

The Doubletree

He had said, “ No Lady, I ain’t nothing special, but I do know a little about wagons and horses. Your doubletree is broke and you’re lucky the horses stopped.’ These words coming from a dirty bearded forty year old rider that looked the part of an outlaw. He was Tracy Bird just luckily escaped hanging for being a part of a robbery and attempted murder. The woman he spoke to was a thirty year old Farmer’s widow recently losing her husband in a mining cave in. Tracy had seen the team bolt sideways off the dirt road almost turning the wagon over and quickly rode over as he saw the driver was a bonnet covered woman.

He said, “Ma’am are you Ok. I saw you were having trouble and rode over.” The woman in tears replied, “this is just terrible. I cain’t do a damn thing right! I don’t know what to do. Would you please ride into town and tell the livery man , I need help. He is Sam Jefferies , a friend of my husband. Maybe I can unhook the horses.” Tracy said, ‘ I can go get your husband maybe. I’m heading into Kanab. “ The lady replied, ‘ Don’t have a husband. He was killed three months ago. Do you know if my wagon can be fixed? I need it badly . Are you a farmer from around here?” Tracy followed with, “” No Ma’am, just traveling through. I ain’t nothing special, but I do know a little about wagons and horses. Your double tree is broke and you’re lucky the horses stopped. Would you like me to unhook for you and tie up your team. Names Tracy. I’d be glad to help. It’s gonna get awful hot here pretty quick and there ain’t no shade for miles.’ The woman was nervous and Tracy could see she was afraid of him. He said, “ Ma’am , I’m not the cleanest and I know you feel frightened, but you have a rifle. Can you ride a horse? I’ll go with you to town and take your horses. You might get a double tree and some help.’ The woman still worried said, “ Mister Tracy, I thank you , but I’ll stay here with my wagon. Please just take my message to Sam. He’ll be able to help me .” Tracy assured her he would get her message to Sam and quickly rode away.

An hour later, Sam Jenkins lifted a tired and annoyed head saying, “ Abby Winton again! Damn woman needs to take a husband.

She's in trouble every week. Don't like Mormon men , but that's all we have around here. She better go back east where she came from. Yeah, I'll get out there with another wagon soon as it gets in this afternoon. I cain't do nothing till then.' Tracy exclaimed, "This afternoon! Hell man it's hotter than blazes out there . She's about an hour out. The wagon needs a double tree. Hers broke." Sam replied, " Too bad, I just cain't drop everything and go out there. She'll just have to tough it out.. Tracy said , " Damnit man the woman is in tears. Suppose it was your wife out there." Sam replied " I'd leave her! Worthless bitch ran out on me." Tracy shook his head and replied, ' Sam, loan me a pack horse and double tree. I'll go out and put it on for her. It's just a swivel hookup.' Sam said, " You'll need some tools and whose gonna pay for it. She ain't got no money." Tracy said, I have a little, but I can work off the cost Sam. You've got lots of manure piled up in here. Mister the lady needs help. She said you were a friend of her husband." Sam said, " Yeah he died owing me fifty dollars, but if you're willin, I'll stake you on your word you'll pay. It'll save me a trip I don't look forward to."

Later Tracy was once again standing talking to this frightened and worried Abby. He said, " Abby , I got your name from Sam and he staked me the horse and double tree . Gimme an hour or so and we should have you on the road. Abby said , ' I don't know how I can thank you mister Tracy. I don't have any money. I was hoping to sell the team and wagon, but when that runs out I'll sell the farm and go back east where I can teach school. I refuse to be a second or third wife for a man." It was almost evening by the time Tracy had the wagon repaired and Abby said, " Mister Tracy, I'll have to go back home. It's too late now for town. Would you follow me back to the Farm, I can at least offer you dinner." Tracy replied, " Abby, it's not mister ,the name is Tracy Bird and I'm a half breed Comanche, but took my Father's looks and my Mother's name. My father was an Outlaw. I appreciate the offer for supper. Haven't had a good meal in months, but what about you. People will talk you know." Abby replied, "Don't worry about me, they talk already; Mildred is a black lady, lives with me. She came from Baltimore , lost her husband, needed help, and I brought her outta town to give her a place to stay. She's been a great help since my husband died. Some folks think it's a bad thing, but I don't. I

needed someone, it's really lonesome and scary out here alone. she'll fix you a good supper." Tracy replied, "thanks, I'll take you up on supper. Pretty good pay for putting on a double tree. Lead on Abby, I'll follow."

Mildred was pleased to meet Tracy and thanked him for helping Abby. She said, " Mister Bird, you're the first man visitor we've had that didn't want to marry Abby. She's much too young and pretty to be a single woman, but all these men have wives. it's common here to have two or more, but nobody's been after me. Too old, I reckon or black; I don't know which, but I'll be fifty pretty quick. Thank the good Lord for miss Abby. She's a saint. Took me in when I had nothing and no place to go. The only place I could find to stay was the livery stable, but even Sam wanted me outta there. So here I am Mister Bird a black lady with a shot gun to protect miss Abby. Thank you and supper'll be ready pretty quick." Tracy replied, ' Mildred , you won't need a shotgun unless you want me to quit eating. That pot of beans smells great."

Abby said, "it's not much for the help Tracy, but we've been pretty hard on the chickens, for eatin already. Only one rooster left and he stays outta shootin range. Gotta keep the hens going. I can sell the eggs. I know you must be tired after today. You might wanna pile up in the barn tonight and share a little bacon with us in the morning, before you head down the road." Tracy thanked them and headed for the barn. He was thinking, " Too bad Abby lost her man. This is a pretty little farm , be nice to see it all in daylight. Should take a look at that wagon it sure pulls sideways. Wheels need greasing , I reckon."

