

APACHE SQUAW GOLD

“Sheriff ! We want you to turn in your Badge!” Harsh and ungrateful words coming from the Town Council. He was Sheriff Austin Gray, of Sweetwater, Texas. Eighteen years, he had served this town as the Peace Keeper. Local crime and serious altercations had been low to non-existent up until two days ago, when he had become involved in a deadly shooting .

The Colin Bragg Gang had staged the holdup of the Del Rio Merchants Bank . Although they had come away empty handed; they had shot and killed two customers during the get away! One, was the young wife of the Bank owner. The Gang had split up heading north and the town of Sweetwater was right on their escape route. Sheriff Gray was in his office when three of the Gang rode into town and headed for the Buckhorn Saloon. It was his customary habit of walking the streets around ten o'clock and checking that everything was quiet. On this evening , he noted the three sweat stained horses at the saloon hitch rail and his years of experience warned him that something unusual had caused the hard use of these mounts. He also noted that the owners had not loosened the saddles as was a normal thing to do when your horse had been worked hard. This indicated the riders to be careless of their mounts or set for a fast exit of town. The brands were not from around Sweetwater and Gray thought , “ Maybe I should see what kinda riders these were that would treat their horses this way!”

Walking into the Saloon, he checked his holstered Colt in a habit he had developed over the years. Maybe that was one of the reasons he was still around. Business was slow this evening with only a half dozen locals and three hard looking strangers. They were seated at a table sharing a bottle and Gray knew immediately that these were the

riders he was looking for. He walked halfway down the bar to where he could see all three in the back mirror and asked Mike, the bartender for his usual. Mike handed him a short whiskey and he turned it in his left hand studying the three riders closely while appearing to examine his drink. All three were rough, bearded and a little louder than normal. Troublemakers was how he had them pegged. One, a slender dark faced man; was probably a gunfighter . He had untied his holster when he sat down and this permitted his belt gun to hang normal for a quick draw. The one seated across the table from dark face was a big man with dirty blond long hair and he was wearing one of those long Walker Colts. The third man was a little older and some what quieter than his companions. Gray wasn't in a position to see if he was armed, but assumed that he was.

Having had his look and made a decision, he walked up behind dark face and asked the question, “ You fellers ride far today? We've got a good Livery in town if you wanna give those horses a rest.” The big man answered , “ No, Mister Sheriff! They'll do just fine where they are . We stopped in for a drink and we'll dust outta your dirt bag of a town as soon as we finish this bottle! We don't need your concern for our horses!” Dark face laughed a little , but the quiet one said, “Take it easy Ed, the good Sheriff was just trying to be friendly.” Ed had taken on too much to drink and said, “ I don't need no Damn Sheriff to tell me nothing!” Gray knew that things were beginning to get outta hand and said, “ Calm down Mister, I wasn't trying to tell you anything. I consider myself a horseman and those horses could use a little attention! But ol' Willis down at the Livery is probably already in bed anyway and it's closing time for this Bar , so I guess you gents can head on up the road!”The big man jumped to his feet saying, “ Are you telling me to get outta here ? I'll leave when I get Damned good and ready to go! I ain't gonna let some broken down old man of a Sheriff tell me what to do! You take your self outta here and find some old woman to give your horseman advise!”

The Bar turned deathly quiet! The locals turned around staring! No one in their recent memory had challenged Sheriff Gray like this ! “What would he do?” The big man spread his feet daring Gray to challenge him! The gunfighter turned half around and a nervous smile crossed the face of the quiet one! Gray looked straight on at the quiet man and said , “You either take him outta here peaceful or you and dark eyes here will carry him out!” The quiet man started to stand up and Gray said , “No! Stay in your chair! Once again! Do you take him out or do I ?”

There it was! Sheriff Gray had challenged all three in a showdown! Once again the quiet man said nothing, but let a nervous smile play across his face. The Gunfighter said; “Sheriff I think you’re making a big mistake. We’re in this together you know!” and he spun his finger in a circle! The big man , Ed had waited long enough! This was all the encouragement he needed! And with a loud “I ain’t goin nowhere Damn you!”, he grabbed for his gun! Gray’s draw was slow compared to the quiet man’s! He had a shoulder holster and was lightening getting that gun out and triggering it in Gray’s direction! Dark eyes, jumped up from his chair and immediately hit the floor! Grey’s first round hit Big Ed before he could clear that ten inch Walker and he switched to the quiet man pumping two bullets into his chest. The gunfighter was out of it and all three were now laying on the floor! Three long seconds and three men down! Gun smoke was all that was left! Gray took a deep breath and shook his head. He had been lucky! Maybe there could’ve been a better way to handle this! He didn’t know!

Looking at the gunfighter, Gray found that he had jumped up into the line of fire and caught two bullets in the back from his partner across the table! One was a killing shot in back of the head! He died instantly! Big Ed had taken the Sheriff’s bullet near his left shirt pocket and probably died before hitting the floor. The quiet man was still alive, but sinking fast. Gray went to him and checked his wounds. One

in the chest and the second high in the stomach. Mike , the Bartender brought some clean bar towels over for bandages, but there was little they could do for him. He would probably die within minutes. Gray asked him, “Mister, how come you to get in a gunfight? You could have easily took big Ed out and down the road!” The quiet man said, “Ed was drunk. Won’t listen when drunk! Mistake , big mistake! Wiggins jumped! Sheriff , you knew, you knew, Smart!” He died!

