.

“I love spring!” Steve yelled again. Samuel’s little brother was laughing. Samuel, on the other hand, was still trying to get Steve to be quiet.

“How fast do carriages go in your day Elder?” Annie asked Steve.

“Well, they can go over 200 miles an hour, but on the Freeways the speed limit is usually 75 miles an hour.”

“Seventy five miles an hour?” Annie asked incredulously. Steve nodded.

“Elder, on a good day we go twenty or twenty-five miles. That’s on a good day!”

“I know.” Steve said.

“So where do you go?” Annie asked.

“When?”

“I don’t know, anytime. Going that fast you must be able to see lot’s of exciting things.”

“Well, my family would usually go on a vacation each summer. One year we went to Disneyland, we’ve been to Yellowstone, we did the Grand Canyon once. Places like that. My little sisters always got carsick at least once and would throw-up. We used to...” Steve trailed off and was lost in his thoughts. Annie waited for a few minutes before trying to get his attention again.

“Elder are you alright?” She asked quietly. Steve’s eyes suddenly focused again and he looked at Annie and smiled.

“Uh? Oh yeah, I’m fine. I was just wondering where my family went this

summer on vacation--without me.”

Annie put her arm around his back and gave him a squeeze. “I’m sorry Elder. I’m sure they miss you dearly.” Steve nodded and smiled a little.

“Yeah, I’m sure my dad misses me telling him to drive faster and my little brother and sister miss me telling them to shut up so I could hear my music.”

“You were singing?” Annie asked, grateful for an opportunity to get Steve thinking about something other than his family.

“No?” Steve wasn’t sure what she meant and said it more like a question.

“You said you couldn’t hear your music. Who was singing?”

The carts in front of them had begun to move again slowly and Annie and Steve followed. “So, have you ever heard of a guy named Thomas Edison?” Steve attempted to respond to Annie’s last question.

“No, I don’t think so.” Annie responded.

“Well you will. I’m not sure when he will do it, but, if I remember right, he was one of the first guys to figure out how to record a sound and then play it back. By 2006 we have little things about the size of a big button that can hold a thousand or so songs. You carry it around with you and can listen to

any song you want, any time.”

“Must be very noisy.” Annie said, trying hard to understand.

“Huh? Oh no, you don’t listen out loud. We have ear buds--little things you stick in your ears so that only you can hear.” Annie looked at him with disbelief on her face.

“It’s true--and it makes it sound like you are right there with the band.”

“Keep moving folks! Keep moving!” The captain’s voice cut into their conversation. Steve and Annie looked up to see the captain standing by the trail waving his arms and encouraging the saints to keep moving rather than stopping to look at the huge buffalo being skinned behind him. Three saddled horses were casually grazing on prairie grass not far from the carcass. Three men that Steve didn’t recognize were working on the skin, pulling and cutting to coax it off the hulking shoulders of the beast. When the captain saw Steve he called to him.

“Elder! Elder! Would you mind having your families pull off here and help?” Steve didn’t have a chance to respond. All four carts that he was responsible for were already pulling off the trail and making their way toward the buffalo. Captain Martin waved the rest of the carts on up the trail and then came over to where Steve and the others were gathering around the

butchering.

“Elder, I don’t know if you met Captain Hodgett back in Iowa City. He is leading one of the covered wagon trains that is a few days ahead of us.”

One of the men working on the buffalo looked up from his work and said,

“Howdy!”

Steve returned the gesture and the captain proceeded to introduce the other two. “This is Brother Cluff and Brother Porter. They came upon some buffalo this morning and killed one for their train and then were nice enough to run this one down for us.”

“Cool!” Was all Steve could muster. He was amazed by the size of the buffalo and the knives being expertly wielded to dress it out.

“Mind grabbing hold here?” Captain Hodgett motioned to Steve and pointed at a big roll of skin. Steve jumped in and grabbed a hold with both hands.

“OK, pull!”

Steve and the other two men began pulling while the captain cut the hide away from the flesh. Slowly they peeled it back toward the tail. Captain Martin spoke again.

“Elder, I need to catch back up with our company. Will you and your folks please help get the meat cut up and bring it into camp on your carts?”

Steve looked over at “his folks.” They all nodded. He then turned to the captain. “Sure, we’ll be happy to do it.”

“Thank you. Please be careful and don’t delay any more than necessary to get the meat on your carts. Then come directly to camp.” The captain paused waiting for a commitment from Steve. Steve thought it a little odd but agreed.

“Sure, we’ll come as quick as we can.”

“Thank you.” Then he turned to the other men, “Captain Hodgett, thanks again for thinking of us. The meat will be much enjoyed.”

“Not a problem at all. Happy to do it.” Before Hodgett had finished his reply Captain Martin turned and set off at a jog to catch up with the other handcarts. Steve looked up from his work to watch him go.

“Boy, he sure seems to be nervous about something,” he said to no one in particular.

“Don’t blame him much, with all the Indian activity. Soon as we get this

hide off we'll be on our way ourselves. Like to be back with our families before dark." He looked up at the sun in the western sky and then went back to work with his knife.

"Indian activity?" Steve asked. John, Aaron and Samuel had now joined him and were pulling back the hide while captain Hodgett and the other two men worked quickly with their knives to separate it from the flesh.

"Cheyenne." The captain said matter of factly. "You see Babbit's rig back down the trail?" He asked Steve.

"We saw it." Steve replied groaning a little as he pulled for all he was worth on the hide. "Did Indians do it?"

"That and the Margetts party as well."

"Margetts?" Steve asked.

"A few miles further west." The captain lifted his head from his work to nod toward the west. "Two families from what I understand. Stopped to do some buffalo hunting and never got to go a step further. Killed both a woman and a child."

No one standing around the buffalo said anything. Those that weren't work-

ing on the buffalo nervously scanned the horizon in all directions. Mothers made sure their children were close by. The hide was now down to the haunches and was coming off nicely. During a break in the pulling, Steve turned to the sisters. "Sisters would you mind making some space in each of the carts for the meat? We'll cut it into quarters and try to get a quarter on each cart."

Within a few minutes the hide was off. One of Hodgett's men had a sharp hatchet and the carcass was quickly quartered. Hodgett and his men then wasted no time getting into their saddles and galloping off to the west.

Steve was anxious to follow them and so was everyone else in his party. There was no argument when the springs from Babbit's buggy were discovered and thrown off the carts. Somehow they no longer seemed important. Even the children who normally found some kind of game to run and play were subdued and anxious to get back on the trail.

It took all four of the men, including Samuel, to get the quarters hefted into the carts. The little carts groaned and cracked at the added weight but didn't collapse. Steve scanned the area to make sure they hadn't left anything and then said, "Let's go."

He didn't have to ask twice. The sisters pulled out first followed by Aaron and his family, then Samuel's family and finally John and Elizabeth. The

extra weight was very noticeable, but so was the fear-induced adrenaline. Nobody wanted to think about still being on the trail, alone, when the sun went down. They made very good time for several miles and Steve began to think they would catch up with the main company just over the “next bluff” but bluff after bluff came and went with no sign of the others. To make matters worse, just as Captain Hodgett had described, they came upon what must have been the Margett’s party. Feathers were strewn about in the prairie grass; Steve caught a glimpse of a small skull and what appeared to be a bloodstained shirt. No one said a word and the pace quickened once again.

The sun had set and the eastern sky was beginning to lose light when Steve’s little caravan of four overloaded handcarts were finally pushed and pulled into the main camp. The saints that saw them approaching cheered their arrival and soon most of the camp was gathered around to greet the buffalo meat. The Captain quickly thanked Steve and his families and got the meat divided and handed out.

Steve nearly forgot about the Indian concerns once they were back with the main company. His mind quickly turned to the thought of a big slab of buffalo roasting over the fire. He wasn’t disappointed. Though coarser than beef, Steve thoroughly enjoyed the buffalo steak he ate that night and was just thinking about hitting the sack when a call went out for all men to meet

the captain on the outskirts of camp.

“I wonder what this is all about?” Samuel said to Steve as they made their way to the gathering place. Steve just shrugged.

The captain wasted no time getting to the point. “Brethren, as we’ve seen on the trail today, the Indians are carrying out deprivations on every hand. Some in our company have reported seeing Indians not far from camp. I’d like to ask each of you to stand guard tonight. We’ll form a line around the camp to protect our loved ones. Please take with you any weapon you may have. Make sure you can see and hear the brother to your left and right throughout the night. Any questions?”

No one said a thing. “Ok, please go quickly. Let’s be in position in five minutes.”

Chapter 28

Steve found a rock to sit on and pulled his blanket up around his shoulders. Samuel was off on his right and John was to his left. He could just make them out in the darkness. Every few minutes one of them would whisper his name with a hiss and make sure he was still there. As many wild experiences as Steve had had over the last few months, he still had a very hard time believing he was actually on guard duty for blood-thirsty Cheyenne Indians. That's not to say he wasn't a little scared. He had seen the blood-stained clothes and the skull with his own eyes and he had sensed the danger, but still--Indians? He strained his eyes and peered out into the darkness, trying to make out any movement. It reminded him of wild games of "Capture the Flag" that his scout troop used to play. He never liked to wait and guard. Much funner to be on the attack--running and taking by surprise. His mind jumped back to the present and he wondered what it would feel like to get hit by an arrow. He hoped if the attack came, he would at least be able to get a swing in with the makeshift bat he had picked up from the firewood pile.

Something moved behind him. He flung off the blanket, grabbed his bat and jumped to his feet straining to see what was there. Something or somebody was moving. He hissed at Sam, "Sam can you see anything?"

Sam hissed back. "No but I heard something!"

"Elder?" The voice was Annie's. "Elder is that you?"

Steve's body relaxed. "It's me, I'm over here." Turning towards Sam he hissed, "It's ok Sam. It's Annie."

Steve put his bat down and picked his blanket back up while Annie made her way over to him.

"What are you doing out here?" He whispered to Annie once she was close enough. "You just about got yourself clubbed to death." He held up his bat to make sure she got the full impact of what he was saying.

Annie rolled her eyes. "It's very comforting to know that I am being guarded by such a tightly wound warrior."

Steve smirked. "Did you just call me 'tightly wound?'"

"Yes, I did." Annie said, handing Steve a cup of something warm. "Like a tiger, ready to attack."

"That's me alright. A tiger ready to strike." Steve lifted the cup to his lips. It smelled like a pot roast. "What is this?"

"We boiled some of the bones of the buffalo. That is the broth. Do you like it?"

Steve blew on the liquid and slowly raised it to his lips. The warmth spread through his body and the taste wasn't bad as long as he didn't think too much about it.

"Thank you it is good."

"You are welcome." They both stood awkwardly for a few minutes. Steve took a few more sips and smiled at her. She smiled back.

"Do you want to sit down?" He asked pointing at his rock.

She sat and Steve took a seat on the ground near her. "Are you cold? Do you want this blanket?"

"No I'm fine, and I won't be here long. You keep it so that you don't get chilled. Have you seen anything yet?"

Steve suddenly remembered why he had been sitting out in the dark by himself. "Nope. Other than you, we've had very little excitement out here."

"You can say that again!" Samuel's voice hissed out the darkness.

Steve smiled and pointed in Samuel's direction. "That's Sam." Pointing the other direction he added, "And that's John."

Annie smiled back and asked. "More tightly wound tigers?" Steve nodded.

"I still can't believe I'm out here." Steve said.

"You mean in our time?" Annie asked.

"Well, that too, but no, I meant standing guard for Indians."

"You don't have Indians in your time?" Annie asked in a lower tone.