The following morning Tracy told Abby at breakfast the wagon wheels needed grease. Pulling hard the way it was might be why the double tree broke he said, ' I don't want you to get the wrong opinion Abby, but I could work on it today and get into Sam's this afternoon. I need to return his horse and I owe him a few day's work to pay for the double tree. No Abby, I know you don't have the money right now. i'm just glad I could help out a little. This sure is a pretty farm you've got. Wouldn't take much to put in a garden. Your husband knew what he was doing when he bought it." Abby replied, ' No , he was a miner. His Dad left it to him when he died. It's been hard scrabble trying to live

here and I don't know anything about farming. I love it but I cain't keep it. Mildred and I will go back east where I can teach school."

Mildred said, " Miss Abby, you know I can help you . I think we can keep the farm . I was raised on one. And we can both get work in town doing something." Tracy said , " Abby I think she's right. This is too nice a home to give up. Let me ask you this, I don't mean to interfere, but let me stay over a couple of weeks and fix a few things for you. I'm not in a hurry going anywhere and old Scooter , my horse can use a break. I can stay in the barn. It's sure better than the brush and hard ground. I'll get into town and settle up with Sam . that'll take a few days, but after I can work that well shelter and the hen house over for you. They both need attention , especially the hen house. Ol'fox or bobcat get in there and you won't have a chicken left.'

Mildred said , ' Mister Tracy where were you going? Maybe we could put you some smoked meat together with a few sea biscuits to help you out.'turning she went on, "Abby. He's right about that hen house. It would be a real boone to have him stay over and fix a few things." Abby replied , " Tracy, I'd love it if you could do that for us. I just cain't thank you enough already. We can promise you good eatin while you're here if you don't mind pork with the beans." Tracy replied, " Best offer i've had for a job Abby and it ain't likely to get me hung. Couldn't ask for any better. I'll get on that wagon greasing and then get into Sam's. I'll try to get back before dinner."

That evening after returning from shoveling manure all day and eating a good meal Tracy said,' Abby, I got a lotta questions about your wagon today. It sounds like you could get a real good price for it. Sam say's there ain't a place closer than Salt Lake city to buy one and they're sky high in price. A small used one will go for better that two hundred dollars yours ought to bring three easy, but you cain't get by without one if you're gonna be farming or working in town. I had a thought coming from town, I'd like to tell you about. Ten or twelve years ago a lot of wagon trains came through this area before the town was started. Any one that's been west of here will tell you of the stories they heard about those trips and the hardships they went through. For years folks tried to cross that Great Salt desert west of the Salt Lake. It's a hundred miles of nothing . no animals, no water, just a dry miserable nothing. i've heard stories of that desert for years.

Many folks died trying to cross it and many turned back short of half way. One train of twelve wagons had to leave everything and ride and lead their animals out. There's a lot of junk scattered along the wagon route. That's a high and dry desert. What interests me is the broken and abandoned wagons that would still be there. It's true there may be nothing but junk, but iron is like gold and it would all still be there. Ol'Sam is paying through the nose for horseshoes. This far from back east iron is twice what it costs in Virginia. A couple hundred pounds of junk iron would buy groceries for a year. Horse shoes and wagon wheel rims are almost like gold in Arizona. Your wagon, Abby, would easily carry five hundred pounds if we could find it, burn off the wood from abandoned wagons and bring it back to Saint George sell it and go back for more. It's a thought to make wages. It's way too late for a garden this year, but I'll bet on the iron being there and it's really a couple weeks or a month maybe to go there and do some searching and hauling out. Any way it's just a wild idea, but I've thought about making a trip over there and checking it out. Maybe when I leave here, I'll ride out that way and see if anyone else had the same idea." Abby replied, " Tracy that's a great idea, but we cain't do something like that." Tracy replied , " No you ladies cain't; I can, but any plans that way will have to wait. I've got henhouse work to do."

It was a week later and Abby asked Tracy to stay if he would. He had made repairs everywhere and she was getting use to having him around. Mildred was hoping and crossing her fingers for them to become a couple. They sure seemed to work together , but money was short and Tracy felt he was becoming a burden Abby couldn't afford. He was planning on going back to Sam's when early one morning he was awakened by loud grunting going on near the barn. Pigs! There was a herd of them rooting up the lot behind the barn. Quickly grabbing his rifle, he shot two in the head. When Abby and Mildred came out wondering about the shooting, they were amazed to see him bleeding the animals. Abby exclaimed , " what are you doing Tracy , we cain't eat wild pigs!" Tracy said, ' Look at'em Abby , they're domestics gone wild. There's nothing wrong with the meat. Mildred , I'm sure you know how to salt wrap the meat and smoke the hams with the shoulders. Abby, it's called money when you can sell ham and bacon. Both of you gimme a hand and build a good fire under your

bath tub to get me some boiling water. Ladies, we might just be in the pig business. There's another dozen in that herd and about half of'em will butcher. If I know people this time of year we can trade or sell every thing we can get."

Between Mildred and Tracy, Abby learned a lot about pork. A smoker was built and the smell of smoked ham and bacon filled the air nearby. It wasn't long until Abby had money in her kitchen egg money jar. Tracy had considered trapping the young pigs, but said to Abby, "We cain't feed'em, they'll just have make it on their own. Maybe if we had corn, we could do it, but that's out, we're gonna try the Auction for our pork. There's a number of miners that come there and I don't think they'll complain about a little tough pork. Maybe we can do a little trading."