Mike the Bartender. Asked, “ What did he mean Sheriff , when he said that you knew? What did he mean by that? Did you know these men?” Sheriff Gray looked around and said, “ What the hell are you talking about? This is the first time I’ve seen any of them!” Mike said, “ Seems to me that he knew you and what’s this big mistake he was talking about?” Gray said, “ Look, it was a gunfight! He was talking about the gunfight Damn it! Some of you men give a hand! We’ll get these bodies loaded in a wagon! Boot Hill can wait till morning , but we’ll get’em outta here tonight!”Mike the Bartender, was not satisfied with Gray’s explanation , but helped load the bodies . Gray took the three horses to the Livery Stable, unsaddled them and put them in with the rental stock. They would get a little feed and he would talk to Willis in the morning. Three men had died tonight and he figured he was lucky to still be alive!

A Posse arrived from Del Rio the following morning. Sheriff Jim Downing and members of his posse examined the bodies , identifying all three; as part of the Gang that attempted to rob their Bank. Del Hodges, the banker was with the posse and identified big Ed Blaken as the killer of his wife. He said, “I was hoping to be with the posse when these killers were caught. I wanted to see these murderers hang. Shooting was too good for them!” Sheriff Downing identified the gun fighter as Bob Wiggins , a fast gun from up around Dodge City and the third man was Colin Bragg, leader of this Gang of outlaws. Downing said, “ Gray you did the Territory a hell of a service taking this gang

out of operation! These were some of the most dangerous killers in this part of the country. The outlaw Jensen and one other are still out there. If they come around, you may have some more shootin to do! I can't see how you managed to get all three at one time!" Gray said, " Jim , I just got lucky I guess!" Downing replied, " Yeah, lucky like a fox! I can see why this town has such low crime . A Sheriff with your experience and ability is hard to come by. Gray, we're going over to Austin for a few days and try to round up the other two killers. Should be back in ten days or so. The Posse is headed back to Del Rio, but I'll swing by and see how things are going. By the way, there's a Reward out for some of this Gang. I'll look into it while I'm at Head quarters." Gray said his "Thanks and Ride Safe".

Two days later, Gray is summonsed to meet with the Town Council and this is where he received that curt and surprising, "Sheriff! We want you to turn in your Badge!" Gray was dumfounded! He couldn't believe this was happening! Eighteen years and not even a Thank You from any of these dozen businessmen! "Might I ask what brought this all about?" asked Gray. George Bolton was the Council President and his reply was, " The killings that took place in the Saloon three nights ago were unwarranted in the opinion of witnesses and it's felt that a younger and more able man could have avoided gunplay. The Council has reviewed the account of all witnesses and we all agree that a new and younger Sheriff would be beneficial for Sweetwater. In all fairness to you, a vote of the members was taken and you lost! You will be paid through the end of the month. A young lawman from east Texas, Ringo Cauley has been offered and accepted the job!"

Gray was speechless! He finally managed to say, " All of you good folk's took a vote without even giving me a chance to reply and I lost! That's a joke! None of you voted to hire me! You begged me to take the job! Some of you remember Brown Lee? Yeah! The killer outlaw that was and still is terrorizing the state, but hasn't dared to set foot in this

County since I ran him out! I should have killed him, maybe your Ringo will make him shiver in his boots! No, I don't want your pay till the end of the month! Here's your Badge!" Gray threw the badge on the table , spun on his heels and walked out! Bitter anger, disappointment and a feeling of hopelessness followed him to his cottage on the edge of town. What would Margaret , his wife say? No job and fifty five years old! His savings were small! All had been spent for medical attention and medicine for his Margaret! She was doing fine now , but the three years of illness had cost him everything. He knew nothing else but lawman's work and wasn't physically able to work cattle again.

Margaret was upset and shocked by the actions of these folks he had served for so many years, but she was secretly pleased that Austin Gray would no longer have to risk his life . Maybe she could breath easy now when he walked out the door! She accepted what ever came to them without complaining. Gray was so thank full to have a solid woman behind him. This made it easier. He could expect her help rather than complaints! She volunteered to go to the Jail and help him pack up his belongings. By the time they had hitched up his team and wagon, he and Maggie ; as he called her; had decided on a plan of action. They would immediately move to Austin and she would go to work in a Seamstress Shop owned by her sister, Gladys Hammer. She always wanted to do that and her sister was begging her to come. Gray looked at the belongings that they had and decided that two trips would be necessary. On their first trip. He would haul all of Maggie's keepsakes and look for a house in Austin. She could stay with her sister for a week or so till he had her sat up. After getting things settled in Austin, he would look for a job. Maggie dearly hoped that it wouldn't be in Law enforcement again!

Sheriff Downing was horrified to find out that Gray had been fired ! He demanded to speak to the Town Council and learned that the witnesses and their stories were nothing close to the truth. He

**straight out asked Mike the bartender to repeat his story and then ,
“Let me get this straight. You thought Gray was getting a drink to
brace his courage? Did he drink it ? No ? I thought so! He didn’t touch
the thing! And he walked up behind the gunfighter Wiggins, taking him
out of the gunfight and used him as a shield! That worked great! The
big killer Ed Blaken took his bullet while Colin Bragg was shooting at
him and hitting Wiggins. Cutting to Bragg who was momentarily
stunned to realize that he had shot his partner Wiggins twice in the
back; Gray shot Bragg a number of times .**

**This is one of the greatest pieces of Law Officer work that I’ve ever
heard of and you people fired him hiring , Ringo Cauley from east
Texas . Cauley is the Deputy Sheriff that was disgraced in Brownsville
by a drunk Mexican. Cauley was so drunk he couldn’t get his gun free
of his suspenders! Cauley is worthless as a Lawman and is also a
known alcoholic. By ten o’clock in the evening, he won’t know a wet
blanketed saddle horse from a camel! You folks deserve Cauley! You
fired one of the best Lawman in the state of Texas! I’m going back to
Austin to see him , I’ve got a Bank draft for him . It’s \$800 dollars
Reward for Colin Bragg, the Outlaw!”**