"Sure we have Indians, but they don't try to kill us any more. In my world people just don't die that much."

"People live forever?" Annie asked incredulously.

"No, not forever. People still die when they are eighty or ninety and some die from accidents or cancer or something when they are younger, but it hasn't happened in my life very often. I mean, I've been to one funeral in my life and that was my great-grandma. Since I've joined this company I've almost lost count of the number who have died. Now Indians that want to kill us all? It's blowing my mind."

"Oh, I hope it doesn't hurt!" Annie replied with concern, and then added a little wistfully, "A time with less death sounds wonderful."

Not wanting to give the wrong impression, Steve added, "Don't get me wrong, there is still a lot of death in my time. The weapons are bigger and badder and a lot of the people are meaner, but I personally had never actually seen someone die before I came here."

"Are there workhouses?" Annie asked quickly.

"Workhouses?" Steve asked a little surprised at the quick change of topic.

"Yes, where those who can't pay their bills--or their children-- are sent to work off their debts."

Steve thought for a minute. "I don't think so. At least I've never heard of one."

"So what happens when somebody is infirm and has no money to care for their self or their family?"

Steve thought some more. He hadn't known too many people that were poor. There were a few families in the ward that didn't have much. One of the brothers was in a wheel chair. Every Christmas they received lots of

turkeys and other gifts from the ward but other than that Steve had never given much thought to how they paid their bills.

"I don't know." He answered honestly. "I've heard hospitals can't turn anyone away. I know that the government has social security because they always took money out of my check. I think that is supposed to help people and I know the church has the Bishop's storehouse, but I don't know how it all works."

"But there are no work houses?" Annie asked again.

"I've never heard of one." Steve confirmed.

"The wind is blowing in my mind." Annie said.

Steve smiled, "You mean I'm blowing your mind?"

Annie just nodded and seemed to be thinking of something else.

"Annie? Annie are you ok?" Steve asked.

"Yes, yes, I am fine Elder. I was just thinking about my family."

Steve sat quietly for a moment hoping that she would continue. When she said nothing he finally prompted her, "Annie, how come you never talk

about your family?"

Annie tried to change the subject. "Have you figured out why you are here yet?"

"We're not talking about me Annie. I want to hear about your family."

Steve insisted.

Annie sighed and pretended to look out into the darkness though her eyes were closed. Steve waited patiently.

Annie sighed again, looked at Steve and began. "My father is--was--a seaman. I used to love the day he arrived home from a voyage. He smelled of the sea and of ropes and he was always so happy to see us. He would bring us little baubles of one kind or another, but just having him home is what made us happy. He loved being outside and would take us on long excursions into the country. Then at night we would gather around and listen to his tales of strange places. He had come to America many times. Never this far west, but he saw all the port cities and would tell us about each of them. He always had a piece of rope in his hand. He loved knots--the tricks he could do with a rope. As a young girl I wondered at times if his rope was alive." She paused for a time.

"Your father died?" Steve asked trying to keep her talking.

"In a way, yes--but no, he is still alive. He still smells of ropes but now it's because he sits and picks at oakum all day with the rest of the inmates at the Oldchurch workhouse. Can't see or even smell the sea. Wouldn't matter if he could because he never gets to go outside."

Annie sighed again and Steve couldn't help asking, "What's oakum?"

Annie seemed far away and came back to answer Steve's question only with some struggle. "They cut junk ropes into pieces just a couple inches long then they untwist it and separate the yarns and reduce them to shreds with their hand and fingers. Sometimes they rub it against their apron. It is a tedious and irksome process. The only ones they can get to do it are those in the workhouse who have no choice. They do it twelve hours a day. "

"And what is it used for?"

"Pardon me?"

"The 'oakum'--why do they pull it apart?" Steve asked curiously.

"Oh, it's used to caulk the cracks in the ship's hull. They mix it with tar and force it into every nook and cranny. Ironic isn't it?"

"What's that?"

"My father loved the sea and ropes and now he is reduced to a dark room in Romford tearing apart ropes to keep ships afloat. Ships that he will never again have the chance to sail."

"So why can't he sail anymore?" Steve asked.

"There was an accident on the wharf. His ship had just come in. He was rushing home to see us. It left him unable to walk. My mother went to work as a charwoman. But it wasn't enough. Father was sent to the workhouse as an invalid. My older sisters had already been put out to work. My younger brother and I weren't so lucky. We spent six months in Romford until mother found me a suitable position and my younger brother went home."

"So you were with your father?"

"We were only allowed to see father once a week. A few minutes each Sunday." Annie took a deep breath. "Elder, I dare not think on nor repeat the atrocities I witnessed there.

On the second greatest day of my life I was placed with Mrs. Sophia. I was fourteen."

"Wow." Was all Steve could say.

"She was strict and I was given little time off, but she was kind and I so enjoyed caring for her young daughter and granddaughter. In fact it was while I was in her employ that I first heard of the missionaries and went to hear them preach. Their message had so much hope. It was like the sun was once again shining after years of nothing but clouds. I was so excited to share with my family what I had discovered so we could all be happy again..." Annie's voice trailed off.

Steve didn't say anything. After a few minutes Annie turned and looked at him. Steve could just make out the shine of a tear on her cheek in the moonlight. She smiled at him and said, "It hurt more to have them reject the gospel than it did to be torn from our happy home. I so wanted them to be happy again and knew—know, that this is the only way to find it."

Steve took the blanket off his left shoulder and wrapped it, along with his arm, around Annie's shoulder.

Chapter 29

The company saw no Indians that night. As the days grew shorter, the elevation higher, and the temperatures lower, hunger and cold quickly replaced Indians as the top concerns in the emigrants' minds. Steve had never experienced such hunger. The pound of flour he received each day combined with beef every few days could never fill him. It just touched the most urgent pains. Now as the weather cooled and his appetite naturally increased, he was on the constant lookout for more food, as were all in the company.

It was definitely fall. The days were beautiful--not too hot and not too cold--but the nights were brisk and some times downright cold. Steve was beginning to see a little ice form on the sides of creeks as he washed up each morning and the thought of what was coming sent more shivers through him than the ice cold water he splashed on his face.

So far Steve's families seemed to be holding up well, though Steve was beginning to worry about Aaron. He was a tireless worker and Steve could sense that the cold, the work and the lack of nutrition were beginning to wear on him. Steve tried to help whenever he could, but there were many to help.

His hunger, concern for his families, and his growing relationship with An-

nie distracted Steve from his quest to understand why he was there. It still gnawed at him when he had time to daydream, but the quest to survive was taking more of his efforts. More importantly, though not as easy to hold on to, he had found a peace as he intensely read the Book of Mormon and tried to finally learn what he should have learned so many years before. He often thought how strange it was that he had no logical reason in the world to feel at peace. He was in a place and time that weren't his, had no idea how to get back to his time, was nearly starving to death, and was certain that disaster lay ahead, yet he could not deny that he felt peace. He was grateful for it. He couldn't always hold on to it, but each time he put forth the effort to seek God the peace returned. And so he walked on.

"Look!" The first carts in the train had just topped out on yet another bluff and were excitedly pointing off to the west. Steve was again helping Aaron and Elizabeth when he heard the cries. They had just started up the incline. Anxious to see what all the commotion was about, he picked up the pace. His sudden push caught Elizabeth and Aaron off guard and they stumbled a little but picked up quickly. They had nearly passed Samuel and his family by the time they got to the top of the bluff. Steve slapped Samuel on the back as they staggered away from the carts.

"Nearly caught you there buddy!" He wheezed and then bent over and put

his hands on his knees to breath. "What is all the commotion about up here?" He looked up at Sam who was staring off to the west with the rest of the saints.

"It's a mountain! Look at the mountain." Samuel was now pointing.

"Look how big it is Elder!" Annie, whose cart was ahead of Samuel's walked up beside Steve. The pioneers had taken an impromptu break and were staring in awe at the mountain ahead. Steve was still a little perplexed at their fascination.

"Get used to it folks, you are going to see a lot more where we are heading."

A number of worried faces turned toward Steve after hearing his comment. One of them voiced what was on most of their minds. "That big? How can we possibly get over them?"

Steve was about to reply when the captain did it for him. "We don't go over them. We go around them and between them. The good news is that the plains are behind us. We're getting closer every day. That's Laramie Peak which means, if we get back on the trail we should reach Ft. Laramie by sun down." The captain's last words were said with some emphasis and the pioneers slowly made their way back to their carts.

"So Elder, are all the mountains that big?" Annie asked Steve as they made their way back to their carts. Steve looked again at the mountain. It was still quite a ways off, but it was obvious that it was good size. Maybe even as tall as Timp, the mountain he used to see everyday from his home.

"Bigger." He replied to Annie. "Maybe not much taller, but there are lots of them that line up end to end like a big wall. When you live up close to them they look even bigger."

"What if they fall on you?" Asked Samuel who was walking along with them.

"What?" Steve replied incredulously.

"Living up close to them. Don't you worry they will fall on you?" Samuel asked again.

"Haven't you ever been up close to a mountain before?" Steve asked.

"Elder, where would we have ever seen a mountain before?" Annie cut in trying to help Samuel who was looking a little worried.

Steve thought for a minute. "Not even in a photo--I mean drawing?" He didn't wait for an answer, but slapped Samuel on the arm and added. "We

don't have to worry about them falling on us Sam. They've been there for hundreds or even thousands of years and haven't gone anywhere."

Samuel looked less than assured. They had reached their carts and began taking their places. Steve decided to help the sisters for a spell and joined Annie pushing. Samuel stepped into the pull bar of his family cart and they started down the trail.

"You'll learn to love the mountains Sam." Steve said loud enough for Samuel to hear behind him. Sam just smiled.

"I'm not going to lie you." Steve continued. "Mountains are great. In the summer my family always goes camping and fishing. In the fall we go into the mountains to see the leaves that have turned colors. We used to go this place we called Fruit Loop canyon because it looked like a big bowl of colorful cold cereal."

"Your cereal is colorful?" It was Annie's turn to again be incredulous.

"Well, yeah." Steve said a little embarrassed. "My parents ate the old brown stuff, but we liked Fruit Loops that were all different colors. Brian liked the chocolate stuff like Count Chocula and Cocoa Pebbles. Mostly we ate it for breakfast, but it was like the favorite meal. Especially when mom wasn't around to make us something to eat." Annie looked at him with a

confused look on her face.

"It was really easy to eat." Steve tried to explain. "It comes in a box. All you do is put it in a bowl and then pour milk on it. Bry and I used to grab a bowl full and watch cartoons every day after school."

"Sounds good." Samuel said from behind them. "Where do you get it?"

"At the grocery store." Steve nearly choked on the last word. The thought of a fully stocked grocery store was almost more than he could bear. Even knowing that talking about it would make it worse; he couldn't resist describing the wonders of the modern grocery store to his half-starved friends. He was just explaining how there was always fresh fruit and vegetables no matter what time of year it was when Sam's little six-year old brother, Richard, came walking back down the train toward them. Steve would have just kept talking but he noticed the boy was chewing on a big wad of something.

"Yo, Richard whatcha eatin' there Dawg?" He called to him.

Richard smiled a big goopy smile and orange saliva dribbled out the corner of his mouth. He wiped it away with the back of his hand. Richard pointed back to the front of the train. "sweetmeats."

"Sweetmeats? Where did you get sweetmeats?" demanded Samuel.

"Two dragons." Richard replied and pointed to the front of the train again as he munched away.

"Dragons?" Steve asked with a laugh.