Abby said, 'Trace, you've been a God sent miracle for us. I've often wondered why you stuck around.' Tracy said, "'Abby it was you. I guess I got stuck the minute I saw you in that broken wagon. You reminded me of a pretty mountain girl whose Dad saved my life. I reckon I owed something in return. I'll leave any time you want me to. You know that.' Abby said, "No, Tracy, you've come to mean a lot to me and I think you know that. Maybe we should make plans." Tracy exclaimed, "Abby are you serious! Girl, I have nothing but my horse. I cain't do a thing for you." Abby replied, "In your own words Tracy, the hell you don't! I'd be back east if it weren't for you and where would Mildred be. It's not what you own or have in money that makes you a man, there's twenty or more of those that came calling. None of them asked what they could do to help me. You didn't even ask, you just did it and keep doing it. Well Mister Tracy I need a husband and you're the one I want, I know you have feelings for me and I cain't help but love you. " Tracy laughed and hugged her saying, "Abby honey that's not the way it supposed to happen you know, but you read my mind. I'd love to marry you."

Milderd was thrilled beyond words to hear the good news and sharply said, "I knew it all along. It's just takes some longer than others." Tracy said, 'Abby hon, I'm ready today, but I've gotta get this pork sold or traded first. Let me see how the auction goes and we'll have a few dollars for the parson or maybe I could trade him a chicken or two.' Abby said, "Oh No you don't! We ain't getting rid of my

chickens to get married. You go ahead with your tradin and I'll handle the Parson." Mildred asked , "honey , you won't give up your chickens to get married. I never heard of such a thing." Abby laughed saying, " Well I might consider letting that rooster go." Tracy left shaking his head at the laughter.

The Auction turned out to be better than selling the meat. Tracy traded for every thing the miners wanted to get Rid of. He wound up owning six burro's, guns , bullets and hand tools. Abby asked about The burro's Tracy said, " I haven't forgot about that iron in the desert and each burro can carry a hundred and fifty pounds easy. Lady that's hundred pounds of iron plus their water. How many horseshoes and nails will that make at a dollar per shoe and two dollars for five pounds of nails. You're looking at about three hundred dollars for your jar. The good thing is, your pasture and homestead land will feed these burros and your horses for most of the year. No I haven't forgot about the iron. I'll be building pack saddles every chance I get. I still think there's money to be made from the abandoned junk out there and we're gonna try to get some of it. The big thing is water. I and the animals will need water and food. That desert is over a hundred miles across. I'm figuring on three days in and three days out from St. George. That should allow for the iron search and loading. Water is the problem I'm working on." Abby said, "You figure on some water for me too. I'm going with you." This shocked Tracy saying, " No, No Abby, it's gonna get nasty out there. You stay here and hold things together. I think I can do this on my own and we ain't married yet. Folks will talk." Abby said, " They need something to talk about. We should be as good a thing as any, but I don't care. I'm going with you married or not!"

Abby wanted a private affair so the wedding was held at the parson's home. Mildred had wanted a big celebration , but Tracy said, " Millie, I don't have anything but work clothes and I'd make Abby look bad. She's right, a private wedding will do for both of us. There'll be talk enough .Her husband hasn't been dead for a year yet. I'm the one to celebrate. I never thought a woman would have me."

With the wedding over, the happy couple began making plans for the desert trip before winter came in. Two water barrels and two sacks of corn for the wagon and each burro would carry four gallons of water each. Tracy went over everything and left Mildred his riding

horse. She would have a way to get to town if needed. Mildred said a silent prayer for their safety as she waved them good bye.

At St George they took on the water they would need and Tracy talked to long time residents to make a map without disclosing his intent other than curiosity intentions. Most thought him crazy , thinking he was crossing the desert to find something or take the short cut to Las Vegas town in Nevada . This was a trail of death. One family's grand father , Able Mathews told a story that really excited Tracy . Able was a survivor of that ill fated twelve wagon train. He and his family abandoned their wagon and made it back to St. George with their four horses. He stated that the other eleven members also left their wagons, but continued on with what animals they had. Some made it out alive, but most didn't. Three young men from back east had a terrible time, greenhorns all three, I don't think they made it.

No one has ever attempted that trail since with Conestoga wagons. Many others had failed over the years. Most lucky to get back alive. He knew of some prospectors that had made it across with pack mules, but the wagons were not near the trail they followed and never found to his knowledge. Able went on to say, "We were all short on water and turned south toward a rocky ridge we could see in the distance, but a rider returned with bad news . No water! Short of the ridge we attempted to cross a ground swell and lost a wagon breaking down. After that we all stopped and abandoned the heavy wagons. There were heated arguments going on, and the three young men from the broken down wagon buried one of their horses that had to be shot. It was plain to everyone that desperate measures must be taken in order for us to live. Some horses were beyond help. They couldn't go on, they were shot and left laying. Many were taking their canteens and walking on figuring Las Vegas was closer than going back. " Me and my family returned to St George. We were very lucky to get out alive. All of our family possessions lost . None of the others came back with us. Every time I watch a beautiful sunset in that Salt Desert I can only remember the hardship and death. I cain't see the beauty."

Later to Abby , he said, " Honey, it doesn't sound like a good idea after all. That desert is soft in spots and we could bog down easy and lose our wagon. Sounds like the iron is out there but we're risking

it all by going into the desert. It's kinda up to you Abby. It's going to be mighty tough on you." Abby replied, " Tracy you were God sent for Mildred and I. You've made everything work for us. This was your idea and I think it's worth the risk. You know we have to find some way to make money. Let's do a short trip and see how it goes. If we have to lose the wagon, we can still get out and I know we've got plenty of water. I'm willing to risk it Tracy, Let's get on with it before winter gets here."