**Days later , Downing caught up with Gray and gave him the Bank
Draft. Downing was saying, “ Gray, I know what it took in nerve and
ability to take that Gang down! That was one hell of a good job! If
you’re interested , I can get you a position with the Texas Rangers. I
know they’d take you on in a second!” Gray said, “ No , Jim, I
appreciate the offer , but Maggie is right! I had better look for
something else! She thinks I’ve pushed my luck far enough. It’s time to
hang up my gun for hire and find something a little more peaceful! I
don’t have any plans right now and this reward money will sure come
in handy. Thanks anyway and if I change my mind, I’ll look you up!”**

That evening , Gray went over his decision with Maggie and she was mighty relieved to hear that he was outta law enforcement for good. She knew that he was doing this for her peace of mind and not because he was afraid! Maggie was thinking, “ I’m well aware that Austin was weaned on the smell of gunsmoke fighting outlaws and raiding Indians. He would not change overnight and become an armchair citizen. Give him a few days and he would come up with something to catch his interest. When he does , I’ll get outta his way! That Reward money could be his start of something new.”

Two weeks went by. Gray and Maggie were settled comfortably in a small house in town just a short walk from sister’s Millinery Shop. Gray was getting a little bored with the usual Porch gossip at the local Grocery Store and wandered around town visiting with the Mexican families. One older man that he struck up a conversation with was Antonio Verdugo. Tony had lived in Austin for twelve years. Gray asked him, “ Did you know a Carlos Verdugo that was killed by Brown Lee the outlaw?” Tony angrily yelled, “Yes! Carlos was my brother! That murderer Brown Lee tortured and shot him years ago! He never did anything to Brown Lee or any of his Gang, but they robbed him over west of Sweetwater and killed him! I would give my life to kill Brown Lee!” Gray said, “ I’m sorry Tony, I didn’t know you were his brother. Carlos was at my home when he died. My wife and I had found him and tried to make him comfortable during his last hours. He had been shot twice and was in very bad condition . Once again , I’m sure sorry for your loss.” Tony was still upset , but thanked Gray and wanted to personally thank Maggie for her aid to Carlos.

That evening, Gray ran over an idea that he had. He said, “ Maggie, I ran into a Tony Verdugo today that was a brother to Carlos, that gun shot Mexican we picked up outta town a few years back. Remember, he had been tortured and shot by Brown Lee; the killer, and died that evening at our place!” Maggie said, “ Yes Austin, I remember. You’re

surely not thinking of going after Brown Lee now!” “No Maggie. If Lee leaves me alone, I’ll stay outta his way! Recalling Carlos though, has got my interest up! He said that he was carrying two California new mint gold coins dated 1862., when Brown Lee robbed him! Those coins had to be part of that shipment of California gold meant for the Confederate Army and Lee tortured Carlos trying to find out where he found them. Carlos refused to tell him and Brown Lee shot him!” Maggie said, “Yes , I remember you talking to him about that. What are you thinking about doing? Going looking for lost treasure! That Cooks Canyon Massacre when the Apaches raided that California Confederate money wagon? ”

Gray had been thinking of doing just that. He said, “Maggie , you know I have to find some way to earn some money. We can’t make it on what you earn and this reward money won’t last long. Carlos told me with his dying breath that the freight wagon carrying the Confederate Army gold was laying at the bottom of Cook’s Canyon. It was empty, but he said that the front of the wagon was pointed in the wrong direction. He found the two coins on the uphill side of the road. He had an idea where the money box was, but died before he could tell me. Maggie that wagon was supposed to be carrying a million in those gold coins! I’m thinking of making a trip into Arizona with my wagon and try to find that treasure!”

“Austin!” Maggie exclaimed, “ You know there’s a thousand stories of lost treasure told around every camp fire in Texas! This could be a wild goose chase and you could lose what little money we do have!” Gray replied, “ We got lucky with this reward money and maybe I’ll get lucky with this treasure hunt. Anyway, I can’t sit around here soaking up Porch gossip and you know the rest of that Bragg Gang is still running free and have sworn to kill me. I’ll be safer out there where I don’t have to be afraid someone is waiting for me to stick my head out of this house. A number of weeks away will help things to die down a

little.” Maggie had to agree. It was common knowledge that he was living in Austin, but she still didn’t like the idea of his leaving! Finally, she said, “Austin, I know you aren’t happy here and I wish we could leave the state, but I know we don’t have the money or a place to go. Maybe four weeks isn’t too long and I’ll be OK here with Gladys. You go ahead and look around over there , maybe you might find work in one of those Mining Camps.” Gray said, “ Maggie , you’re one in a million! I have to find that treasure now , just for you!”

Word came to Austin that Brown Lee had raided the town of Sweetwater taking money and supplies from every merchant in town. He had attempted to rob the vault in the Country Store, but the owner was in Del Rio at the time. Four sticks of dynamite failed to bust it and two of Lee’s gang were wounded in the effort. Brown Lee was angered when some of the citizens laughed at his efforts and burned the store down before leaving town. Every man in town was needed to help put out the fire. Ringo Cauley, the new Sheriff, was no where to be found. Some folks reported that he had been seen headed north when Lee came in from the south. An Austin Deputy had been sent to tell Gray that Sweetwater was now looking for a Sheriff. Gray said, “You can tell them not to look my way! I’ve applied for a freighting job and don’t want to disappoint the lady that is depending on me. I wish them luck!”

It seemed like he had been on the road for a month when Gray came in sight of the area where Cook’s Canyon was supposed to be. He had been very close about letting anyone know where he was headed. The stores and bar rooms were his best source of information. As the canyon was in the direction of Tuscon, he asked for directions to the town and sure enough one of the helpful citizens directions sent him right through the middle of Cook’s Canyon! Gray drove through without stopping and to any outward appearance was headed to Tucson. Circling a mile past, he turned off the road and doubled back

to the top of a hill where he could camp unseen and visit the canyon on foot. He had brought glasses with him to closely study the whole area and try to figure out where to start looking. The hillside was steep and the roadway had a double switch back coming out of the canyon to the top of the hill. Gray decided to walk down and have a closer look.