"Yep! Two of them."

"What did they look like?"

"They were blue with big swords." Richard said wiping the saliva from his chin again as he gulped down the sweet mass he was chewing on. "See, there they go." He pointed to the horizon as two soldiers on horseback road away.

"Oh dragoons!" Samuel exclaimed with sudden recognition. "He meant dragoons, the soldiers on horseback."

"Yeah, that's what I said." Richard said. "They were from the fort and had a bag full of sweetmeats." Richard was now licking his hands.

"What are sweetmeats?" Steve asked.

"Certainly they have sweetmeats in your fabulous grocery stores Elder." Annie chided him with just a bit of sarcasm.

"Never heard of them." Steve replied. "Sweetmeat just sounds wrong, but right now I'd eat about anything. What is it?"

"Pieces of fruit rolled in sugar and dried." Samuel couldn't help licking his lips as he said it.

"Ah!" Steve said. "I take it back. Sweetmeats sound great! Is there any left on your hands Richard? I'll take a lick." Steve let go of the back of the cart and started to chase Richard. He giggled and ran around behind the cart where his mom was pushing.

A few minutes later, word came to setup camp. They were within a mile of Fort Laramie. Word also came for all tent captains to gather for a meeting with Captain Martin as soon as possible. Steve helped his carts to a good level camping spot then set off to find Captain Martin and the rest of the tent captains. They weren't hard to find. Steve couldn't help but notice how different they now looked after a few months of hard work on the trail. Not only were they trail hardened but most of them looked worn out. There was certainly no energy being wasted as they greeted each other and found places to sit near where the captain was standing.

Steve looked quickly for his old friend O'Malley who was sitting on the ground at the edge of the circle with his back up against the wheel of one of

the carts. Steve made his way over to him.

"Is this seat taken?" He asked as he sat down next to him.

O'Malley opened his eyes and looked wearily at Steve. A smile crossed his face. "Been saving it fer the likes of you laddie!" He pushed over a little so that Steve could lean up against the wagon wheel as well.

"How's mother O'Malley and the boys?" Steve asked.

"Fit as a fiddle. And yer people Elder?"

"They're good. Hungry, but then who isn't?"

O'Malley just nodded his head. "And the lass? Annie? How is Annie, Elder?"

Steve rolled his eyes. "You too O'Malley?"

"Not fer me Elder. Fer me wife. Nary a day goes by what she doesn't ask me how the Elder and Annie be doing. I be asking purely fer me wife."

Steve rolled his eyes again but answered. "You can tell Mother O'Malley that we're good. We're good."

"Brethren!" The captain's voice interrupted Steve and O'Malley's conversa-

tion.

"Brethren as you can see we are within a mile of Ft Laramie." The captain turned and pointed behind him. Steve hadn't noticed before but a cluster of buildings could be seen on the horizon to the west. "As you can also see, we are no longer on the prairies." This time the captain pointed to the mountain peak beyond the fort. "I don't think I have to point out to anyone that fall is upon us. As we continue our journey into the mountains the temperatures will continue to fall. I'm still hopeful that God will control the elements and we will safely arrive in Salt Lake City but I don't believe he will do for us what we can do for ourselves. We will only remain here at the fort for one day. We must pick up our pace. The dragoons that came out this afternoon said they have some supplies at the fort with which we can replenish our stores at a fair price. Please let your people know they can go to the fort tomorrow to trade for supplies if they wish. The soldiers also said that Elder Richards purchased 100 buffalo hides for us when he passed through several weeks ago. We will pick those up tomorrow and distribute them to those with the greatest need. If you have people that you think need one please let me know."

The captain paused for minute and looked around at the faces that surrounded him. Steve could tell he was thinking carefully about what he

should say next. Finally he proceeded.

"Brethren, this is the last real outpost before we cross the mountains--the hardest part of our journey. We are very late in the season. Our supplies are running low and we are all tired." There were several nods. "But--we are on the Lord's errand. We are taking our families to Zion and the Lord has blessed us. He protected us from the Indians. Though there were atrocities before, and behind we came through unscathed. Will he continue to still the elements that we might pass through unhindered? I certainly hope so. But if not, this I know: he will strengthen us to bear whatever we must suffer." His voice trailed off and he was silent for a time. Then he continued, "Brethren, let us be united. Our cause is great, let us have the faith to match it."

With that the meeting closed and the tent captains made their way back to their tents.

As they ate dinner that night Steve shared what the captain had said with his people. It was agreed that those that wanted to go would rise early in the morning and walk up to the fort. With the thought of more food constantly dominating their thoughts many, including Steve, began to look for anything of any value that they owned which could be traded for food at the fort in the morning. As he climbed into bed that night Steve pulled out his canvas bag and reached inside to the inner pocket. Good. They were still there:

two U.S. dollars. How many sweetmeats would that buy?

Chapter 30

Just as Ft. Kearny had been, Ft Laramie was a bit of disappointment to Steve. It was certainly bigger than Ft. Kearny, but it didn't look like any of the forts he had seen in western movies. Where were the big walls made out of logs with the lookout towers on the top and the gates that get shut when the Indians are coming? Ft. Laramie was a collection of buildings haphazardly gathered around a makeshift central square. One of the buildings was an old adobe structure that actually looked a little like the forts Steve had imagined. At one time it looked like it must have had four outer walls with a big opening on one side and a courtyard in the middle. But only three of the walls were still standing and one of them looked like it would go at any time. There were two or three other two-story buildings that were made of wood and the rest of the structures were all small adobe buildings.

As Steve and his group made their way between the buildings toward the central square several soldiers greeted them kindly. Steve asked one of them where they could trade for supplies.

"Well, you've got yourself two options." The soldier drawled. "The sutler's store is over yonder." He pointed at an adobe and stone building a little to the north. "He's got the good stuff, sure enough. But you'll be paying for it for years."

"And the other option?" Steve asked.

"Well I just saw the commandant go into Old Bedlam there. If he approves it, you can get your supplies from the military stores. Not as fancy as the sutler's stuff, but it's edible and it's a whole lot cheaper."

Steve thanked the soldier who tipped his hat at the sisters and went his way.

"I'll go check with the commandant." Steve said, "You are welcome to go on over to the sutler place and look around if you want to." Most of the saints liked the idea and headed toward the adobe and stone building. Steve headed for the building the soldier had called Old Bedlam. It was one of the two-story wooden buildings. It had a covered porch on both the ground level and the second story and was whitewashed a bright white. Steve didn't have to look long for the commandant. As he was approaching the building a group of three men in uniforms came out the main door and down the steps toward him. By the way everyone was saluting, Steve had no doubt one of them was the commander. Unsure if was supposed to salute, Steve held out his hand.

"Sorry to bother you sir, I'm with the handcart company. We're looking for supplies."

The commander took his hand and smiled. "Good to meet you. We've been

expecting you. I guess you know, you are very late in the season." It wasn't as much of a question as a statement. Steve nodded any way.

"Well we will do what we can to help. Our supplies are limited, but what we can spare we will sell to you at fair prices. You'll find the military stores there on the other side of the parade grounds." He pointed at a building across the central square. "Talk to Lieutenant Miller. I've already given him orders."

"Thanks." Steve said.

"No problem." The commander replied, "and best of luck." With that he turned and walked away.

Steve met up with the rest of his party at the sutler's store. Annie was coming out the door, as Steve was about to go in.

"The soldier was right." She said, "Just like one of your grocery stores in there, but at mountain prices."

They gathered the rest of their group and headed to the military stores.

Other pioneers were now arriving at the fort and Steve and his group pointed out both the sutler and the military stores. By the time they reached the stores there was quite a group of them. The Lieutenant must have seen them

coming because he stepped out onto the porch of the building as they approached. He was was a jovial, rather short and round man.

"Howdy folks! The commander said you would be coming. We'll give you all we can afford. We can only take money here. If you have things to trade, go over to the sutler's and trade them for coin then come back here. Biscuits are 15 and 1/2 cents, bacon is 15 cents, and we have some rice at 17 cents. Just let me know what you'll be needing and we'll get you taken care of."

"What about sweetmeats?" Steve called out. He'd had dreams about the sweet flavor of dried fruit ever since he saw Richard chomping the day before.

"Sorry! Only the sutler has got the sweets. You'll have to get them there."

"I was afraid he'd say that." Steve turned to Annie. "What should we buy?" He asked her.

"I've no money Elder."

"Well, I do!" Steve pulled out the two gold coins and showed them to her. Not waiting for her next question he explained that they had been in the bag with his clothes. "C'mon, I'm buying. What do you want?"

Annie hesitated. "Oh, Elder I couldn't."

"Why not? Hey, have you ever been on a date?"

"A date?"

"Yeah. You know a guy asks you to go out to dinner or to a movie--well not a movie, maybe to a dance or something? You are sixteen right?"

"I'm eighteen Elder. And if it is courting you are talking about--well I don't think that is any of your business."

Steve tried to recover quickly. "Don't get mad. I didn't do a very good job of it, but I was actually trying to ask you out on a date--to court you I mean."

Annie blushed and Steve was glad the rest of the pioneers had headed off to the Sutler's to trade or were busy giving their orders to the Lieutenant. Annie responded without anger.

"Elder, as much as I would like to, I don't think this is the time or the place."

"Why not. C'mon I can't think of better time or place. The company is not moving today. We've got two 1856 Indian head dollars and a place to spend them. It'll be fun. Besides, who knows when we'll ever have another chance? I could be gone tomorrow."

"Don't say that Elder."

"But it's true and you know it. C'mon when was the last time you just had fun?"

"Life is not about just having fun, Elder!"

"I know that, but I also know it helps. We're doing this."

"But Elder, we can't waste the money. We need the supplies. We've still got a long way to go."

"I'll tell you what," Steve's mind was more determined than ever. "Let's use \$1.50 on supplies and we'll figure out a 50 cent date."

"Fifty cents! Elder that is way too much. Ten cents for the date--as you call it."

"Twenty-five cents." Steve responded.

Annie sighed and closed her eyes. She opened them with a slight smile.

"Ok, twenty-five cents Elder."

"Great! It's a date. I'll pick you up at," Steve looked down at his wrist as if to look at a wristwatch then realizing he didn't have one looked up at the sun

that was about halfway up the eastern sky. "I'll pick you up when the sun is about there." He pointed straight up.

"What do you mean by you'll 'pick me up?'"

"That's how dates work Annie. The boy goes and picks up the girl at her house. So let's decide what supplies we need. I'll get John to take them and you back to camp. I've got some things to do to get ready for the date and then I will come to camp and pick you up."

"When the sun is about there." Annie said and pointed straight up in the sky.

"Right. C'mon what supplies do we want?" Steve took Annie by the arm and pulled her toward the stairs of the military stores. They ended up with four pounds of bacon and seven of the biscuits. Steve made quick arrangements with John to get Annie and the supplies back to camp then went to find Samuel. He found him with the rest of his family at the sutler's store. They were just coming out and from the looks of it were enjoying sweetmeats. Steve ran up to them.

"Hey!" He said to all of them in greeting, and then not waiting for a response turned to Samuel. "Sam, I need your help. I've got a date!"

"We got apricot." Sam replied.

"What?" Sam pointed to the bulge in one of his cheeks. "Apricot." He repeated.

"Oh nice." Steve said impatiently. "Listen I asked Annie to go out with me. I'm going to take her out to lunch but I need your help."

"Elder are you courting?" Samuel's eleven-year-old sister, Isabella was quicker on the uptake than Samuel.

Steve nodded. "Yes!"

"How can we help Elder?" Samuel's mom asked.