Four days found Tracy and Abby chopping iron shoes from the dried feet of dead horses and oxen that seemed to increase in number the further they went. One wagon they passed looked to be complete, but Tracy worked on ahead, not bothering to stop. The small iron is what interested him. It was looking across a long stretch of items thrown from wagons to lighten the load that Tracy said, " Hold up Abby, don't take any more. Let's go one more day out and turn around. We'll load our wagon on the way back. It'll be easier on the horses and burro's. Kinda dumb of me to load on the way coming in, but we've got a couple hundred pounds already. We'll pick up some of these cast off tools on the way out. We've gotta watch out for sump holes under the crust . That one wagon we passed had been left mired in one. I'm gonna stick to the old wagon tracks and walk ahead with a pole to tap the ground. Might save us from a broken wheel or bog. One good thing we're only down a third of our water. One more days work and we should have our load."

Abby stood looking at the trail ahead and couldn't help but cry for the poor dead animals and sorrow the families must have experienced in having to throw out favorite family belongings. It almost seemed evil to be benefitting from their misery . Tracy put his arm around her saying, "Abby, I know it's heart breaking, but put yourself in their place hoping and praying that some day someone might get use from what they had to leave. I'm sure few really had any thought but to survive and now we're trying to survive on their throwaways. Honey let's gather what we can . I'd like to make it back to that mired wagon and see if it had a possum sack of fire wood underneath. We need a fire. It's cold mighty quick when that ol'sun goes down. We might have to sleep with the burro's to keep warm."

It was almost twilight when they had searched throwaways and collected iron back to the mired wagon. Luck was with them . it had a possum sack half full of wood, but Tracy had to dig under it to get the wood. He said , “ Honey I’ve got three pick axes and this shovel we picked up. I’ll bet we could get this wagon out in a week and it looks in pretty good shape. Maybe grease it up and I’ll bet it’ll roll. Looks like it broke through the crust and that’s like mud it’s in. We may be picking up pennies when we could sell a wagon. That rush for the gold fields in California caused a lotta bad judgment and too many dreams of getting rich. That’s probably why this wagon has set here for six, eight or maybe ten years, but look at it. Weathered and rusted but still in one piece. A new board here and there and it’ll sell pretty easy. The big thing are the wheels. They may be beyond much use. We’ll look it over in daylight.”

Morning brought a beautiful day and Tracy said, “Honey, we’ve got almost seven hundred pounds of iron. No one would believe some of the stuff we found. All those pots, skillets and kettles will sell. All the hand tools and nails, I’ll bet we’ve got a hundred pounds of those alone. It’s just amazing what we might have missed covered in blow sand and pot ash. The half way point is really loaded with stuff. All those poor dead animals, probably already worn out and pitiful from crossing the desert getting here. With no feed anywhere the hard pull through loose sand took what little strength they had. I’ll bet most fell in their tracks and couldn’t be beaten to get up. The owners left them to die. It would have been merciful to cut their throat and spare them the torture of a slow death and I’ll bet some owners did just that. I have seen skulls with bullet holes. Yeah Abby, the sad story is there. You can read the suffering and misery they must have had. There’s nothing we can do about what is in the past. Just hope we never have to face such a thing. No crying girl , I know it hurts, but we have to move on.”

Abby swallowed her feelings and went to work taking things from the wagon. Most everything was trash, weathered and only metal objects usable. A wooden box under the seat had at one time held the wagon jack, but now empty and split open. Tracy reached for a flat dirty iron washer in the corner and screamed , “ Tracy! Come here!” Gold! it’s gold!” the flat washer was a fifty paso coin, dated 1821. An

excited Abby and Tracy searched through everything for more and wasted half a day looking. There was no more and Tracy said, “ Now Abby , you can see what gold does to you. We haven’t watered the horses and burros or fed them any corn. it’s a great find, but we’ve got work to do and finish our loading. I wanna head for St George tomorrow. We’ll not mention that gold coin to anyone. It’ll only make our job harder because many folks will go looking and interfere with our gathering iron. You think about it, these people carried money with them and we may find a little in some of the abandoned stuff, but iron is what we’re after.”

Neither Tracy or Abby could believe their good fortune. They would be going home with a little over eight hundred dollars. Tracy said, “ winter coming too fast Abby , we’re gonna have to wait until next summer to make another gather. It’s gonna get nasty and cold out there. I wanna go talk to Able again before we leave. I’d like to find out a little more about that wagon out there.” Abby replied, “We need to take something back for Mildred, I’ll go pick out a dress and maybe a sweater for her. You go ahead, Able might know how we can get that wagon out.”

Able asked , “ Mister Bird wasn’t it. I can see you came out alive. Did you find what you were looking for?” Tracy replied, ‘ I’m not sure, but it’s getting rough out there. I’ll wait for summer and go back. I wanted to ask you about a wagon bogged down about two days out. It looks like one I’m looking for. Do you know who was driving it?’ He replied, “ Yeah, a few city boys from back east. They bought two of the old Mormon wagons from Elder Williams They threw away a lotta stuff and went on with us in the other wagon. I heard they never made it to California. Not surprised, They sure didn’t belong out here. Couldn’t pour sand from a boot. You might get something from Elder Williams. Try that good lookin house near the church.”