There was no evidence of where the wagon had tumbled down from the road. The road through the canyon came out the west end and switched back to the left and in a full turn headed east along the rim of the canyon for a couple hundred yards to the east end. Here it turned abruptly to the right switching back and heading due west on top of the hill. Gray found the remains of the freight wagon on the south side of the canyon road . It was covered by low brush and totally obscured from the road way. Unless one had knowledge of it's existence, it would take plain luck to find it. He was thinking, "Carlos was right! The front of the wagon was pointing east! Part of the broken tongue and front axel were on the east end of the remains. Did the wagon spin around as it left the road causing it to tumble over and land in this manner or did Carlos find something else?"

Gray studied the wreck from end to end and climbed up the side of the canyon on foot following the probable tumbling fall of the wagon. If the wagon left the road above it's present resting place, there should be evidence of some of it's contents under the low growing brush. There was nothing! Gray was stumped! Maybe , Maggie was right ! He was on a wild goose chase. He walked back up to his camp site. This wasn't going to be as easy as he had hoped. He tried to recall everything that Carlos had said. Over and over he repeated the conversation to himself, but no answer came to him . It was time to take the horses down to the creek for water. They had been on picket all day while he was searching the canyon. They were gone!! The horses were gone! Indians! Stolen by Indians! He had to get to his wagon and his rifle!

“Thank God!” he was thinking, “ My wagon is OK! Nothing here has been touched! Indians would have ransacked it and set it on fire!” Gray was confused, “if not Indians then who would steal his horses and leave his wagon alone?” He had purposely parked in a small grove on top of the hill with clear ground all around, but anyone taking the horses would surely have spotted the wagon. He was trying to puzzle it out when he saw the boot prints in the loose dirt. That foot was a lot bigger than his! Horse thieves? “Could be”, he was thinking, “but these two horses of his were just low grade Mustangs. Ok for pulling a wagon but not the best for riding or selling. People get hung for stealing horses and his two weren’t worth hanging for. Something was not right , or had he been a Sheriff for too long maybe!

Getting out his Henry rifle, Gray checked the loading, grabbed a canteen and some jerky. He had decided to follow his horses for a ways! Whom ever had stolen the horses had pulled the picket pins and used the tether ropes to lead them off. Gray was beginning to form a suspicion and when he came upon tracks of shod horses, he knew that he was in trouble. The thieves had not even tried to hide their direction of travel. Someone was trying to lure him into a trap or he was already in one! The tracks indicated there to be two riders and they walked their horses west toward a brush grove growing near a large wash out ditch. Gray would have to play their game for a ways. If he took off running , the thieves would run him down on horseback. He was in a wide open area and they could come on him at any minute! He was a sitting duck and had walked right into their trap.

Desperately he searched for some kind of cover that he might get to. Ever so slowly he drifted over toward that wash out ditch. If he could fool these killers for just a little bit , he had a chance! He squatted down a few times as if looking at hoof prints. It worked! He was less than twenty five yards from the ditch when the killers realized that he was on to them! They broke form the brush on horse

back and started shooting at him! Gray high tailed it to the ditch and jumped in spinning around and opening up with his Henry! The killers were bearing down and within fifty feet when Gray's shooting knocked one from the saddle! The other killer, spun his horse to the side when his partner went down, and tried to cut up the valley and get away. Gray had no trouble shooting him before he got outta range! He fell from his horse! Both killers were down! Gray went to the nearest man. He was dying, but managed to say, "Should leave alone , tried! , told Jensen, Too tough" these were his last words. Gray went to check on Jensen. He was dead! These were the last of the Colin Bragg Gang!

Gray knew that he had been darn lucky to figure out their trap and come away without getting shot! These killers ,had probably been following him from Austin waiting for a chance to kill him! He had a job now! He had to get rid of the bodies so they wouldn't draw more attention his way. Jensen's horse was handy so Gray mounted up and went to find his team. They were tethered beyond the grove of brush and he caught up the other horse, taking all four back to the wagon. Later , he found another wash out ditch two miles down the road to Tucson and dumped the two killers. His shovel came in handy covering up the remains. If the coyotes and buzzards didn't mind eating rattle snake killers, then here was a treat! Gray had no regrets for putting these two away! Maybe now, he could get back to his search for treasure!

Jensen and his partner had been packing food and ammunition and extra guns in their saddlebags. Gray went through their things and now he had an arsenal of guns. He also had two riding horses. There was no need to be concerned about brands! These had been blotted over till they were considered Mexican! Gray was thinking, "Staking out four horses every day and seeing to their care was taking a lot of his time away from his search for those gold coins! Dang! He remembered! Carlos had said that he found the coins on the upper side

of the road above where the wagon lay! This was the clue! How does it fit? What does it mean? How did the coins get on the upper side of the roadway? Tomorrow he would ride over and take another look!” Gray was wrong! Tomorrow would bring another problem!

Morning brought a beautiful bright day to eastern Arizona Territory and Gray sat having his morning coffee. Suddenly he heard the sound of gun shots and running horses. A group of riders came out of the west at a high lope riding the switch backs down into the canyon and heading east. They seemed to be in high spirits, laughing and enjoying their early morning ride! Gray was concerned ! What had they been shooting at down on that creek bed west of him? That was near where he watered his horses! Catching up Jensen’s horse, he saddled up and rode down to the creek. “ OH God! Indians!” He exclaimed to himself. Yes there were Indians all right , an old squaw and half a dozen kids, mostly young girls! These bastard cowboys had taken a lot of pleasure in shooting two burro’s that she was using to haul her food and some of the little ones. It was true that Geronimo and Victorio’s terrorizing in southern Arizona Territory had made the Indians fair game for anyone, but this was going too far for any fair minded person. We didn’t make war on women and children. Gray was sickened by what these young cowboys considered sport!

