

A LINK IN TIME

By T.J.Hobbs

There is snow swirling everywhere; into my nose, eyes and mouth, making it impossible to see my outstretched hand. I feel nothing until, at last it touches stone.

“Is it the cave we were told about? It must be or we are in big trouble,” I mutter.

I feel my way and suddenly there is a void. The wind screams around me as I push on into the unknown. One step more and the white is replaced by darkness. Theresa follows and tumbles inside almost on top of me and we hug each other in relief. As my eyes readjust, I make out an old haversack and bed at the back of the cave.

“Look!” I point and we move forward to investigate. The wind howls outside, blowing snow into the entrance, but at the back it is sheltered and dry. I bend down and look inside the pack but it is empty except for two blankets. I hand one to Theresa and we put them around our shoulders.

“Let’s get comfy,” I say, as we have no choice but to sit out the storm. I take her hand and we snuggle up together for extra warmth. As I close my eyes I thank the long-gone stranger who left the blankets and wonder who he was.

I look up at Jeanie, framed in the cave entrance, with the late summer sun behind her making her into a shapely silhouette. She is the only woman I have ever loved. I sigh and feel again the weight of the sadness that has overshadowed us since the turn of the year. Today we leave this place forever. This land, which we had hoped would be our home and our children's home for generations to come, will no longer belong to us after today.

It all could have been so different except for one tragic moment in time, when our lives changed forever.

“Oh Jed, I'm so sorry,” I mutter to myself and feel the burning ache of guilt deep inside of me. If only we had the ability to go back in time, then I would never have given in to his plea to come with me to feed the stock on that fateful snowy morning. I would never have put him in danger like that but hindsight is a luxury we do not have. I cannot change the fact that I did take him and lost him for ever. I close my eyes and see once again his laughing face as we threw snowballs at each other before we boarded the wagon to head for home. I still don't remember exactly what happened except the panic and fear I experienced. One moment we were talking as the horse trotted along the track and the next I was being tumbled over and over in suffocating snow. I couldn't see and my mouth was full of it but finally I stopped falling and for a moment I lay still under its great weight. Then my survival instinct kicked in, and I fought to get to the chink of light above me. Clawing upward in terror, I somehow managed to reach it and once I had I could breathe once again. That was the sweetest air I have ever had. I blinked my eyes to see more clearly and

found myself down a gully. I looked up the slope to find to my surprise, that Brin, our horse, was still standing on the track but there was no sign of the wagon or Jedediah. I scrambled to my feet, desperately calling out his name but there was no answer. To my right was a piece of the wagon sticking out of the snow and I made for it, digging desperately around it with my hands. I don't know how long I searched before I finally found him. Our beautiful boy lay there like an angel without a scratch on him, but his spirit was no longer there. Somehow, even though I had twisted my back and damaged my shoulder, I managed to get him back up to the track and onto Bren, who took us home.

Home. Well it was never the same after that. Jeanie disappeared within herself and I felt her anger and grief directed at me although she never said it was my fault. She didn't have to, as I blamed myself already. I will until the day I die.

We had tried to carry on, each of us wrapped up in our personal cloaks of grief, but my injuries were slow to heal and made it hard to cope with running the ranch. By the summer, I knew we couldn't stay here; if we did it would kill us both. There are too many memories. Everywhere we looked there was Jed; the pool where he learnt to swim, the pony he loved so much, his bedroom we could not longer go in. The list was endless and painful. My body could no longer move as it once had and probably never would again, so we decided to sell up while the ranch was still in good working order. Thankfully the Jenkins family loved it on sight and bought it for a fair price. They, like us, saw it as a place to raise their children.

Now we had the means, if not the heart, to start over before the snow returned.

I look around the cave, one last time and then fold up the two blankets, storing them in the canvas knapsack and put them on the bed. When we had first arrived here, we had found this cave and I had decided to put the bed and blankets here in case the snow prevented one of us from getting home. Blizzards are common in these parts and they come quickly without warning. You can freeze to death just yards from home so a cave like this can save your life. Jed liked it, so it seemed fitting to say our last goodbyes to him here. Maybe one of the Jenkins will need this cave one day.

I stand up and walk stiffly to Jeanie's side. There are tears in her eyes as I take her hand. Together we look down the valley to our log cabin. It is beautiful and it will always be part of us but now, for a while at least, our future is in Denver. Jeanie's folk live there and until we know what the future holds for us we'll stay with them.

I look at her and say,

“Its time to go, Jeanie.”

She nods and tries to smile. With one last look back inside the cave we take our first steps into a new world. Maybe one day we will return.

“Jim it's stopped snowing” Theresa's voice brings me back from the most vivid and strangest dream I've ever had.

I open my eyes and look into hers, and I feel so lucky. She is the woman I have spent most of my life looking for. When we had met, the world had stopped; just for an instant, and I knew I had found her. She says it was the same for her, too. We know each other so well; as if this is not the first time we have been together, but just one of many. The funny thing is, we both believe in past lives and had accepted our bond without question. Not that we haven't been questioned by friends about this assumption, but I know it's true, so why fight it?

I struggle upright and together we walk to the cave entrance and look out on a beautiful, white world. Below is the ranch house, and it was this view that had sparked my desire to come on holiday here, even though it is a small set up, not like the more fashionable ski resorts like Aspen. I had shown it to Theresa and she had gotten all emotional, but insisted we come. I look into her eyes and instantly I know who we had once been.

She looks at me and says

“Do you remember it now too?”

I nod.

“Yes my love. Now I do.”

We have finally made it back home.