The Elder after introductions and Tracy’s question, replied, ‘ Yes mister Bird , Able is correct I think. It’s been a long time, but the young man had an unusual name. Just a minute, we keep all cash transactions for the Church. I sold two of our emigrant transport wagons to the young man. Did you notice our Brand on the wagon tailgate. It’s a big M burned into the wood. Yeah, eight years ago it was. Jimmie Draper was the name yes he paid two hundred dollars for

one and only fifty for the other; It had a little too much ware. I don't know where he got the horses from , but they loaded up in town like they were going five hundred miles. Yes he paid in Mexican gold and probably did the same in town. That's about all I can tell you." Tracy said his thanks in leaving.

Later telling Abby what he found out and Abby said, " Sure busted my bubble Trace. My coin could be one he picked up in town. I was hoping to find more. In that wagon." Tracy said, ' I told you so. Gold does that to you. You'll probably be dreaming about it. " Abby laughed saying, "You're right again Oh great Master, I already have."

Mildred was thrilled to have them home and was overjoyed by their success. The stories they had to tell of the killing field they had seen was still hard to talk about. Abby had a hard time with the tears just talking about it." The beautiful gold coin drew a surprise " Yipes!" from Mildred and Abby told the story of finding it. It was later as Tracy repeated his conversation with Elder Williams , that the name Draper came up and Mildred said, " That name, Draper. I heard it years ago when we lived in New York city. Some kind of a big Bank robbery. I don't know, but maybe his name was Jimmie Everyone talked about it for years. Stole a bunch of money. My sister Ethyl still lives there and I'm sure she would know all the dirt and gossip. She lives on that stuff. I've got a letter, I'm writing to her; I'll ask about Jimmie Draper. Your gold in his wagon and what the Elder said, about buying with gold in town might mean something. Won't hurt to ask. She needs something to talk about anyway."

Tracy now able to buy corn, easily trapped two litters of small pigs and now he was officially in the pig business. Some were developing feral markings, but the meat wouldn't show that and bacon was bacon. With winter coming on and no grass, horses and cattle were cheap. Tracy and Abby traded her horses for three good looking mules. Tracy said, " This is a great trade Abby. Mules are much easier to handle than horses and can eat anything. They'll be just what we'll need in that desert .My ol' Scooter will work pullin and we'll have a four up.I'm looking to trade for some wheels to fit that bogged wagon. Abby, that to me, is an easy hundred and fifty dollars with a little wood work. We'll carry a little more water on the burros going in and I'm taking in ropes and pulleys to move that wagon."

It was past January when Mildred received a letter from her sister and practically let out a quick cry when reading the letter. Abby and Tracy both rushed to her . Mildred held up a hand saying, “ I’m Ok! Miss Abby get that gold coin out will you?” then after looking exclaimed, “Oh God! It’ an 1821! Listen to what Ethyl writes. “ A saloon owner Shang Draper was the leader of the gang that robbed the Manhattan Savings Institution in New York city. Shang was a nickname, his name wasn’t mentioned as Jimmie. There was a Jimmie Hope and Sam Perris in the gang. It was a massive amount of money securities and twelve thousand dollars in cash. It was the biggest robbery ever committed in New York. Most of the gang was caught and arrested, but only part of the securities recovered. The news report stated that Emperor Maximilian of Mexico used that bank to hide part of his ill gained fortunes in one of their safety deposit safes. The cash stolen was from his private safe. It was twelve thousand in newly minted 500 peso gold coins dated 1821! Never found; Tracey is it possible that this is one of those coins?”

Tracy replied “ Not likely . I’m sure that coin was common everywhere. It is strange though, that the Draper name comes up with that particular coin of 1821 date. Draper is not a common name so there could be a connection. It’s too bad that the names of his companions in St. George is unknown. It makes for a good story, but that’s all it is. We’ve got a few months to get things set up for another trip. I wanna get that wagon. We’ll take four wheels in with us, I think that trail is a gold mine all right, but for iron in all that discarded farming equipment and wagons. We’re going back to get more iron. I don’t wanna waste our time looking for gold Paso’s. We get that wagon and a load of iron out, we’re looking at maybe not twelve thousand , but a good twelve hundred.”

As June approached, Tracy began shutting down his pig operation and began trading his pigs and meat to get supplies and equipment for the trip. Ropes and pulleys he took along to get the wagon moved. Mildred exclaimed, “ Land sakes Tracy, you’ve got a wagon load. You won’t have room for any iron on that wagon!” Tracy replied, “All of this stuff we’ll bring out with that bogged wagon. Those four wheels take up most of the room. They’ll come off my rig right away. I think I know how to move that wagon. The wheels were

buried deep in the mud, now hardened to brick almost. There hasn't been soft mud in that area in five years or more. I'm taking the wheels off and dragging the box over to safe ground, put my new wheels on and that should be enough to get it back to St. George. The trick will be getting those wheels off. I've gotta think about that."

It was the middle of June, hotter than blazes on the Salt Lake Desert. Every day it was too hot for work and Tracy had just about given up trying to get the wagon out, The wheels were buried deep and dried splitting and ruined beyond any use. Digging was hard going and trying to get leverage for loosening the cap nuts was impossible buried as they were. He had decided to give it up and was splitting dried water barrel staves for a camp fire when he knew how to get the wheels off to move the wagon. His Ax! He could chop and break the wheel spokes. . it was a simple answer to his problem. He said , " Abby honey we're getting up at day break and start busting off these old weathered and rotten wheel spokes. We'll need the four up harnessed and we'll use our wagon to pull that Mormon wagon out. I think that'll work best with the least amount of trouble without breaking the axels."

Sun up and having coffee with the wagon box free of the wheels , a few jerks by his team and the box had came free. Abby was digging trash and old bedding out when she called him saying, " found the wagon jack Trace, it' s here!" Tracy looking at it said, " A good metal one. Most are made of wood. We can use it right away. I'm gonna take a mule and pull those iron rims out, they'll probably sell just as is."