The Indians were afraid of him. He tried to talk sign language to the squaw and finally convinced her that he wasn’t gonna hurt them. He dismounted and picked up her packs tying them on his saddle. He indicated to her that she was to follow him and allow the little ones to ride his horse. Three of the smallest climbed aboard and he led them back up the hill to his wagon. He had plenty of flour and sugar. The old squaw had some kind of pulverized dry meat and ground seeds in her pack and mixed with that sweet flour , fed the kids a great meal. Now Gray was thinking, “What do I do with them? I don’t really want them with me while I search for treasure, but I can’t just tell them to get out

and go on down the road. The little ones will die out there without some kind of help! He was stuck! Weather he liked it or not, he had a family of Indians to take care of! Damn it !!” He made up his mind! The treasure hunt would have to wait until he could do something about the Indians.

Talking to the old Squaw in sign language , he told her he was going to butcher the burro’s and bring the meat back for smoking. The Squaw was smoking a pipe of something that he choked on the smell of; but showed him a big toothless happy smile. Burro and mule meat was favored by the Indians over beef! Gray figured two carcasses would feed this bunch all summer. Three trips were necessary to haul all the meat back, but Squaw had started a fire and was ready to start smoking meat. Gray thought , “ Damn , here’s another problem. The smoke will bring visitors and he didn’t need that!” Then he thought , “No, let it smoke and don’t try to hide anything. Anyone coming by will think I’m crazy helping out Indians anyway! They’ll make it easier to for me look around without being so secretive!”

The wagon made a great Teepee for the kids and the Squaw. They crawled in and out from under it and Gray threw his bedroll in the back. The accommodations weren’t the greatest, but the kids didn’t seem to mind at all. There wasn’t a lot of time for hunting treasure and Gray still had no idea what he was gonna do about his Indians! Squaw was smoking dry horse manure or something that smelled worse and once again, Gray had to move outta choking distance!!

The old Squaw had scraped and dried the Burro hides as Gray had asked. He thought that with all these kids , he could use the hides to rig a travois for the Squaw when they left(whenever that was gonna be). He could let her have one of the saddle horses for traveling. Gray was beginning to enjoy the little kids and they were learning to speak English a lot faster than he was picking up Apache. They had been

camping with him for four days and he hadn't had a chance to go hunting for treasure. One little girl of about seven was helpful around camp and took care of the two three year olds. There were two little boys and another girl of about five. Gray had no idea what their names were and got them mixed up most of the time. The older girl "Natall", was playing with the other kids drawing in the dirt and showing the others how to draw a wagon when it dawned on Gray how the freight wagon may have tumbled to the bottom of the canyon with the tongue pointing east. Natall had at first had the tongue on one end and then decided to make the wagon go the other way. She erased the tongue and moved it to the other end! Gray looked at the road to the canyon and now!! He had it !! It was so simple why no one had found the answer!!

The freight wagon had been headed east on the upper road as it approached the canyon when the Indians attacked! It had gone off the road before it ever got to the first switch back! It had tumbled over rolling on to the lower road and continued rolling on down to the bottom of the canyon! That's why the tongue was facing east and nothing was ever found because the contents had been dumped out in that Manzanita brush between the upper and lower roads! Gray was so excited he couldn't hardly breath! He had the answer! It had to be ! There was a fortune laying on that hillside between those two roads! Carlos had found two of the coins on the upper side of that lower road! Everything fit! He was gonna be a wealthy man! Gray couldn't wait! He had to get over there and see if he was right! He had saddled up and was about to leave when riders came loping into the east end of the canyon! Gray called to Squaw and pointed to the riders. They were the same group that killed her burros! She immediately shooed the kids under the wagon! The abject fear in her eyes brought a terrible anger to Gray! He hadn't realized how attached he was getting to his Indian family! Handing a rifle to Squaw, he pointed to the wagon bed indicating she should lay down inside.

The riders saw the smoke up where he was and came riding up the hill! Gray stepped out to meet them! The leader pulled up saying , “ Hey Mister , what you doin here and what are you burning?” Gray could readily see that this man thought pretty highly of ,himself and he answered, “ Well Mister what ever your name is, what ever I’m doin here is my business and I’m smoking the meat of two Burros that you and your brave cowboys killed a few days ,back!” The rider answered back angrily , “ My name is Hooker and I own the Bar 6 Ranch ten miles out. You’re on my grazing range and I don’t like squatters! My Boys shot up an Indian Camp a few days back and we’ll do it again if they’re around! You get your ragtag wagon outta here. That’s the only warning you’re gonna get!” Gray said, “ Mister you’re trying to cover way too much territory and before you get yourself in real trouble, I want to let all five of you know something. I’ll kill the first one that makes a move for a gun! Every one of you are locked in with keepers on your guns! Mister Hooker you’ll be first!” There was a deathly quiet that settled over the group! Hooker said , “ Mister, we might be willing to take that chance! You can’t get all of us!”

Gray said, “I can empty this gun before any one of you can get a gun out and I’ve got a sixteen shot Henry sitting right here! I hope you and your brave Indian fighting cowboys try it! That big Indian Camp you were so proud of shooting up had one old Squaw and six little kids in it! You brave Boys can be proud of killing the two burro’s they needed for carrying a couple of three year olds! There’s a rifle pointed at you from this wagon and any move will mean a dead cowboy! Now Mister Hooker, you ride forward and tell your cowboys to sit tight ! Any wrong move on their part and I’m gonna kill you!”