Steve laid out his plan for them. They all agreed to help. He gave them fifteen of his precious cents and then turned and ran toward the stables he had seen on the other end of the parade grounds. It took his eyes a few minutes to adjust to the darkness inside the stables. When they finally adjusted he saw a long row of box stalls, most of them filled with horses. Some one was singing as they cleaned out one of the stalls. Steve made his way to the stall.

"Excuse me?" He said leaning over the edge of the stall. A young man in a military uniform stood up and looked back at him.

"You talking to me?" He asked, slinging a shovel full of manure out the gate.

"Yeah, who do I talk to about renting a horse?" Steve asked.

"Not sure what you mean be renting," the young soldier replied. "But you'll find the sarge, down there--bald guy with the big mustache." He pointed his manure-covered shovel down the row of stalls. Steve thanked him and ran the direction he pointed.

The sarge was sitting behind a desk that had been set up in near the center of the barn. He was chewing on on something.

"Excuse me sir?" Steve asked as he approached the desk.

The sarge looked up at him without a smile. "Military stores is thata way."

The sarge said pointing out the door.

"No sir. I'm not looking for the stores. I need a horse."

"None of ums for sale." The officer replied.

"No, I don't want to buy one, I just want to borrow one for a few hours."

"Borrow one? You think I have feathers for brains boy? None of 'ems

available for borrowing either."

Steve wasn't sure what smelled worse, the horses or the sergeant. He tried to be as pleasant as possible. "Does anyone else in the fort have any horses?"

"Nope. We keeps 'em all in here to keep 'em safe from the Indians--and the emigrants." The sergeant spit a big brown wad of tobacco juice into the corner. An old bucket was there, but the walls behind it seemed to have more tobacco on them than the bucket had in it.

"Look," Steve tried again. "There's this girl I really like. I really need a horse to just take her to lunch. It will only take a few hours. I can pay you as well."

"Oh now ain't that sweet?" The sarge said sarcastically.

"Isn't what sweet sergeant?" A woman's voice came from the direction of the barn door. The sergeant jumped up from his chair.

"Nothing ma'am. Nothing. Here let me get your horse for you." The sergeant came out from behind his desk and quickly went to the woman who was dressed sharply in a riding habit. She handed the reins to the sergeant and patted the horse's neck and said something Steve couldn't hear to the horse. She then turned to the sergeant.

"Now sergeant please make sure she gets properly cooled down this morning and tell me what you and this young man were talking about."

"Weren't nothing mam. He's with them handcart pioneers and he wanted to borrow a horse to take his girl for a ride. I told him we don't have no horses for borrowin. That's all."

The lady now walked over to Steve and held out her hand that still had a riding glove on it. "I'm Mrs. Elliott. My husband is the commander of this god forsaken outpost."

Steve took her hand and replied. "It is good to meet you. My name is Steve. We're heading to Utah. We've had a long walk and still have a long way to go. I was just trying to do something nice for somebody I care about. I thought a horse ride and a picnic would be nice."

The woman looked at Steve for a moment and then said, "That is the sweetest thing I have ever heard. In fact it is the only sweet thing I have heard since we arrived here." She turned to the sergeant. "Sergeant, see to it that this young man has a horse for his picnic."

"But..." the sergeant began to protest.

"Please don't make me have to take this matter up with my husband."

"Yes, ma'am. I'll see to it." He turned to the soldier that was still mucking out the stall and told him to get "Nellie" saddled and ready to ride.

Mrs. Elliott turned and winked at Steve and then added, "If you follow the river west about a half a mile, there is a beautiful little meadow right on the bank that I've often thought would make a wonderful place for a picnic."

"Thank you ma'am, thank you very much. I have a little money, I can pay."

Steve held out his coins.

Mrs. Elliott smiled and shook her head. "Buy something nice for your friend. What is her name?"

"Annie."

"Yes, buy something nice for Annie."

"Thank you." Steve said as she turned and walked away.

Steve's vision of galloping up on a well-groomed stallion to sweep Annie off her feet was short lived. He didn't know a lot about horses, but Nellie was not at all impressive. When the soldier brought her out, saddled and ready to go, Steve had to stifle a giggle. She wasn't much bigger than a pony to start with and her back was very swayed. The stirrups nearly dragged on the

ground once they were extended to match the length of Steve's leg.

The young soldier handed Steve the reins and said, "Don't let old Nellie's looks worry you none. She don't go fast, but she don't spook easy and she just keeps on going. Got her from the Indians."

"That right?"

"Yup. Some hot head soldier stole one of the captain's prize stallions and made a run for it. Captain didn't even chase him. Knew he wouldn't get far. Sure enough, a few days later he come riding back in on old Nellie here. He wasn't wearing a stitch a clothes neither. Guess the Indians did some "trading" with him." At that the soldier chuckled. Then added, "Indians won't bother you none on Nellie. They don't want her."

"I can see why." Steve said with a smile. He patted Nellie on the neck.

"Well old girl. Let's go have some fun."

The soldier asked Steve if he'd like a leg up. Steve thanked him but said, "No, I'll just walk her over to the sutler's. Want to save her strength." He took the reins in his hand and started across the parade ground. The sergeant came to the barn door and yelled, "If yer not back before sundown, I'll send a patrol out after ya!" Steve didn't look back. Just waved his free hand.

There was a hitching rail in front of the sutler's. Steve tried flipping the reins over the rail to get them to wrap around and stay in place like he'd seen a few times in western movies. After the third try he gave up and tied a knot the old fashioned way. The sun was nearing the straight up position and he still had ten cents he wanted to spend on Annie.

As he climbed the steps onto the boardwalk, Samuel's family came out the door. Richard was the first to speak.

"Elder, is that your horse?"

"For the next four hours." Steve replied.

"You're going to need four hours to get that thing out to camp and back."

Samuel said looking critically at Nellie.

"Very funny." Steve slugged Sam's shoulder just as Sam's mom and sister came out the door.

"Elder, we got everything you wanted. Some lovely dried meats, a little cheese and some sweetmeats. They even had a little gingham we were able to buy. See!" Isabella pulled some red checked cloth out of one of the paper wrapped packages she was holding.

"Great." Steve said, "Thanks for your help. I've got to buy one more thing then I will be on my way. Oh, I almost forgot. I ran into the commander's wife in the stable. She said there is a very nice place for a picnic about a half mile west, right on the river."

"Don't worry Elder, we'll take care of it." said Samuel. "You just worry about getting Annie and that horse there."

Steve went for his shoulder again but Sam jumped off the boardwalk with a laugh. Steve thanked Isabella and her mom again and went in the door.

As Steve entered he looked around quickly, not exactly sure what he was looking for. There was a long counter across the back of the store with shelves up the wall behind it. There were several wooden barrels and white sacks stacked to make aisles throughout the store. The smell was an odd mixture of leather, spices, sawdust and even a little sweet perfume. Steve was still taking it all in when a voice called out from behind the counter.

"Whatcha' looking for young fella? Need to do a trade? We've done plenty of trading today."

Steve hesitated a little still looking around "Nope, not looking for a trade." He finally responded and began to make his way back to the counter and the voice. "Actually looking to buy something."

"Well, that's music to my ears today. Never had so many come through my doors and buy so little! You with the Mormon cart company?"

Steve was now standing in front of the counter admiring the row of jars filled with what were obviously candies of the time. He nodded his head in response to the last question. "I am."

"So what is it you are looking to buy?"

The question pulled Steve from his admiration of the jars and he finally looked up at the owner of the voice. He was a middle-aged man. His hair was parted in the straightest line Steve had ever seen. It was greased down and every hair seemed to know exactly where it should be. The man was shorter than Steve by a full foot. Every thing about him was thin and precise, including his mustache and his manners. Steve again hesitated, still not exactly sure what he wanted. "I--I'm looking for something. I don't know, maybe some kind of jewelry?"

The shopkeeper's eyebrows lifted, but only slightly, and then fell back into perfect position. "For a young lady?" He asked.

Steve nodded, his eyes again scanning the shelves behind the shopkeeper looking for some kind of inspiration.

"And what amount would you be planning to pay for this piece of jewelry you are looking for?"

Steve looked at the man again. Pulled the ten cents from his pocket and put it on the counter. "Ten cents." He said, not sure exactly how far it would get him. He wasn't left to wonder long. The shopkeeper coughed but quickly regained his composure.

"Young man for ten cents your best option might be to go to the blacksmith's and have them bend a nail into a ring for you." The shopkeeper's thin lips turned up slightly at the ends but quickly returned to their original position leaving Steve wondering if it was a joke or a serious suggestion.

"Are you sure you don't have anything? I don't have very much time--just some thing small?"

The shopkeeper lifted his left hand to the end of his thin mustache, gave the mustache a twist and seemed to be thinking. Without any emotion he said, "There might be something. If I can remember where I put it." He walked to the far end of the counter, pulled a small wooden box from under the counter and then came back to Steve. Without a word, he dumped the contents on the counter and then began to move them about on the countertop. They were mostly buttons, a few thimbles, a wooden marble rolled towards

Steve. He put out his hand and stopped it before it rolled off the edge of the counter. As he picked it up to examine it, the storekeeper called out, "Here it is!" He held up a small golden heart with a ring at the top. There was no chain through the ring and the heart itself was no bigger than Steve's thumb-nail. "I took this one in earlier this summer. I could probably get a dollar for it in Chicago, but we're not in Chicago are we?"

"Don't worry, EBay is coming." Steve said as he placed the wooden marble in the pile of buttons where it couldn't roll and held out his hand. The shopkeeper laid the heart on his palm. Steve took one look at it and said, "It's perfect. Can you wrap it for me?"

Chapter 31

"Are you sure she can carry both of us?" Was all Annie asked when Steve and Nellie finally made their way to her tent.

"Are you kidding? Ole' Nellie here could carry this whole company and half of the next one all the way to Salt Lake City!" He quickly climbed down out of the saddle, patted Nellie on the neck and walked over to Annie. He put his arm around her and turned her around so they were talking away from the horse then whispered in Annie's ear.

"Don't talk bad about her. If you diss her, she goes slower."

Annie looked over her shoulder and then back at Steve. "You're teasing me, aren't you?"

"No, I swear it is the truth. I just spent the last half-mile thinking up every compliment I could think of. The more compliments I gave her, the faster she walked."

Annie laughed. Steve continued, "Speaking of compliments you look wonderful."

Annie pulled away. "What are you talking about? I look the exact same

way I've looked everyday we've been on the trail."

Steve grabbed her hand and pulled her toward Nellie. "Like I said, you look wonderful." Annie rolled her eyes.

"So what is the name of this beautiful steed that we will be riding on?" Annie asked loudly and spoke towards Nellie to make sure that the horse would hear.

"This is Nellie, the most talented horse in the entire territory." Steve replied as he patted Nellie on the neck and shoulders. "Have you ridden before Annie?" Annie shook her head. "Not only is Nellie the most talented horse in the territory, she is also the gentlest and most pleasant to ride."

Steve took the reins that he had let drop when he arrived, passed one around the other side of Nellie's neck and then brought them together and wrapped them quickly around the pommel. Nellie stood and waited patiently. Steve turned to Annie, placed his hands on her waist and said, "Ready, jump!"

Annie jumped and Steve lifted her into the saddle--sidesaddle. Grabbing a hold of the pommel, he put his foot in the stirrup and swung up behind her. Taking the reins in both hands he called out to Nellie. "Ok, beautiful, giddy up!" Nellie gave up hoping for another mouthful of grass, turned and began walking.