Four days later, they were in St. George dickering with a buyer for their Mormon wagon. The iron work was in good condition and the new wheels made it a good buy. Tracy pocketed two hundred and seventy five for it . He also sold iron for fifty dollars . They were a happy couple, but their activity and selling generated too much interest and Tracy said, " Big mistake Abby, I let this Mormon wagon lose us a lotta money, I'm afraid. There'll be others out there now looking for iron and anything else that'll sell. I got greedy too quick. We're gonna have to hustle now before we get too much company out there. I wanna go by Elder Williams and ask a few more questions."

Returning on horseback they had to pack harness. Abby rode a mule and Tracey his Scooter horse. Once in camp , Tracy said, “ Meant to tell you honey. Elder Williams couldn’t tell me much. He showed me the entry he’d made for sale of the wagons. He said they were back east men, spoke with eastern city accent and kinda dumb. Left their wagon Jack sitting in his shed. He figured they didn’t know how to use one or maybe even know what it was for. We’re gonna pack up here and go out two or three days before we turn around and begin picking up iron. I think we can do much better loadin up as we go back. Cain’t do much through the day so we’ll plan on day break to begin moving . I would love to move at night, but cain’t afford to take the chance on driving into a possible sump that’s just a crusted over dry hole. We’ll just have to tough it out. Sure a lot harder than last fall when the temperature was cool. I can see why these early travelers had so much trouble. They didn’t have a string of burro’s carrying water.”

Two days out and any sign of wagon tracks was gone along with any sign of throwaways . Tracy said, “ looks like we lost’em. We better go back away.” Abby said , “ Didn’t that old man say they turned south toward a rocky ridge.” He replied. ‘ Damn, I forgot! Cain’t see nothing in the dark. We passed their turn off, I see a low ridge off south there. That’s gotta be it. Honey, I don’t think we wanna go there. I think we should just take what we can going out and call it good We’ve seen a good wagon load of iron coming out this far. I know it’s tempting to go for those other wagon’s Abe told us about, but we need to reload everything for the time it’ll take to make a run down to that ridge. We could make it down there, but we need time to load iron and remember we can only search, dig and load in the early hours. We just ain’t set up for two more days extra and we don’t have shade for the animals. They’re needing a lot more water than last year. I don’t wanna chance it. I think we’ll be pushing it as is.”

A week later and they’re in St. George when trouble stopped them cold. Abby came down sick and scared Tracy into thinking too much hot sun and work in that desert had brought on sun stroke. The scare was over and turned to joy when Abby found herself to be pregnant. Their iron brought three hundred and Tracy said, “ We’re going home! Honey , you’re not going back out there. We’re done!”

Abby argued that they would be giving up everything out there because she was pregnant. She insisted that she would be all right, but Tracy said, “ No! we’re going home and start raising chickens, and a baby. This desert ain’t going no where. Maybe we’ll be back.” Once home Mildred was thrilled with the news of a baby coming and Tracy went back looking for pigs again. He was tempted to sell the Burro’s but Abby stopped him saying, “ Honey I won’t be pregnant forever. Maybe we can go back next summer or fall maybe.” Tracy said , “ No, I think the cat’s outta the bag now and this fall there’ll be folks going out there looking for anything to sell. Right now it’s too hot for anyone unless they’ve got a string of burros with pack saddles carrying water. If they try it with out plenty, they’ll leave their stuff out there too. Late September would be about right for another trip” Abby said, “ I know I cain’t go with you . I’m sorry we’ll just have to wait. You cain’t go it alone. You know that.” Mildred spoke up saying, “ Ain’t no reason I cain’t go with you Tracy. Abby can collect eggs and feed corn to the pigs for a few weeks. From what you two have said, “ Those abandoned wagon’s you talked about could really pay off and with other folks looking around out there they could be found. I can drive a mule Tracy . I was born on a farm remember.” Tracy said , “ No Milderd, I cain’t ask you to go out there. I’ll think of something. Maybe someone from town.” Mildred shook her head saying, “ I came from town and I can lift as much iron as any woman.” Tracy said , “ We’ll think about it Mildred, September is a ways off yet.”

It was August when Tracy was replacing a flooring board in the wagon and Abby brought him water. He was using the metal wagon jack she had found in the wagon they sold and asking if that was it. Tracy jumped to his feet exclaiming, “ Damn, I’m an idiot! Honey, Elder Williams said they left the wagon jack in his shed! You know what that means? They put their gold in the Jack box under the seat and you found this one in the bogged wagon.” Abby said excitedly, “The gold may be in the other wagon jack box! Oh God Trace, is it possible?” Tracy replied, “ Honey it has to be there. Maybe they took some with them, but that much gold weighs sixty pounds or better; I don’t think so. It’s my guess they argued about it and planned to come back and get it. I know they did if they had to walk out. Honey I hope you don’t mind feeding pigs for awhile. Mildred and I can go look for

gold!"Excitement occupied their every day getting things set for another trip into the desert. Mildred was a house afire in anticipation.

September finally came and it was still too hot for daytime work in the desert, but Tracy said, "Honey I think we'll load up and head for St. George, I want to speak again to Elder Williams and ask him what kind of gold was used purchasing those two Mormon wagons. It was ten days later when Tracy was met with a surprise from Williams exclaiming, ' Damn you Mister, you played hell with the Able Mathews family. They went into that desert of yours. Two are dead and there's still three Grandson's out there, out of water and dying as we speak. The idiots heard your stories and just couldn't wait. Their Grand father' wagon was abandoned out there and they went to find it. They think there's family stuff left after all these years. Young lives wasted mister and they're on your shoulders.'" Tracy turned to Mildred saying , " Millie I'm gonna take a run out there with a couple mules and water, you've got a gun , just hang out in the camp site. I'll see if I can find these boys."Mildred quicky helped him get pemmican and water together. He waved leaving at a fast trot.