Hooker said, “Mister , you’re buying more trouble than you can ever live with! I’ll come back and even things with you , you can bet your life on it! OK Boys, do as he says. Our day will come!” Gray called ,

“Squaw!” and when she sat up with that other Henry rifle, every cowboy there thought their day had come all right! They expected a bullet any minute! Gray said , “Now Mister Hooker , I’m gonna give you that chance you want right now! My gun is still in my holster. Remove the keeper from yours if you like and we’ll even things out right here!” Hooker was looking at sure death! He didn’t want any part of this gunfighter! Finally after Gray had given Hooker his chance to call or crawlfish he said, “ Get down off your horse! All of you! Get down off your horses!” They all dismounted . Gray drew his gun quickly firing two shots in the air! The horses stampeded heading down the road! He said , “ Mister Hooker, I’m gonna leave you your guns. That’s just in case you run into some real bad Indians on your way home! I do suggest that you stay plum clear of old Squaws and little kids! I’ll make you all this promise, If I ever see any of you again, I’ll shoot you on sight!” Gray didn’t know how much effect his lesson in Indian courtesy would have on these cowboys , but he knew that they would think twice about following Hooker into anything! The loud angry complaining about a ten mile walk back to the Ranch started in earnest, but Gray sent them on down the road! He hoped to get outta there, before Hooker was able to recruit gun hands to come after him!

Gray was thinking, “I may have let my temper get a little outta control, but that Hooker bunch burned me the wrong way!” he indicated to Squaw that he was riding over to the roadway on the hill and that she was to keep the rifle handy for protection. She knew how to shoot and hopefully she wouldn’t use it on him! Squaw was evidently happy, because she gave him that big toothless smile once again! She was firing up that stinking pipe as he rode away!

As Gray rode to the top of the canyon hill , he could easily visualize the Indians coming up the road past the switch back and attacking. They would have been totally hidden just past the brow of the hill and the drivers wouldn’t know what hit them until it was too late! The

canyon side bank was steep and the big wagon would not have stopped rolling as it hit the lower road! It would have rolled to the bottom where it now lay. In Gray's mind , the mystery was solved and now for the gold! Ground tying his horse, he climbed up the bank from the lower road and there laying buried under Manzanita brush was the broken remains of two wooden boxes! God! He couldn't breath! His heart was pounding in his ears! Pulling the broken planks and dead leaves off revealed, Piles of Gold Coins! He couldn't believe it! More gold than he had ever seen! Piles of the stuff! Two boxes of gold!! He pulled his gun! Was anybody watching him? This couldn't be real! No need for a gun, there was no one within miles! He had found it!! He and Maggie were rich!! God, she would be happy! God! He was happy! He filled his pockets with gold pieces. He had to take some out! The weight was pulling his pants down!

Gray sat down by the boxes. He had to catch his breath! This was beyond any expectation that he ever imagined! He had to calm down and start thinking. The boxes had been busted open by the Indians looking for food or ammunition. They had no use for gold! They had been disappointed! "White man collects soft heavy yellow metal; no good for weapon and no good for food, White Man Crazy!!" They had left it there! Gray was trying to figure out how he was gonna get it back to Austin! He had no containers or wooden boxes. He had a small keg for water on the wagon , but that wouldn't do. It wouldn't even carry half the coins! He took the saddle bags off his horse and started to fill those! He couldn't believe the weight! Half full and they weighed over a hundred pounds! Putting the bags on the horse, he returned to camp. There had to be a way!

As he rode into camp, the answer lay there on the ground above the wagon. The two burro hides! He could cut them in strips, fold them over and make long leather bags that would hold the coins. Thinking about it , " They would ride against the sides of the wagon all the way

around. It would distribute the load and hide his fortune from the eyes of anyone.” He tried to get Squaw to understand making bags out of the burro hides, but finally had to show her by making one. He unraveled one of his ropes to make stitching and in a very short time he had a long bag that would probably hold well over a hundred fifty pounds of coins. Squaw went to work making bags and Gray was starting to think about collecting his fortune and getting outta there! A big question took over his thinking, “What do I do about the Indians?”

That evening using his limited knowledge of Apache and sign language, he was able to learn from Squaw that all of the kids were orphans. Their families had all been killed in recent battles with the Union Calvary and they had no home to return to. She had been trying to get them all to the San Carlos Apache Reservation and Confinement Facility. This was the best she could do , but without her Burro’s and food , she’d never get there with the little ones. They would die! Gray, looking at her and her age was thinking, “ She is giving up her safety and risking her life for these little kids. She could very easily die on the road herself. I’ve got to collect this fortune and get it into a bank. I’ll get it to Austin and then I can get her and the kids to the Reservation! They can travel with me!” Gray had made up his mind .

Squaw had built six long bags and Gray figured that they would more than hold all the coins. The following morning, he left the children with Squaw and her rifle. Driving the wagon to the lower road, he started collecting gold coins! It was late afternoon by the time he had collected everything from the two broken boxes. The wagon was loaded ! All of the Burro bags had been used! How much gold did he have? He had no idea! It was all tied up neatly laying completely around the side walls of the wagon box! Had he got every coin? Maybe not, but he had what he could find! There was probably some scattered down hill, but Gray figured that he had enough! Maybe one hour left of daylight ; It was time to head back to camp!

Suddenly! Rifle fire from camp! Two quick shots! He couldn't run the team up that hill, but he lost no time in getting there! Rolling into the camp area he was carrying his pistol in his hand and that Henry was close by his side! He was ready for a fight! Squaw had shot a rattlesnake! "Boy! What a relief!" he was thinking, " I'm getting too jumpy with all this gold . I've got to get outta here and get rid of this stuff!" His fears were calmed , but his concern turned to Squaw. She was skinning the snake to cook for dinner! Beyond that he was amazed to find that Squaw had shot two rattlesnakes! Both, through the head. Squaw could shoot! Gray was thinking later, " Well, I ain't much on rattlesnake meat. It kinda looks like fish and tastes like chicken! I think I'd rather have chicken! The kids loved it!" Gray started packing his tools and camp together. Morning would be time enough to load the wagon. He let Squaw know that he would take them with him if they wished to go. Once again he was privileged to be rewarded with that big toothless grin! And once again he moved upwind of her pipe!