Steve had hoped they could get out of camp without anyone noticing them and charted the shortest course to the outskirts of camp, but his hopes were dashed when the first child spotted them.

"Elder! Elder! Can I have a ride?" Soon there were dozens of kids following them and begging for rides. As the children gathered and made a commotion, the adults came to see what was happening. By the time they passed the last tent, half the camp was following them and the other half of the camp was lined up in front of them waiting for them to come past. Just when Steve was beginning to give up hope of ever being on his own with Annie, Mother O'Malley pushed her way through the crowd with a huge smile on her face.

"Elder! Ye are courtin' Miss Annie! Twas beginning to think we would run out of country before ya made yer move. But here ya are--laddy and lassie together at last!"

Steve forced a smile. "Hard to do much courting with a crowd!" he yelled back at her.

She looked around. "Hold on Annie and say no more Elder. Say no more." The towel snaked off her shoulder and snapped Nellie in the most sensitive part of her flank. Perhaps unaccustomed to sudden movement, or perhaps

because her nerves took as much time to move as every other part of her body, Nellie didn't get the message until the second sting of the towel. When the message finally arrived there was no problem with interpretation. She jumped and took off like a shot. Steve had to grab hold of the pommel to keep from being thrown off the back. As they left the crowd behind they heard Mother O'Malley's Irish accent sending everyone back to their camps.

Nellie's burst of speed was noble but short lived. A half-mile from camp they were back to a walk but they were alone. Steve broke the silence.

"Well, that went well. Do you think anyone noticed we're courting?"

Annie laughed a little. "Elder, what are we doing out here?"

"We're on a date." Steve replied.

"I know that Elder. But why? The worst of the trip is yet ahead of us."

"That's exactly why we are on this date." Steve said with emphasis on exactly. "Look Annie. You've taught me a lot since we met. I still can't believe how little you have and how hard you work. And for the first time in my life the gospel means something to me. I just want to figure out some way to return the favor. Who knows, maybe my whole purpose in being here is to take Miss Annie on a date and let her have some fun for just a

couple of hours."

Annie scoffed. "I hardly think God would send a messenger from the future just to have fun with me."

"Maybe not." Steve agreed, "But we can have fun finding out. C'mon, just a couple of hours relaxing and then we'll return to camp and put our shoulders to the wheel."

Annie didn't say anything. But Steve didn't give up. "I can't hear you."

Finally Annie said, "Alright. It is against my better judgment, but I will give you two hours."

Steve laughed. "I asked a girl to prom once. She gave me the exact same answer. I guess some things never change."

"What was her name?" Annie asked. Grateful to have Annie thinking about something other than the trip, Steve launched into a long and detailed explanation of the prom dance traditions. He was just beginning to tell her why you couldn't just walk up to a girl and ask her to go to prom when Nellie reached the river. Steve turned her to the west and began describing some of the ways he and his friends had invited girls to proms. Fifteen minutes later the trail came around a bend in the river and climbed a little hill. On top of

the hill was a small meadow surrounded by large cottonwood trees except on the river side where the grass of the meadow sloped gently down into the water. In the middle of the meadow was a bright red and white gingham cloth spread with bundles of various sizes.

Steve directed Nellie towards the cloth. When she was within ten feet, he pulled her to a stop, climbed off her back, made a sweeping bow and said to Annie, "My lady, your picnic is served."

"But how did you--?" She never finished her sentence. Just shook her head and smiled. As Steve helped her off the horse he saw Samuel and Robert wave from behind a tree and run off in the direction of camp.

Steve gave Nellie a whack on the backside and told her not to go far. Then turned to Annie, took her by the hand and walked her to the picnic. "Have you ever been on a picnic?" He asked her. She shook her head.

"Well it's a whole lot like the way we've been eating all our meals. You just call it something different so that it sounds funner and the food tastes better."

Annie tried to laugh and then began to cry. Steve put his arm around her.

"Hey, why are you crying?"

She sobbed for a moment and then managed to say "Because no one has

ever done anything like this for me before." She had her handkerchief out of her sleeve and began wiping her eyes.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to make you cry." Steve said weakly.

Annie smiled through her tears trying to make Steve feel better. "I know Elder, I know. Shall we eat?"

Steve helped her sit down and then took the seat across from her. "Well let's see what the picnic fairies got for us." he said trying to lighten the mood. He picked up the nearest bundle and began to unwrap it.

"Elder should we pray first?" Annie asked with a smile.

"Oh yeah. Sorry forgot." Steve offered the prayer and the two of them began to unwrap the bundles.

"Sweetmeats!" Steve called out. "Here have one." He held the brown wrapping paper with half a dozen dried fruit chunks in the middle out to Annie.

"Shouldn't we save those for dessert?" Annie asked.

"Nope. Today you get to eat dessert first."

Annie smiled. "Ok, dessert first." She took what looked like a chunk of apricot and popped it into her mouth. She closed her eyes and smile came over her face. "Oh Elder it is lovely!"

Steve had a purple chunk in his mouth and couldn't agree more. His teeth wanted to chew but he was having none of it. He was going to slowly suck every bit of sweet flavor out of it slowly. He lay back on the cloth and looked up at the wispy white clouds blowing by. How many thousands of pieces of candy had he gulped in his life? Yet nothing ever tasted so good as a little dried chunk of plum out on the prairie near Ft Laramie.

So passed the afternoon, opening little bundles, savoring each flavor, and enjoying every minute. The cheese and bread were a wonderful treat and the cold water of the Platte served beautifully to wash it all down. By the time the last bundle was finished they were both laying on their backs looking up at the clouds.

"That's odd." Steve said.

"What's that Elder?"

"I think I am actually full." Steve replied. I haven't felt that way for so long I had forgotten what it feels like.

Annie laughed. "You were right Elder. This has been wonderful. Thank you for bringing me."

Steve leaned up on one elbow and looked at Annie. "You're welcome." He thought about leaning over and giving her a kiss, but decided to give her his gift instead. "Thanks for coming. I--uh, well I have something for you."

"Something else?" Annie asked incredulously. She sat up and looked at Steve.

Steve sat up too and began fishing in his pocket. "It's not much." He said as he found the little folded up paper bundle and handed it to Annie.

"But, Elder I don't have anything for you."

"Just smile." Steve replied. She blushed, smiled and began unwrapping the package. When she got to the heart, she held it up by its little ring.

"It's lovely Elder. Just lovely." Her eyes were tearing up again. "I will always cherish it."

Steve smiled and said lamely, "Like I said it's not much, but I wanted to get you something."

"Oh it's lovely?" Annie said, she held it up again to take a closer look at it.

"What does the "w" stand for Elder?"

"The what?" Steve's smile disappeared.

"This little "w" inscribed here on the back." Annie said. "Just wondering what it means?"

Again Steve's dreams of a romantic afternoon seemed to be crashing down around his ears. How could he have missed the "w?" The shopkeeper only showed him one side! His mind raced. He probably should have just come clean and told her it was all he could afford and it came with a "w," but that didn't seem good enough. The "w" could mean something.

"My first name actually starts with "w." Steve blurted out.

"Really?" Annie said, very curious. "You spell Steve with a "w" in the future?"

Steve smiled. "No. Steve is my middle name. My first name is actually Wenlock, but my parents decided to call me Steve." Annie dropped the heart and looked at Steve like she had seen a ghost.

"I know, it's kind of a funny name, but it was my grandpa's name and his grandpa's name--a family thing." Annie was now staring at Steve very

closely.

"What?" Steve asked again. "Why are you looking at me that way?"

"How do you spell Wenlock?" Annie asked.

"W, e, n, l, o, c, k" Steve spelled it out for her.

Annie was now standing up, pacing back and forth in the grass next to the blanket.

"Annie? What is it?" Steve got up too and caught hold of her by the shoulders and looked down into her eyes.

"What is it?" He asked again.

"It's your name."

"Hey, it's no big deal." Steve replied. "Nobody calls me by it anyway. Just forget about it."

"You don't understand. It's not your name, it's my name!" Annie pulled away from Steve's grip and began pacing again. She walked down to the opposite end of the picnic cloth and then back to Steve. Steve just stood and watched her completely confused. Annie stopped in front of Steve and took

a deep breath.

"My mother's name is Hannah--Hannah Wenlock." she said and waited for the realization to register in Steve's face.

"Wow, that's weird that we both have the same name." Steve replied, "So Wenlock is a girl's name is that what's bothering you?"

"Elder, Wenlock is her last name!" Annie said with exasperation. "I always thought if I ever had a son I would name him Wenlock. Don't you see? Your name is Wenlock, your grandfather and great-grandfather were named Wenlock!"

Understanding began to dawn in Steve's mind. "So that means you were--you are," Steve hesitated, "my grandma?"

Annie kept pacing, shaking her head back and forth and mumbling to herself, "It couldn't be—could it? No, that's impossible."

"Whoa!" was all Steve could say. He dropped to his knees on the picnic cloth.

Annie knelt down beside him. "Elder are you ok?"

Steve nodded. "I remember now my parents used to tell us stories about our

pioneer ancestors. There was one that got disowned by her family when she joined the church. It's you isn't it?" He collapsed on his belly and then rolled over on his back with his eyes closed. Annie didn't answer and he kept talking with his eyes closed struggling to take in all the implications.

"That must mean you survive!" Steve sat up and looked at Annie who was still kneeling, sitting on her heels with her hands in her lap. She nodded her head like she had already thought of that. He lay back down and kept thinking and talking.

"It also means I almost kissed my great, great, great, great--who knows how many greats--grandma!"

"And what is wrong with kissing your grandma, Elder?" Annie asked indignantly.

"Nothing wrong with a grandma-kind-of peck-on-the-wrinkled-cheek kiss, but that's not exactly what I had in mind."

"No I don't suppose it was." Annie looked at Steve and winked.

He laughed and asked, "So do I have to call you grandma now?"

"If you do, I will never get married and you will cease to exist!" She

grabbed a wadded up piece of wrapping paper and threw it at him. He caught it in mid air and tossed it back at her. They both giggled and then sat silently for several minutes letting the revelation sink in. Steve was the first to move.

"Well grandma--I mean Annie. We better get packed up and get Nellie heading back to the fort. The sergeant said he'd send a patrol out after us if we didn't get her back before sundown." He stood up and took a few steps toward the horse and then added over his shoulder, "And at your age, you shouldn't be out too late." Steve was quick, but Annie had a good arm. Another wad of wrapping paper bounced off the back of his head.

They rode back to the fort mostly in silence, grateful that they didn't have to go back through the handcart camp to get there. Nellie was old and slow, but once she realized they were heading back to her stall they didn't have to give her any additional compliments. From time to time one of them would realize another implication of their newly discovered relationship and mention it out loud. Then they would both go back to their individual thoughts, until the next discovery was announced.

When they arrived at the barn only the stall-cleaning soldier was still there. He asked how they liked Nellie and they both gave her their final compliments and thanked him for letting them use her. Then they headed back to

camp. Steve held out his arm for Annie to take.

"Thanks Elder." She said as she took it, "And thanks again for the wonderful afternoon. I know it didn't turn out quite how you--how we--planned, but I think it was wonderful. I am proud that you are my descendent."

Steve smiled. "You know what's strange?" He replied.

"Could there be anything stranger than the fact that we just discovered I am your grandmother?" Annie replied innocently.

"Yeah, I mean for the last couple of months I've been living in this dream and I can't figure out a way to wake up. At first, it was really tough but I've survived and at times even enjoyed it. But this, this is really blowing my mind. I mean, what if something--you know, happens to you?"