It was midnight and Tracy pressed on. There was enough moon light and he wasn't in a wagon. He made much better time. He rode all night at a fast walk, then into the next day and it was hotter than blazes when he passed the location where they had found the bogged wagon. He sparingly gave the mules water and let them browse for half an hour in a brushy area. He was pleased to see they ate almost anything , but he had to hurry on as he chewed jerky. It was mid morning of the second day when he saw a lone horse standing off the trail and quickly rode to it. It was a mustang, almost dead on it's feet and he took time to wet it's mouth and let it have a quart of water. He was hopeful it would be enough to help until he could find the boys. An hour later he found the three boys, all teenagers about out of their minds with thirst. They were laying in the brush for shade. He had to fight them off the canteen forcing them to understand water, too much , will make'em sick and could bring on a stroke to kill.

After an hour he heard their story, The never found their Grandpa's wagon and their horses died, one had strayed away and that was the one Tracy had found. When evening approached , the boys were wanting to ride the mules and race home out of the desert. Tracy

said, “ No, these mules havn’t had descent food in three days and you ain’t pushing them nowhere. If you wanna race home , go ahead and take off walking, but my mules stay with me. If you wanna get out alive, you better start using some common sense. We’re gonna travel at night and hold up in the day. We’ll be three days getting out, but we can get out . That horse of yours we’re gonna take him out too. Going slow , we’ll make it. Rushing things and we’ll be walking for another day.”

There was much joy and celebration when Tracy brought the three boys in alive. Tracy was a hero , but ran into another problem. Mildred was black and the folks all considered her a slave. While he was gone she had been called insulting names and had her money refused at the local store. She was told that she was to remain outta town and get her water from the creek. They didn’t want her using the town well. Tracy was fuming mad, but Mildred said, “Trace, don’t get too mad about it. Believe me, I’ve been treated a lot worse, back east.’ Tracy said, “ Mildred, I won’t have you treated that way . I risk my life to save those three ignorant boys; you’re my partner and the town treats you like dirt. I’m gonna go and let this Elder know how I feel.” Mildred said, “ That’s the best way to lose Trace. You cuss’em out and they won’t tell you nothing. Keep your feelings to yourself and win. Remember I’m in this too. You win, I win, Ok?” Tracy said, “Mildred where you been when I needed you, I could sure use you as my mom. You’re right, I’ll go as their shining hero and they’ll be happy to tell me anything I ask.’ It was later when Tracy said, “ Mom , you were right! They bought the wagons with gold coin and no one else knew anything. Able came to give me his sincere thanks for going out for his Grandsons. at least he appreciated it. We’re gonna hold up a few days for the mules and I was gonna buy that mustang I brought back. Able gave me the horse. We’ll pick him up on the way back. I think you need a horse. He’s yours.”Mildred couldn’t hold back the tears. No one was ever more family to her than Trace and Abby

Five days they stayed in St. George and Tracy made sure everything was ready for the trip. Mildred wrote a letter for Abby to let her know they’d be a little longer than planned. Tracy loaded on more water than usual on the burro’s and decided to by pass everything iron and go looking for that gold. He took digging tools figuring they might

have to dig a wagon out, but was thinking, “ The condition of that bogged wagon was not that bad. There could be a lot more out there to salvage than he thought. It was still too hot for much travel during the day and it was three day’s getting fifty miles into the desert. He found the dead horses and gear of the Mathews boys. They had never gone in more than thirty miles when they turned around; probably short on water and getting worried. He said to Mildred, “ Pretty sad. Young boys with no adult like their grandfather , to plan a desert trip. They probably didn’t even ask for his advice, thinkin they could do it all themselves. If I hadn’t came out here for them, we’d have found their dead bodies ten mile back if they would have even made it that far. Mildred, if we do find gold , remind me to get it and get gone. We’re too far from water to take any chances. If there’s no gold ,we grab some iron on the way out. It’s still too hot to mess with a wagon if there’s any one in moveable condition.”

It was evening of the fourth day when they saw the ridge south and turned that way. Tracy was pleased to see evidence in some areas that indicated the wagon train had passed that way. Twelve wagons had made a trail where traces were still visible even after ten years. He decided to hold up until daylight to make his way south. He said to Mildred. “ Hope I can sleep tonight. The thought of all that gold is unreal. Sure gonna be disappointed if there ain’t any.”

Morning brought an excited cry from Mildred saying, “ Trace I see something on that’ hill! It’s gotta be the shadow of something .Look a here!’ Trace looked exclaiming, “Millie, that’s it ! gotta be a wagon! Ain’t nothing on this desert that big.Don’t worry about a campfire. We’ll pack up and git over there!’ Mildred shared his excitement and quickly the burro’s were packed and ready to leave. The closer they got to the hillside it was easy to see that it was an abandoned wagon. All four wheels partially buried, but still intact. The box weathered and split but still in better shape than the bogged wagon had been. Tracey and Mildred both were not concerned with the wagon . Their mind was on the wagon jack box under the seat. Only the remains of baggage and trunks remained in the wagon with brush and blown sand covering everything. The seat was buried and anxiously they both dug at the underside to clear away the brush. Shocked as the tore away the sand . There was no wagon Jack box!

