

Whiskey Gold

“ Burt! I don’t give a damn if he had a knife in your back!, That’s the second self defense killing you’ve done in this town and one is too many! Get out! Get outta town. As Sheriff , I’m ordering you; No one wants you here, just get out!” Burt Hayden exclaimed, “ Damnit John they were the Cole brothers; sworn to kill me. I didn’t start the fight. I’ve never been a part of their fight. The Harris Ranch crew hung their Dad for stealing horses. I wasn’t even working there at that time. Why they tried to kill me is dumb and now Harris has fired me. John, I haven’t got a thing except my horse and thirty dollars. Where the hell do you expect me to go with that? Anywhere from Young Arizona is a hundred miles , I don’t care which way you go.” John said sharply, “You said it yourself, I don’t care which way you go , just git!” Burt stopped at the Mercantile and sacked up Jerky and Hard tack corn dodgers, filled his canteen at the horse trough and slowly rode south for Holbrook. He wished it was fall, but no, the old sun was blazing hot. Maybe he should wait for sundown, but he knew John Hoel would watch him outta sight. Maybe he’d stop at the stage change station and wait out the day.

“Yeah”he was thinking,” twenty six years old. One of the Hayden gun fighters. Yeah, what a joke that was. Both of his brothers killed in the big war, but before leaving home became notorious for their gun fighting. Here he was inheriting their reputation and forcing himself to learn to use the gun he never wanted to touch. His Dad, Sheriff Chester Hayden killed in a gunfight facing four men. His Dad’s gun rested in his holster. Yeah, I didn’t wanna fight, but Luke Cole’s bullet almost killed me when I turned to walk away. I was just lucky to spin and shoot. Then two days later here comes Bob Cole riding in looking to kill me .He knew I didn’t wanna fight. His bullet clipped the heel of my boot and once again I was lucky Both Cole brothers shot in the chest. Yeah, I can shoot some, but I don’t want to. John’s probably right about one thing. I’m now a target for some young feller looking for a reputation. One thing’s for sure, I’m taking my Mama’s name Hollis, Burt Hollis cowhand.”

Two weeks earlier, there had been a big disturbance at the Yellow Bird Saloon. Joel Murdock's wife Mable had stormed in with a shot gun looking for Joel. She found him upstairs in the bed of Lilly Mae one of Gus Haynes saloon girls. Fortunately, Gus grabbed the gun before murder was committed. Joel Murdock was the local big man , owner and banker of a number of businesses in Young. He had become infatuated with the charms of the ladies and often sent a runner to Gus reserving a girl for the evening. On this particular evening , Mable had seen the boy runner and questioned him. She was out for the blood of the young whores that had seduced her Joel. It had to be Satan's work because Joel was a Deacon at the church.

The following day Lilly Mae received her walking orders. She had to leave Young. There was no arguing with Gus. Murdock held the overdue mortgage on the Yellow bird. She had to go. Lilly was stricken. She had only been there a few weeks and had very little for a nest egg. The only thing she had of value was a gold neck less peppered with valuable stones and Gus had admired it often. He offered her two hundred dollars for it and she had to accept although it was valued for much more. It had been her Mother's from a different world in Europe. It was all she had left and cried as she had to let it go.

Her descent to saloon girl prostitute from a fine family was the result of a finishing school teacher assault on numerous occasions and although she reported the crime. The administrators refused to let her speak to the law, or leave before her two year tuition was up. Her mother was on her death bed when Lilly was able to escape and come home and tried to tend her in her last days. Her Dad had passed years before. It was following the funeral when she took sick and horribly found that she was pregnant from the assaults by her teacher. Destitute and due to give birth, she accepted the friendship of an older man that assured her, he only needed her in a live in maid capacity. He lied and attempted to assault her. She fell down a staircase trying to resist him. Her baby died from the event. The man accused her of attempted robbery. She delivered her aborted baby in Jail. It was here that she met Helen Bowers a House madam of street prostitutes. She convinced Lilly that with her looks, she could easily make a living selling herself. This began a down hill lifestyle that eventually led to

Gus Haynes making a trip to Dodge city and buying her contract from a saloon owner.

Lilly sat on her bed and cried with self pity for the terrible things that had happened to her. If she had a gun at this point , she would have killed herself. Seeing herself in the mirror, she saw her mother staring back at her. Yes, she closely resembled her mother and remembered the horror stories her Mom had lived through to finally get to the United States. Yes her situation was not anywhere near what her Mom had overcome. She stood up and began packing her hand bag. With head held high she walked to the Stage Station and bought a ticket for Tucson. She was now anxious to see what life handed her next.

Burt had managed to get to the Stage station and wait until nightfall to travel. The stations were fifteen miles apart and Burt made use of this aid in traveling. He rode all night , hit each station for water and camped out to allow his horse plenty of grazing time. He hoped there would be no Indian trouble. Things had been quiet for months and it was blazing hot in the desert. The apaches were no dummies and knew the travel conditions would be much better in colder weather. Food, guns and horses was the main intent of their raids on wagons headed west. South of Holbrook was a favorite raiding area for Comanches and Apaches. Burt was well aware of the dangers. His family has been raised in the area of Window Rock north of Young Town. His mother killed in an Indian raid and he remembered the years spent there always fighting when Raids occurred anywhere nearby. The whole community responded with every available man and teenage boy riding to protect a neighbor. He too often remembered the killing and wanted no part of it. Unfortunately, events pushed him into a gun fighting man.