"You mean what if I die?"

"Exactly! What if you die before you have kids and get married?"

"Well my plan is to get married first and then have children." Annie replied.

"You know what I mean." Steve said and Annie nodded. "So do you think I got sent here to help you?" he asked.

Annie thought for a time and then replied with a more serious tone. "I've been wondering the same thing. It could be, but in a way you've already done that. Now that I know that I have descendants, the whole world has changed for me." She paused, "And yet it hasn't. I joined the church because I know it is God's church. I'm going to Zion because the prophet said to come. None of that has changed, but I'm more determined than ever to choose the right--for you." She gave Steve's arm a squeeze.

"It's kind of the same for me." Steve said after a few moments of silence.

"I've liked you ever since I met you. But the more I learned about you, the more I thought, 'Man, here's a girl that's really got her stuff together.' I've never met anyone your age that knows what they want the way you do. And to leave your family and come on this trip all by yourself after all you have been through? I'm not going to lie to you--you rock!"

Annie was shaking her head. "Well thank you Elder, but I have only done what I felt was right."

"Exactly! You do what is right and that is so cool. But here is what is even cooler: Before tonight I just admired you, but when I found out you were my grandma it was like I was Peter Parker being bit by a radioactive spider! Or Clark Kent finding out that his father was from another planet! I felt like I was given super powers!" He paused for a minute to take a breath and

looked at Annie to see if she was getting it. She looked back at him blankly.

"Don't you get it?" he continued. "Before I just admired your qualities.

Now that I know you are my grandma, I also know that those qualities are a part of me! Because you rock, I rock!"

Annie smiled. "It's even better than that Elder."

"What do you mean?"

"We're all children of our Heavenly Father."

The sun had now set behind them. The campfires of the pioneers burned brightly ahead and promised external warmth, but neither of them was in any hurry to rush there and lose the warmth that burned within.

Chapter 32

With Laramie Peak looming down on them from the west, the Martin Handcart company left Fort Laramie on the ninth of October, eighteen hundred and fifty six. The rolling hills of the prairie quickly gave way to the peaks, canyons and ravines of the black hills. The toll on the carts was felt immediately. Breakdowns became even more frequent as the brittle carts bumped over rocks and crashed down steep inclines. As if the rough roads weren't enough, the saints began to feel the drain of climbing as they pushed their carts up the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. The weather also took a turn for the worse. Pleasant days and cool evenings became cold days and freezing nights.

Just as the company members needed more calories to deal with the added strains of the rough trail and colder weather, rations were cut to twelve ounces per day from the original pound. Captain Martin calculated the days it would take to cover the distance to the Salt Lake Valley and compared it to the days of flour left. A pound a day per person left them short of their destination so the rations were reduced to increase their odds of survival.

Steve did the best he could for his families. He added the biscuits and bacon he had purchased at the fort to the rations. He was amazed how much difference just a small piece of very salty bacon made in his energy level and

attitude. By the time each night rolled around he was wasted. Sleep came quickly but he rarely slept deeply or peacefully. He was never really cold at night, but he never got really warm either and he would wake several times throughout the night, which left him exhausted to start the new day. But there was no choice but to keep moving. Others were depending on him.

Just three days out of Fort Laramie, Steve's carts were bringing up the rear of the train. The sisters' cart came down hard off a rock ledge. There was a loud crack and the right wheel fell off, leaving the cart to topple to the side and dump all of the sisters' belongings on the shale-strewn trail. Steve quickly ran up to the cart to survey the damage. The axle had broken. Certainly more than he could repair by himself. He looked up the trail and saw the last cart crest the next hill and disappear. The sun was halfway down the western sky. He looked around at his people. Their faces were all drawn and tired. He had to make a quick decision. If they all waited here, no telling how long it would be before the company missed them and sent back help. If he let the rest of them wait with the broken cart while he ran ahead, they might end up spending the night alone or having to walk in the dark to camp.

Little baby Steve cried in his mother's arms. Steve made his decision.

"We're going to need a new axle. We don't have one here. Let's load what

we can of the sisters' possessions on the other three carts. I'll stay here with whatever we can't load up. The rest of you go on ahead. As soon as you get into camp, tell the captain where I am and that I need an axle. He'll send someone back to help me."

There were a few objections. Annie's were the most vocal. She insisted she or someone else be allowed to stay to keep him company. Steve refused knowing that it would take every able-bodied person just to get the remaining carts into camp. She finally agreed after a few private words with Steve. The sisters most important belongings were quickly distributed among the other three carts and the pioneers set off leaving Steve with a few blankets, the makings for a fire, and a broken down handcart.

"Stay together!" Steve yelled as they trundled off, "And don't worry about me. I'll be fine!" Then to himself in a lower voice he added, "just fine."

He headed off the trail to the nearest stand of trees and began breaking dead limbs off the trees. By the time the sun went down he had a large stack of firewood by the cart ready to keep him company for the night. In the dim light of dusk with a blanket over his shoulders and his hands red from the cold and the hauling of wood he huddled over a little spark and gently blew it to life. The grass and kindling he had carefully prepared were extremely dry and the fire took right to it. He fed in larger sticks and soon had a bright

fire burning. Steve scanned for a couple of rocks suitable for a back rest and was soon sitting comfortably next to the fire gnawing on a Fort Laramie biscuit and sipping water from a tin cup. He had no idea if the captain would send someone back during the night or if he would wait till morning, but either way he planned on keeping the fire going all night so he would be easy to find, warm, and protected from whatever was out in the dark.

He must have dozed off. His eyes opened wide but he laid still. It only took him an instance to remember where he was. Something woke him up. The fire was down to hot embers. Steve scanned the darkness without moving. A wolf howled, loud and clear and very close by. Steve jumped up grabbed the nearest stick from the pile and looked in the direction of the howl. He could see nothing. He kept his eyes focused on the direction of the howl but started to load more wood on the fire. Soon it was roaring again and Steve began to regain his confidence.

"Who's afraid of the big bad wolf!" He sang at the top of his lungs. "Come and get me if you dare!" He thought he saw movement out the corner of this eye. He turned quickly and saw two shiny eyes reflecting the fire light not more than twenty feet away. He slowly bent down, picked up a baseball size rock and gave it a throw. The rock bounced harmlessly on the shale of the hillside but the two eyes disappeared.

"Looks like I'm not the only hungry one tonight." He said out loud and began looking for throwing rocks near the fire. As soon as he had a nice pile of rocks ready for the next visit, he picked up his blankets, wrapped them around his shoulders and returned to his sitting position.

"Come on back, old wolf!" He called, "let's play catch."

He stayed awake the rest of the night throwing rocks and feeding the fire. Just as the eastern sky was becoming light a voice hailed Steve from the West. "Hallo the fire! Is that you Elder?"

"It's me!" He called back, "and an old wolf that tried to eat me last night!" Steve threw the last of his rocks out into the woods. He'd had several good shots at the old boy during the night. Only one of his rocks reached its target. The wolf yelped but was back again within a few minutes to try again. Samuel and the company carpenter came up to Steve's fire quickly and began to warm themselves.

"Sorry it took so long Elder." The carpenter was saying, "We were up the better part of the night taking care of all the other repairs. Got here as soon as we could. If it wasn't for your friend Samuel here, I'd have been sleeping soundly back there on the trail several times."

"Thanks for coming. I didn't sleep much last night either--an over zealous

wolf. I wish I could give you a warm breakfast, but I've got nothing to offer."

"Oh, I almost forgot." Samuel said, "Here is a biscuit from Annie. She said to make sure you got it." Samuel handed the biscuit to Steve and added, "She sure is sweet on you."

Steve smiled, broke the biscuit into three pieces and handed a piece to Samuel and one to the carpenter. "Yeah, we're just like family." He replied before stuffing the biscuit in his mouth. The carpenter was now looking at the cart wheel. He asked Samuel for the axle they brought with them. By the time the sun was shining on them, both wheels were back on and the remainder of the sisters' belongings were loaded up ready to go. Steve kicked dirt on the fire and they set off.

"How far is camp?" Steve asked.

"About five miles." The carpenter replied. "The captain is very anxious to waste no time. He told me that they wouldn't wait for us but expected that with the three of us and a light cart we could keep up."

"Alright then, let's go find them." Steve was between the traces in the front and the other two were pushing from behind. The reduced weight in the cart made a significant difference. Even though they were all tired and hadn't

slept the night before, they moved along quickly and made their way easily over obstacles that would have been impossible with a fully loaded cart.

Steve was enjoying the relative ease of the journey and contemplating his night with the wolf when he looked up from the trail and saw a great billow of black smoke rising ahead of them. He pointed it out to the others. "What do you think it is?" He asked over his shoulder? "Our camp fires don't put out that kind of smoke. Does it look like it is coming from camp?"

"Hard to say." The carpenter replied.

"Could be." Added Sam.

"You don't think it is Indians do you?" Steve asked, his concern growing. Neither of the others replied but without saying anything they all began walking faster and then broke into a jog. The unloaded cart bounced and crashed over the rocks on the trail. Steve worried they might break another axle, but they kept running. Fifteen minutes later they rolled into what had been camp panting and sweating. There were no carts and no pioneers but the remains of four or five large fires still giving off black smoke.

"What the?" Steve stopped the cart and lifted the traces so he could walk out from under them. The three of them wandered about the camp and examined each of the fires. There were bits and pieces of just about everything

imaginable in the remains of the fire. Blankets, buffalo skins, household utensils, even the remains of a few books could be seen smoldering.

"What do you think happened?" Samuel asked Steve and the Carpenter as their wanderings brought them back within hearing distance.

"I don't see any blood, or any signs of a struggle." The carpenter replied.

"Me either." Steve agreed. "But for some reason they burned lots of things."

"Must be the weight." The carpenter said suddenly. "We had so many carts to repair last night, the captain talked about reducing weight so we'd have less breakdowns and could move faster. They must have done it this morning."

"But blankets and buffalo robes?" Steve asked. "It's getting colder and we're burning our only protection from the cold?"

The carpenter shrugged. "You saw how fast we were able to move with the light cart this morning. Blankets and buffalo robes weigh a lot."

Steve didn't answer. He was a big advocate of moving faster to beat the winter, but he was really worried about staying warm. "Well, we better get

after them. They'll be moving faster now." The others agreed and they headed back to the handcart.

The carpenter was right. They caught up to the tail of the company just before dinner and got the full story as they prepared and ate their meager meal. Weight limits had been dropped from seventeen to ten pounds including bedding and cooking utensils. Children were limited to five. Everything else was burned. Many very difficult decisions were made and most had no choice but to give up a blanket or two. Rations were also cut again, this time to half a pound of flour per day.

Strong fathers, who had carried and pulled their families for hundreds of miles and sacrificed their rations for their loved ones, now began to pay the price. Steve spent the majority of his days and energy helping Aaron and Elizabeth with their cart. Aaron seemed to be growing weaker each day, yet still did all that he had once done. The women, children and animals also suffered. Feed for the oxen that had been plentiful out on the prairie became scarce. Even when an animal was butchered, there was very little to eat. Those animals that did survive were so weak they could pull little and began to slow the company.