Mildred exclaimed, ‘ Damn! Trace, is this the right wagon’ Tracy replied , “Yeah damnit they took it with’em, but I don’t see how. That box had to weigh over a hundred pounds if it had gold in it. Maybe it’s in some of this other trash. That’s a big M burned into the tail gate. It’s the right wagon. Let’s just throw everything out.” Thirty minutes later the wagon bed was empty and no gold or jack box. Disappointed they walked to the top of the small hill and there below was a group of nine abandoned wagons with another off to the north a couple hundred feet. Tracy said, “It pretty well matches Mathew’s story. That would be his wagon off there when he decided to leave it going back. Millie there may not be any gold, but there’s a lotta money here. A few thousand in wagons and iron. We may as well unload the burro’s and make camp. Pretty bad news for gold but good news for money. I know what I’ll be doing for a year or two. We’ll clean this Mormon wagon of everything first before I take our wagon down there. We can get a big load of small stuff in two or three days and head home. Don’t wanna push it and get low on water.”

Two hours later going through the Mormon wagon busted and rotten trunks, he found guns, boxes of bullets, knives and other hardware, but no gold. It was time to start picking up iron .Mildred had been scouting around and found harness chains then yelled “ouch” as she pulled two single trees from the dirt , They were banded with iron and hot to the touch. She threw them back towards the wagon . Then shaking her burned fingers said, “ Pulled them outta the dirt Trace and grabbed them by the tug hooks. Should know better they were half buried and hot as hell! The whiffle tree is still there in that depression, you’ll have to dig it out. I cain’t budge it.” Tracey said, “ Leave it Millie, there’s plenty of other stuff to pick up. I’m going down to that lone wagon. I’ll bet anything it was Able Mathew’s. If there’s anything left worth taking out , I’ll haul it back to him.”

Yes, it was the Mathews wagon. His name was burned in the back of the seat Once all the brush and sand was removed they, found a small box under the seat with pair of old dueling pistols in a rusted tin box. The name Mathews was stamped in the box. Tracey exclaimed, “ Oh God Millie! Abel will surely love to get these back Probably his Dad’s or grandfather’s. That rotten trunk is full of dishes

and family stuff. We'll load it in the wagon also, but that's all. I wanna get as much iron as possible."

Later sitting in the shade of his wagon, he scared Mildred with an exclamation of , ' Damnit! I'm a fool fool fool ! Millie that whiffle tree is buried in that depression. That's probably where they buried their horse. Why would they work in the hot sun doing that when everyone else just let's the dead horses lay. Millie they buried their gold with the dead horse! That whiffle tree and the two single trees were put there to mark the grave! Grab a shovel , we're gonna dig up a dead horse."

"Yes ! The Wagon Jack box is here!" this shout coming from a dirty sweaty Tracy as he hoisted one end of the box out of the hole. An excited and just as dirty Mildred helped drag it to the surface. Gingerly and tenderly they slid the box into the back of the wagon. Mildred exclaimed , ' Let's open it , open it! It's nailed shut." Tracy said, " Millie I can tell you there's gold in it. I don't know how much, but a bunch. That box is heavy. It's just gotta be! Get a hammer! Get a hammer!"

"Gold, Gold ! Gold!" Was all a breathless Mildred could say as she looked at the pile of gold coins. Tracey stood with gun out looking all around. Surely someone was watching him, but No it was just his disbelieving guilty conscious and the almost overpowering fear for protecting his gold. He and Mildred were now jubilant prisoners to their little over ten thousand dollars in gold. Every thing stopped with the opening of that jack box. The following two days was a real chore forcing themselves to finish loading and get home. They had to sell their iron collection in St. George and return to a very thankful old grandfather Abel the trunk and pistols recovered from his wagon. Mildred never left the wagon. She was never too far from that box and wore a pistol full time.

The journey home and great unbelievable shock to Abby was the thing Tracey enjoyed the most. It was later following a great dinner and celebration that Tracy tried to put the story all together. He said, ' We'll never know the details of how Jimmie Draper got the twelve thousand in gold or if he was the "Shang Draper referred to robbing the New York bank.

It's likely that Draper was carrying some or all of that money in his wagon and when they bogged down, the wagon jack box was full of

gold coins, but totally worthless for jacking up a wagon. They must have grabbed the one from the other wagon and failing to get it outta the mud, they transferred the coins to the other wagon box and abandoned the bogged wagon. Their journey to the rocky ridge killed off a lot of their horses and Draper broke down as they climbed that small rise. Knowing they couldn't take the gold with them decided to leave it, but not in the wagon . As other folks were mercifully killing their dying horses, they killed one of theirs and buried it with the gold. They left the whiffletree and single trees as grave markers sticking in the ground. Millie couldn't pull the whiffle tree out .Dumb me, I finally realized that depression had to be where the body of the horse decomposed and we found the gold!

Tracy wrapped an arm around Abby and said, "Mildred, One of the luckiest days in my life was when I found this pretty lady stranded with a broken doubletree. I've told her all about our good fortune in finding that gold, but what I didn't tell her and Mom Millie, I think you missed it too. That wagon abandoned on the ground rise was the other Mormon wagon with the M brand on it's tail gate. The ill fated twelve wagon train all came to a halt and were all abandoned because of the break down of the Mormon wagon . It had a broken doubletree !"

The End

Epilogue:

Mildred enjoyed a long life as grandmother to three little girls and one boy. Abby joined Tracey as a cow hand and pig farmer The Tracey Bird ranch became the biggest in Kanab Utah. Their Brand ? A Doubletree , of course!