Morning! A beautiful sunrise in Arizona. Gray was thinking, " I'm sure gonna miss this desert country, but there's a bright future ahead for me and Maggie! I can finally give her the home she deserves. We could never have children and I'm sorry for that. It's the one dim light in their life. There was no family other than Gladys in Austin!" he loaded up his Indians and headed for Austin! Passing the hillside site of his discovery ; he wondered again at his good fortune. He was worried and anxious to get his wealth in a safe Bank!

North of his old town of Sweetwater, Gray was making good time, The Indian kids were doing great and although eating the smoked burro was getting a little tiresome; Gray didn't want to take the chance of spending any of those gold coins. No one paid him a lotta attention with that old Squaw and a passel of kids. Squaw was happy

driving the wagon when he rode out to try and find a little game. If he ate any more of that burro he was gonna start braying! They were moving into wild pig country and although these pigs were small, they would make a change from Jackass! He shot two in a small glade about a mile from the road and although he smeared blood over the nose of his horse. He couldn't load it on his saddle. The horse went berserk any time he came near with a carcass! His final effort caused the horse to wheel away from him breaking the bridal reins and there it went running back to it's mate tied to the wagon! "Damn!," he thought, " now I've gotta carry the bloody things all the way back!"

Squaw saw him lose his horse, but there was nothing she could do but hold the wagon waiting for him to walk in. The ground was too rough for a wagon. Natall, got off and jumped on his horse bringing it to him. He was thinking , "Pretty darn good for a seven year old!" She indicated for him to hand her one of the pigs and the horse didn't object with her in the saddle. Gray walked back with her! He stunk like pig and was covered with blood! To top off his anger and discomfort, those Indians would not eat pig!! " Damn it!", He cursed, " They gobbled up rattlesnake like it was candy and won't touch descent food! Well the hell with it! They can eat Jackass! I'll eat pork!" Squaw wouldn't touch the pigs! Gray roasted a hind quarter and had to throw the rest away! Squaw didn't want it on the wagon! She didn't want him on the wagon either! Luckily they crossed a small creek where he could wash off the blood and some of the pig! He was shocked when Squaw threw Natall out in the middle. She didn't want her smelling like a pig either!

Gray would have liked to drive through Sweetwater and spend a coin to pick up some food, but once again , it might attract too much attention. Maybe he'd go hunting again! He drove around the town and headed for Austin. Just the thought of smoked burro killed his hunger! San Angelo was within a days ride, but by wagon, it would be almost

two. They had a bank there and he thought they might drive through and unload all of his gold. He could buy all the groceries and beef that he wanted. He was thinking, “ Fried chicken would be heaven! Maggie was a great cook! Austin was getting closer all the time!”He made up his mind. They would drive through San Angelo and deposit all of that gold! Get something descent to eat and get on down to Austin!

Gray drove in from the north side of town. Being the Sheriff that he had been for most of his life, he took note of things that most folks would ignore. There were a number of good looking well saddled horses standing at a hitch rail directly across from the Bank. Gray got that old feeling of pending danger. The hair on back of his neck was standing and the air felt suddenly thin for breathing! Something was about to happen and he needed to get his Indian kids outta there! Gun fire erupted from the Bank!! Slapping his horses he yelled, “ Get outta here!” and spun the wagon around heading north! The left front wheel hit a soft spot as he turned and shattered collapsing! The sudden jolt and Gray was thrown from the wagon seat to the wooden sidewalk. Sharp stabbing pains in his side and arm almost blacked him out! The frightened horses continued to drag the wagon for a hundred feet or more with Squaw and the kids hanging on!

Men boiled outta the Bank shooting! The bank was being robbed! Gray came to his feet drawing his gun. The Bandits had made a break for their horses and were shooting at anyone on the street! Gray fired at one mounting with a moneybag! He fell to the ground and Gray hobbled across the street firing at another Bandit running toward the horses! Suddenly he was struck by a bullet in his right leg and was slammed to the ground. Brown Lee came running from the bank with a money bag and Gray brought up his Colt to finally kill this murdering outlaw. His gun clicked on empty! “My God!” he thought, “ Not now! “ Gray couldn’t reload , his left arm was useless! Trying desperately to pull the ejector with his teeth to open the cylinder and reload; he knew

he'd never make it ! Brown Lee ran to his horse , mounted up and swung his gun over to kill Gray saying, “ Good Bye Sheriff! See you in hell!”Suddenly from behind Gray, a gun blasted away, one, two, three times, blowing Brown Lee from the saddle! A wild look of horror and disbelief covered Lee's face, as he fell to the ground! Turning his head , Gray was met with the prettiest picture he would ever see! A big toothless grin from Squaw holding her Henry rifle!

Folk's came running from everywhere. A Doctor was called and Gray was carried by a group of willing citizens to his nearby Office . He was the man that stopped the bank robbery! Everyone in town wanted to help him. Gray asked that his Indians be taken care of. Many folk's , he found out later tried to provide for them , but Squaw wouldn't let anyone come near his wagon. No one in town was willing to go up against the lady that had killed the dangerous and infamous murdering outlaw Brown Lee! Gray had suffered broken ribs , a broken arm and a gaping wound in his right leg! Two days after the shooting , he was able to sign talk to Squaw and get her to accept repairs to his wagon and food for the kids. She preferred to stay in the wagon! It was noted that she did accept a good portion of tobacco for her pipe!