Two days after the weight limit was reduced, Steve struggled to sleep at all. He tossed and turned in his blankets unable to quiet his thoughts long

enough to sleep. When a sudden gust caught the tent door and sent it flapping in the wind, Steve gave up. It was nowhere near dawn, but he was too cold to hope for any more sleep. He rose and made his way to the tent door. A brutally cold blast took his breath away as he stepped out of the tent. This was a new level of cold and with the wind it cut right through his rough clothes. He went back in the tent, grabbed his sleeping blankets and his bag and then stepped out into the cold. He had been using Annie's Book of Mormon each evening to read but had returned it to her before bed. He wished he had it now. He reached in his bag and pulled out the empty journal. Maybe if he wrote his thoughts down they would leave him alone. He tossed the mostly empty bag in the nearest cart and wrapped his blankets around his shoulders. No one else in the camp seemed to be moving but there was a fire burning on the edge of camp. He made his way towards it.

He had a sense of foreboding. He couldn't put his finger on it, but it was there. Certainly there was plenty to be concerned about. He didn't know how much longer he could keep going and was sure he was in much better shape than most of those in the company. But today something was different; maybe it was the intense cold. Steve looked up to the sky but there wasn't enough light to tell if there were clouds or not. He suspected there were. He walked into the light of the fire. He didn't realize it was Captain Martin's until he stepped up to it and held out his hands to warm them.

"Evening!" The captain said, looking up.

"Mind if I borrow some of your heat?" Steve asked.

"Glad for the company." The captain replied.

Steve looked at the captain and smiled. Even in the firelight he could clearly see how much the captain had aged over the past few months. He stood facing the fire for a few minutes warming his hands then turned and warmed his back.

"Trouble sleeping?" The captain asked.

Steve turned back around. "Not sure what it is, but my thoughts just keep racing."

"Mine too." The captain replied. "I just keep asking what else?"

"Pardon me?"

"I'm constantly wondering if there is something else we can or should be doing." The captain said, then added, "--to save these people."

Steve thought for a moment. It was obvious that the captain was bearing a tremendous burden and he didn't want to add to it. "I think we are doing all

we can sir. We've reduced our weight. I don't see any way we could move any faster or survive on any less."

"We may have to." The captain replied. "Just did the calculations again. Our flour won't hold out much more than a week at the current rate."

"A week?" Steve said. The pit in the bottom of his stomach opened wide.

The captain nodded. "Even with the reduced weight, we just haven't been able to make the progress we need to. Our best hope--our only hope is that Elder Richards has arrived in Salt Lake and is sending help."

"How long would that take?" Steve asked.

"Best case, I think he might have made it to Salt Lake by the third or fourth of October. Maybe a few days to a week to get wagons loaded and start back. We're still four hundred miles from the valley. If the weather holds and they can do twenty miles a day, that is still twenty days to get to us. Probably end of October--best case. Also have to figure that the Willie Company is between here and the valley and they are going to need help as well. That will cause some delay."

"What is the date today?" Steve asked quietly.

"The nineteenth." The captain replied. Steve whistled. The captain nodded then asked. "Remember our discussion back in Iowa City Elder?"

"Seems like a life time ago." Steve replied.

"You said you had seen the future and that many handcart pioneers die." Steve just nodded and the captain continued, "I hope it is not these pioneers Elder, but I would be lying if I told you I wasn't very worried."

Steve's mind began racing. There had to be some way to help all of these people survive. "So what if we just stayed put? Set up our tents more permanently, conserved our energy and waited for help to arrive?"

"I've thought of that, but we're not even sure help is coming. If it doesn't, we would all starve to death in a matter of weeks. Even if it does come and find us here, there is no way they could bring enough food for all of these people to survive the winter. Our only hope for survival is to get to the valley. Every day we can move, is one day closer to any rescue that may come, and to the valley. No Elder, we have no choice but to keep moving. As much as we would all like to just sit down, moving is the only thing that will save us." The captain stood now and turned his back to Steve and the fire to warm his backside. Steve turned as well. After a few moments he turned back around.

"Captain?"

The captain turned back around and looked at Steve.

"I just want you to know that I think you are doing a great job." Steve stammered a little, not used to giving such compliments but knowing that it needed to be done.

The captain smiled. "Thanks Elder. That means a lot to me. Well I'm going to try one more time to get some sleep. Big day tomorrow. Good night."

The captain turned and walked toward his tent.

Steve watched him go and then took out the journal and began to write.

October 19, 1856, Somewhere in Wyoming--

I write because I'm too cold to sleep and too tired to keep remembering. I used to think it was a dream. If it is, I'm on the verge of never waking up. My brain hurts. Memories of my "past life" disappear now as fast as the cup of flour that I eat each day. I'm done struggling with the memories; there is too much to struggle with here and now. So I write. If I don't survive, I hope someone will find what I have written and benefit. If I do sur-

vive, maybe in a warmer more comfortable time, it will all make sense.

Very cold tonight. There is little to keep us warm. We burned most of our heavy blankets on the trail a few days back to lighten our loads.

Those times that I was warm still burn the brightest in my memory. The names and faces of those that were closest are all that remains.

Chapter 33

The biting cold of the morning never lifted and the clouds became darker and hovered lower and lower. The company got on the trail in good time and crept forward into the cold wind. Every available scrap of cloth or material was wrapped around hands, feet, and faces to try to keep them warm. Steve consoled himself and those that were near enough to hear his voice with the fact that at least there was no snow or rain and they were dry.

When the carts in front of them began to pull off the trail and stop, Steve tried to get a read on time from the sun but the clouds were so thick there was no way to tell where it was in the sky.

"Seems a little early for dinner." He mentioned to Elizabeth and Aaron as they pushed their cart off the trail to see why everyone was stopping.

"Not dinner, Elder" Lydia said, "It's a river crossing."

"Are you serious?" Steve left his carts and ran ahead. The trail climbed to the top of a little embankment and many of the pioneers were now lining the top of it looking at what lay ahead. Steve joined them. The site was crushing.

The trail dropped down the opposite side of the embankment into a wide, deep, and fast moving river. Not only was the current moving fast, it was

carrying chunks of ice and slush with it. Steve's body involuntarily shuddered. He knew from the winter camping that he had done as a scout that getting wet in freezing temperatures was death. How could they possibly cross this river now and survive? He scanned the growing crowd of pioneers. No one was anxious to be the first to go into the freezing water. Captain Martin stood away from the crowd, down near the river.

"Is it the Platte again?" Samuel was now standing beside Steve and asked the question. Most of the rest of Steve's people had followed him onto the embankment.

"I think so." Steve said.

"I don't think I can do this, Elder." It was one of the single sisters.

Steve turned and looked at her and the other faces surrounding him. He took a deep breath of the cold air. He wasn't sure he could do it either, but something welled up inside him. Instead of agreeing with the sister he said, "We can do this." Quiet at first, he said it again louder, nearly shouting. "We can do this! You can do this!" Pioneers that had been anxiously looking at the river now turned to look at Steve.

"I know that you are cold. I know that many of you have nothing left to give, but you can do this! I know you can because I have seen the future. I

have seen your children and your children's grandchildren live true to the gospel because of what you have done, what you will do here today and what you will do in the future. The faith you have will not only save you, it will save generations to come that will tell and retell the stories of your suffering and faith here on this trail!" Steve paused for a minute, not sure where the words were coming from but knowing that he had to go on. He continued, "Though some of us may die, our story and our faith will not. This church will continue to grow and this story--your story--will be told throughout the world for hundreds of years. Converts from Africa to Hong Kong to your homelands will be inspired by your faith and courage here today. What you do today, right now will give them the faith and courage they need to cross their own cold rivers. You can do this, I know that you can, because I have heard your stories."

Steve paused again and smiled. There was nothing more to say. He took the single sister by the hand and said, "C'mon, I'll carry you."

At the waters edge he took off his boots and socks and handed them to the sister. "Keep these dry for me, I'll need them on the other side."

After the first few steps into the cold water, the final crossing of the Platte was a blur for Steve. The softball size river stones along the bottom of the river were nearly impossible to walk on. He slipped many times and had to

catch himself by putting his hands down. In the deepest sections the river came up to Steve's waist. The current was strong and with each crossing he would drift slightly down river and have to walk back up to start again. He carried as many as needed a ride and helped pull and push carts that were in need. He lost track of his own people entering the river. At one point he recognized Aaron sitting on a sandbar in the middle of the river worn out and unable to go any farther. Before Steve could get to him, others helped him across. He saw Samuel's mom enter the river with her little son Richard on her shoulders. He wanted to go help her but already had someone on his back. As he dropped off his passenger on the opposite shore and turned to go back for more he heard shouting down the river and saw Richard and his mom being dragged away by the current. Some were shouting at her to let go of her son and save herself but she wouldn't do it. Steve started to run with the current toward them but slipped and fell. Others ran down the shoreline. Samuel's mom continued to fight the current and finally got close enough to grab the hands reaching out to her. Both she and Richard were pulled to safety.

After a time, Steve forgot where he was. Even after the last pioneer was across, he turned and tried to head back for more. The captain and Samuel grabbed him.

"It's done Elder! It's done!" The captain was yelling at him.

Steve looked back at him with blank eyes. "My family is over there!" He yelled. "I've got to go back to them!" He tried to tear away, but Samuel held him tight. Annie came running over to help. She had also rescued a young boy who had been swept away by the current. She was wet and shivering.

"Elder, Elder! Look at me Elder! It's Annie!" Steve looked right through her and said nothing. "He's got dementia!" She yelled at the Captain and Samuel. "We've got to keep him walking and get him warm somehow!"

The two men walked him up the embankment toward the carts. Steve's legs just dragged. The single sisters had built a fire as soon as they were across and had a little broth warming. Annie called for a cup of it and gently held it to Steve's lips. He resisted. Cold sleet began to fall in great sheets from the dark sky. The captain looked up.

"I'm sorry," he said to Annie, "but I've got to get the company moving."

"It's alright, I've got him." Sam said, "You go." The captain left and began calling for the pioneers to move.

Sam tried to hold Steve up, but it was too much. They both collapsed on the ground. Annie dropped down next to them, warm tears mixing with the cold

sleet on her cheeks. Sam got back on his feet and began trying to lift Steve again.

"It's ok Sam. It's ok. Could you get his blankets for me?" Annie said through her tears.

Sam ran toward the carts to find Steve's blankets. Annie held Steve's head in her lap. She held the cup to his lips and poured a little in his mouth. Steve sputtered.

"Steve! Steve! Can you hear me?" Annie sobbed.

Steve began to feel warm. It was such a nice feeling; he had almost forgotten what it was like. He didn't want to move. Just stay put and enjoy the warmth, like a Sunday afternoon nap on the couch. He began to hear music--singing. Sounded like he always imagined angels would sound. Kind of like the tabernacle choir. Oh, it felt good to be warm!

"Steve! Steve!" Somebody was calling him. The pain instantly returned. He was cold. So cold, but he couldn't feel his legs. Cold darts were hitting his face. He tried to find the warm place again but it wasn't there. He opened his eyes. It was Annie. He tried to smile at her but he was so cold.

"Steve can you hear me?" She asked.

"Hey, you called me Steve." He whispered.

"Oh Steve is that you?" Annie hugged him.

"Sorry, still me." Steve tried to smile again.

"For a minute I thought I had lost you." Annie said.

"You can't lose me Annie. We're family."

"You did it Steve. You did it." Annie said.

"What?"

"You found your message. You are a messenger from God."

Steve tried to smile again. "Maybe," he whispered. The warm sensation was beginning to return. He so wanted to be warm. "I've got to go Annie." He reached for her hand and gave it a squeeze.

Annie fought the desire to keep him. "I'll miss you." She said.

Steve opened his eyes again and smiled. "I love you grandma."

She bent over and kissed him on the forehead. "I love you too."

There was no more pain. It didn't gradually go away, it was just gone.