Gray was worried! The longer he stayed in town , the greater the risk for his gold being discovered! The local store keeper had been generous and provided him with a straw tick for the wagon bed and against the Doctor's wishes he asked to be loaded in the wagon. He and his Indians left San Angelo with Squaw driving! The bouncing was terrible treatment for his injuries, but as the miles rolled behind him ; to get home he tolerated and accepted the pain. That fragrant smell of good tobacco from Squaw's pipe was a welcome relief from burning horse manure!

Finally, the sight of Austin on the horizon and he was coming home! Maggie was horrified and distressed by his condition but came running and helped him from the wagon to a chair on the porch!. She looked

questioningly at the Indians and was visibly upset by the dirt and filth on the kids and in the Wagon! Gray tried to explain, “ Maggie this is an Indian family that I rescued and Squaw, here; saved my life! We need to get a place for them and food. Maggie! We’re rich! I found the gold! You won’t believe it!” Maggie in disbelief, said, “ You don’t mean it! You’re funning me! Where is it? Where is the gold? You’re not carrying anything!” Gray said , “ Maggie look in the wagon!” She said, “ Austin , you’re light in the head! There’s nothing here but blankets , camping stuff and rolled up grey hides of some kind! What are they ,bedding for the Indian kids?” Gray said, “ Maggie get one of those grey hide rolls out for me!”

Maggie practically screamed when she tried to move one! Gray laughed saying, “ Welcome to the rest of your life Mrs. Gray! That’s Gold!” Maggie was speechless, “My God, Austin!” she said, “What are we gonna do with it! I never in my wildest dream thought you would find it! Is there really a million dollars here?” Gray said, “ Maggie , I don’t know , but it’s more than we’ll ever be able to spend. Mrs. Gray , you’re in for a life of ease and retirement!” Gray looked to his Indians and Squaw had all the kids on the porch. Squaw still carried her Henry rifle and sat calmly smoking her pipe. Gray talked broken English and sign language to Squaw introducing Maggie as his wife . This was his home and Squaw and the kids were welcome! Squaw gave up her pipe long enough to give them both a big happy toothless smile!

Gray asked Maggie to walk down and bring one of the Sheriff’s Deputies back so she would have an escort to the bank! He wanted to get that wagon of gold put in a Bank vault. The Sheriff Henry Franklin, came himself. He had heard the story of the San Angelo Bank Robbery and the death of Brown Lee. He personally wanted to meet the brave lady that killed the notorious Outlaw and to thank Austin Gray for stopping the robbery. There was a \$500 dollar Reward , but when he found out that Squaw was an Indian; he couldn’t give her the award.

Indians were not acceptable for consideration of Territorial Awards! Maggie and Gray were angered and Maggie said, “ I’ll sign my name to the award if that’s what’s necessary! I’ll see that she gets every dime!” Sheriff Franklin was happy with this decision , he felt Squaw was fully deserving. Gray then told Franklin the whole story and asked for his help in getting the gold to the bank! Franklin was shocked and amazed when he saw the bags of gold coins. He insisted upon driving the wagon to the Bank with Maggie. Squaw was wanting to go also, but Gray asked her to stay with him and the children. He wasn’t sure that she would be welcome in town! Indians were not looked upon kindly in Texas!

\$733,420 dollars was deposited in Austin Gray’s name. That was the amount that was rolled up in the Burro skin bags . One saddle bag laying in the wagon was forgotten and Gray decided to keep it and spend the coins as they needed. There would be a lot of buying over the next few weeks . His Indians needed to be taken care of . He and Maggie had made plans! Maggie had said, “Austin ,I don’t know how you feel about it, but these babies need a home, not some cold Teepee on a Reservation! We have a God sent opportunity to do something for them and Old Squaw saved your life! What are you gonna do for her?” Gray said, “ Maggie I’ve had lots of time to think things out since I was hurt. Here’s what I think we could do. Your folk’s place in Tennessee was burned down during the War, but I know we could buy the land for taxes. I know how much you loved that place growing up. That’s where we met and married! I want to move back to Tennessee, rebuild the old Plantation with a home that will house all of us. These kids need a home away from Indian prejudice and killing. We’ll adopt the whole bunch including Squaw if she’s willing!” Maggie said, “Austin, you’ve been reading my mind. I love these kids! They’re wonderful! Let’s go home to Tennessee!”

Weeks later, Gray went to visit Tony Verdugo and asked him if Carlos had a family. Tony said, “No, my brother never married! He was taking care of our Mother when he was killed! He loved her very much. It broke her heart! She lives with me now.” Gray said, “Tony , I want to give you and your Mother something. It’s a gift from Carlos , In His Memory!” He handed Tony a saddlebag with twenty five pounds of gold coins inside. Tony was speechless. Gray left him in tears of gratitude and walked to the street where his new Covered Overland Wagon and four horse team waited. Maggie and his Indian Family were all anxiously waiting to start on their new adventure in Tennessee! Gray’s new daughter Natall was going to proudly do the driving! (With his help!) Gray took his seat by Maggie and looking back through the wagon , there sat Squaw smoking her pipe with the other five of his kids. Squaw only left her beloved pipe long enough to give him her favorite big toothless smile!

THE END

Epilog: Twelve years later the Austin Gray family of Madison Tennessee, were celebrating the marriage of their beautiful daughter Natall. The plantation mansion was handsomely decorated and three beautiful Bridesmaids, looking like twins to their older sister; escorted Natall down the isle . Two handsome young brothers, stood strong and tall between their weeping Mom, Maggie and their white haired Grandmother Squaw. Austin Gray, the father; gave the bride away.

As Gray stepped back from the group, he hugged his weeping wife , noting that Squaw was showing her biggest toothless smile ever! “Damn!” He thought , “ I went and bought her the very best set of handmade teeth that money could buy! She wouldn’t wear ‘em!!”