Steve could hear the singing again. He decided that angels did sound a lot like the tabernacle choir. He started looking around for a bright light. In death there was always a bright light that one was supposed to walk towards. He didn't want to miss his bright light. The singing stopped and someone began to speak. It sounded like a voice he would hear in church or conference. He was glad it sounded like conference. He hoped that meant he was going to be waiting in paradise and not prison. Still no light. He began to listen to the voice. It mentioned the Martin handcart company. He strained to hear and understand. The voice continued:

"Those who set out on the long journey from the British Isles to the valley of the Great Salt Lake began their travel in faith. They had little or no knowledge of what they were getting into. But they moved forward. They began their journey with great expectation. That expectation gradually failed them as they moved west. As they commenced the tedious journey following the Platte River and then up the valley of the Sweetwater, the cold hand of death took its fearsome toll. Their food was rationed; their oxen died; their carts broke down; they had inadequate bedding and clothing. Storms raged. They sought shelter, but they found none. The storms beat about them. They literally starved to death. Scores died and were buried in the frozen ground."

Annie! Steve looked around for her. He tried to call out. Where was she and the rest of his people? Where was he? The voice went on:

"When the rescuers reached the beleaguered Saints, they were like angels from heaven. People wept tears of gratitude. The handcart people were transferred into wagons so they could travel more quickly to the Salt Lake community. Some two hundred died, but a thousand were saved. What a story it is. It is filled with suffering and hunger and cold and death. It is replete with accounts of freezing rivers that had to be waded

through; of howling blizzards; of the long, slow climb up Rocky Ridge. With the passing of this anniversary year, it may become largely forgotten. But hopefully it will be told again and again to remind future generations of the suffering and the faith of those who came before. Their faith is our inheritance. Their faith is a reminder to us of the price they paid for the comforts we enjoy."

Steve started to cry. Two hundred of his friends died. He sobbed great sobs.

His whole body shuddered.

"Steve? Steve?" A voice was calling him again. He resisted. He didn't want to return to the cold and the pain.

"Steve can you hear me?" He finally gave in and opened his eyes a crack. He slammed them shut again. There was the bright light he had been looking for. "It helps to open your eyes." He thought to himself.

"Steve? Steve, it's me. Steve, it's Mom. Can you hear me?"

"Mom?" Steve opened his eyes just a crack. His mom smiled down at him. She was wearing white and looked like an angel to Steve. "Mom are you dead too?"

"No, I'm not dead son and neither are you!" His mom was now crying.

A flood of memories that he had forced down came back to Steve in a rush.

"Mom, I am so sorry I hurt you!"

"I know Steve, I know, it's ok. The important thing is you are here. I've got to call your father." She gave him a big hug. Steve inhaled deeply.

"I love you mom."

"I love you too son."

Epilogue

Steve's journey didn't end that October day in the hospital room as his mom sat listening to President Hinckley's general conference address waiting for him. Waiting as she had done every day throughout the summer and into the fall. His journey was just beginning. He was given a gift we all receive from time--the gift of new perspective and, if we're willing, opportunities to use and share it.

According to the doctors, Steve never should have survived the fall off the cliff at the ski resort. They did all they could for him, but there weren't many signs of brain activity and it was very doubtful his shattered legs would ever carry him again. His mom spent many hours on her knees and had been assured otherwise. She insisted that patience, faith and gratitude for each small step were what was needed. She was right.

Steve's therapy began the day after he woke up. It was painful, but he smiled through it all. The ladies delivering the hospital food fought for the opportunity to deliver Steve's. "How could anyone cheer for over-cooked broccoli?" they wondered. They also enjoyed his hugs of gratitude.

Steve's buddy Hank had been pretty shook up by the accident. He started drinking to try to forget and was near the bottom when Steve's dad had a

feeling he should call and invite Hank to read to Steve as he lay comatose in the hospital. Hank resisted at first, but was desperate for peace and finally agreed to give it a try. That was in July. The only reading material Steve's dad left in the hospital room was a Book of Mormon, so Hank started to read. He never missed a day. In January, three months after Steve returned, Hank surprised him with a large white envelope from church headquarters.

"Guess what we're reading today?" Hank asked Steve as he walked in the room.

"Uh, an envelope?" Steve replied sarcastically.

"Glad to see some of your brain function is returning." Hank teased then continued, "But this isn't just any envelope. This one is from President Hinckley and it's addressed to me."

"What? Let me see that!" Steve was totally surprised. Had he been able to walk, he would have jumped off the bed and wrestled Hank for it. As it was, the best he could do was grab for it. Hank held it just out of his reach.

"Not yet," Hank replied, "there is something I have to tell you first." Hank grew serious and Steve stopped trying to reach for the envelope.

"I haven't told anyone this," Hank sat down next to Steve's bed. "I don't

know if anyone told you, but I was the first one to find you after your accident. When I saw you ski across the trail and go out of bounds I knew what was going to happen. I yelled for you but you didn't hear me."

Steve was listening intently, Hank shifted a little in his chair and kept talking. "I flagged down some boarders and told them to go find the ski patrol. Then I skied down the trail to where it goes over that creek. I took off my skis and hiked back up the creek looking for you."

Steve thought about what a painful hike that must have been. "Thanks!" he said to Hank.

Hank just nodded then, as if unsure about how Steve would take his next statement, he said cautiously, "When I found you, you weren't alone."

"You mean the ski patrol got to me first?"

Hank shook his head. A shiver went down Steve's spine.

"Who?" he whispered.

"I don't know." Hank replied. "There was a girl. She was dressed like a pioneer. She had your head in her lap. She was crying. There was also a young guy--about our age I think. He was covering you with a blanket."

Tears were beginning to flow down Steve's cheeks, Hank was also becoming emotional but he kept talking. "At first I thought I was hallucinating. I'd been trying to run in those ski boots to find you. I could barely breath. I thought it was some kind of trip. But they didn't go away until the ski patrol got there."

"Did they say anything?" Steve asked quietly.

Hank shook his head. "Just smiled at me and then disappeared."

They sat for some time in silence. Finally Steve said, "Hey, read me what the letter in that envelope says."

Hank was called to serve in the Hawaii, Honolulu mission and would be leaving in March.

Steve's recovery continued. By the time Hank left he could walk with crutches. At April conference he was using only a cane, and by July 24th he could walk without any help. His large white envelope finally arrived in August. His mom made muffins for the occasion and the entire family gathered around the kitchen table for the opening. "You are assigned to labor in the England London mission." the letter read. Steve was so excited he jumped up and his chair crashed to the floor.

Steve's Aunt June came from out-of-state to hear Steve speak in church before he left for his mission. She was the self-appointed family genealogist. Steve had never spent much time with her but had called her several times since his accident to see what she knew about their ancestor who was a handcart pioneer. She had confirmed that his great, great, great grandma was named Annie and that she was a member of the Martin Handcart Company. Steve had shown so much excitement that she determined she would bring all the information she had about Annie the next time she came to visit. When she heard Steve was leaving on a mission, she decided it was time to make the trip.

After all the extended family and friends had wished Steve well and left for their homes, Steve said goodnight to his family and excused himself to his bedroom. He settled on his bed with his Book of Mormon and began reading. Someone tapped on his door.

"Come in!" he called.

His Aunt June stuck her head in the door. "Can I come in?" she asked.

"I've got something I want to show you."

"Sure." Steve replied, swinging his feet around to sit on the edge of his bed.

Aunt June walked across the room and handed Steve a small cardboard box.

"You will be a wonderful missionary Steve. I know you will. When you called and asked about your handcart ancestor a few months ago, I knew that I needed to bring you this box. It's everything we have of hers."

"Hers?" Steve asked.

"It's not much, but there are a few pictures of your handcart grandma, her history and a few of her things."

"Really?" Steve began to open the box. His aunt said goodnight and went off to bed.

Steve had been so busy with his therapy and mission preparations that there were now entire days that he didn't even think about his handcart experience. In fact, there were some days he wondered if it was just a dream. He had certainly learned things and it had changed him, there could be no doubt about that, but had he really talked to his grandma or was that just part of his dream?

He opened the box carefully. There was a very old picture of an elderly lady in a long skirt with a shawl wrapped around her, standing by herself under some trees. Even with the increased age, Steve could tell it was Annie though he had never seen the picture before. His hands began to tremble. There were a few type written pages. He took them out and carefully un-

folded them. They appeared to be the history his aunt had mentioned. He read:

History of Annie

written by herself, April 9, 1931

I was born in Barking, Essex, England, on the 8th of January 1837, the younger daughter of Daniel Hicks, a sailor, and Hannah Wenlock Hicks. I knew very little of my father's family. My mother was born of Scotch and English parents.

Father being a confirmed invalid, I had, as it were, to keep and care for myself, assuming the responsibilities of a woman when I was a mere girl. As a child, I was very devout, praying and asking God for guidance and firmly believing that he would protect me from all wrong. And surely, I have been saved many times from most certain evil.

I was alone, or rather away from my own people at the time I first heard the Gospel and I think I loved it the first time I heard it; it seemd so quiet and pleasant to me. I embraced the Gospel and was baptized on the 17th of January, 1855, in the White Chapel Branch in London. Shortly after my baptism, before I had been confirmed, my relatives sent me a terrible book against the Mormons, marking it in places for me to read. The tales were so wicked, I was afraid I had done wrong and decided to ask the Lord to direct me aright. I fervently pleaded with our Father to answer my prayer that night as my confirmation was to take place the following morning.

I immediately was comforted by a wonderful dream. A book (The Book of Life) was opened to me and the leaves were turned in rapid succession until the page with my record was found. On the page was my name without a mar or blemish against it. A loud clear voice spoke to me saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." I was overjoyed at this revelation and have never doubted the gospel from that time on. You may be assured I was confirmed the next day feeling perfectly happy and satisfied. From then on my relatives were unkind and cruel to me. I worked very hard to obtain enough money to come to America. I would knit from early morning until evening in the London workshop.

On the 25th of May, 1856, I sailed for America on the ship Horizon, beginning our journey to Zion. I crossed the plains with the belated Handcart Company of Edward Martin. We underwent numerous hardships and lost many of our good and faithful band on the road. I reached the valley on the last day of November 1856, with not a friend to meet me--but I am still here with the saints and many friends in the valley of the mountains.

I was married to Absalom Pennington Free, a Patriarch of the Church on March 5, 1857, and am the mother of seven children, all of whom are living. I am also proud of my thirty-four grandchildren and the thirty great grandchildren.

I have been asked to relate an incident or two that might be of interest to you. One which I recall very clearly, occured as we crossed the Platte River. The stream was very strong and the water bitter cold, making it very hard to cross. In the company was a widow with her family. Her oldest boy, a fine young chap, had started across the river with his handcart but the current was so strong that he was borne down stream. Seeing the boy's condition I ran down the bank of the river and went out into it in time to catch the boy and his handcart. I helped the boy to shore but he was almost frozen. In the evening when the company made camp, the boy's mother was going out to gather chips of wood but the boy insisted upon going himself. When he had been gone a long time, a search was made for him and he was found frozen to death with his sticks in his arms.

Tears were running down Steve's cheeks again. He looked back in the box. Only a little envelope that had yellowed with age remained. He picked it up and opened the flap. There were no obvious contents. He opened the envelope wider and looked into the corners. Something small was down in one of the corners. He reached in and pulled out a little golden heart on a single ring. He held it up and turned it over. Through his tears he could just make

out a little “w.”

Thanks for reading! I hope you enjoyed it. Let me know what you think at <http://ctrstories.com/node/1> or by email at dave@thefrees.com.

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