Holbrook came and went. There was very little work to be had. Most of the surrounding Ranches were full up and Burt was more of a horseman than a cow hand. He loved horses and had spent most of his life working with them. South of Holbrook he ran into crazy weather. There had been huge summer storms and roads were flooded in many places. Stage coaches had quit running. The Little Colorado was running over it's banks and it was at the Mongollon stage station where all travel stopped. There was no way to cross the river and it

was here that Burt met Lilly Mae. He immediately typed her as a saloon girl, but was impressed by her attitude of accepting the fact that she was stuck in a very rough station with very little to accommodate a woman. It was easy to see that some of the travelers looked upon her with no respect at all. She was a good looking as described by the Manager Sam Potts. He had propositioned her a number of times and been flatly refused. He complained that his money was just as good as anybody's. This stuck up bitch wouldn't have nothing to do with him. He told Burt to stay clear of her. She was nothing but trouble.

Burt could see that she was a loner keeping herself away from other passengers and with no accommodations, she was sleeping in the coach . Burt decided she was none of his business and he didn't need a woman . His first day there, he noticed the harassment she was getting from Potts. His snide and insulting comments finally got to Burt and he said, " Potts, leave the woman alone . No man talks to a woman like that. Just leave her alone." Potts angrily replied, " It's none of your damn business, mister. A Range bum and grub line rider. You're not welcome here. Go back out in the damn brush where you belong. This station ain't for bums like you. Just git outta here, if you don't like it. A damn whore too uppity for me. I ought to run her off too." Burt said, " Mister, you just work here. You don't own the place and I'm not asking for anything. I'll leave when I get ready and don't be even thinking you can threaten that girl. She had to pay for a ticket and you better damn well treat her like that." With that Burt pulled up his gun belt. Pott's got the message. So did Lilly.

It was later that afternoon when she saw him sitting near his horse that she went to thank him for his concern. She said, " Mister, I know you. I've seen you some where before. Thank you for speaking up for me . That man has been awful." Burt replied, "Some people have to be taught respect if they live long enough. No thanks are necessary. I don't like nasty people. Yeah, I've been in the Yellow bird saloon in Young. You're the girl Lilly Mae, couldn't miss seeing you. You probably saw me in there a time or two. Name's Burt uh!, Hollis. Where are you headed?"

Lilly replied, "Tucson , had to leave Young. It's not a nice story. It never is, when you're like me. There' no such thing as a nice story. A

girl has to get by. What about yourself?. You headed for Tucson too?" Burt said, " No, I'm just drifting. Might find work somewhere. Wasn't nothing in Holbrook. Might be something around Tucson . Good a place as any. I like workin with horses. There's a lot of wild ones in the Mongollons. some folks claim they're the best around. Bigger than the desert mustang. I'd like to get on with a crew trapping some of them." Lilly replied, " I love horses. I was raised with horses. It would be my miracle wish to turn the years back to them. I loved the young ones, but spent a lotta time with bruises. Mom and I trained together until I was sent to finishing School. It was a Prison and the end of my life. The rest is just Hell!" Burt could see the tears and said, " I was almost killed two weeks ago. I've had a lotta time to think since then , I have to make a life for myself. I have to do something. What , I don't know but now I'm looking, not just living."

Lilly exclaimed, " God, I would love to do that! Quit just worrying about living and find something else. I'm kidding myself. Look at me , painted up for the pleasure of some man. Burt, loan me your gun!" Burt exclaimed , "Hell no girl! Christ you're younger than me! Don't just give up! There's gotta be a life out there for you. I'm still alive for some reason and I'm gonna find out what it is. There's gotta be one for you too. Give it a chance. How long you been stuck here?"

Lilly said, " Too damn long! Two weeks and maybe two weeks more. I'm filthy , every piece of clothes I own dirty. No way to bathe and no place I'd trust to change clothes without getting raped. Potts has tried twice to get in the coach at night. He now knows I've got a butcher knife. I think he's missing one. He won't be hanging around again, but he watches me everywhere I go. Burt, I have to get away from here, but I cain't do nothing. Guess I could start walking back to Holbrook, but I'll never make it. Indians I might meet, but the whites are worse. No I'm stuck here until the river goes down. I begged them to take me back to Holbrook, but Pott's again put the stop on that."

Burt replied, " I haven't got grub enough for two weeks. What you said gives me an idea. How much stuff have you got?" Lilly said, " Just a hand bag. I didn't have a lot and left all the fancy dresses. Whatta you planning?" Burt said, " Holbrook is the answer. What you said makes sense. I'm going back there. I can sell ol'Stony my horse. He's big and will bring a good price in town. That'll give me a chance

to find some kind of work; you don't hardly weigh a hundred pounds. We could easy ride double , maybe three days at the most. Whatta you say?" Lilly replied, "Mister how damn dumb do you think I am, taking off with you a total stranger and me alone. No I guess I'll stay right here where I at least know what kind of bastards I've gotta deal with. Thanks but no Thanks." Burt said, " I'm going back today. I don't have no hankering for your bed. Take a chance girl , whatta you got to lose. I just feel like helping you out. Believe me I can do much better alone. Gimme an answer quick . I'm gonna fill my canteen and saddle up. You wanna take a chance with me . Grab your Bag . We'll have to do something about your dress, but you figure that out. I can make a good ten miles before midnight, if we leave right away."

Lilly was struck dumb, "What to do? What would he do to her on the trail; did he have other plans? He seems nice but I've seen nice before that always turned evil. So what , I've got a knife should I take the chance?" It was then she remembered seeing her Mother's face and the desperate chances she had taken getting to America. She said, "I'm thinking!" She ran to the coach and stuffed her bag. Her dress, she looked at it and said to herself, " What the Hell difference does it make; I haven't got time to fix it". She rushed back to find Burt using his bed roll blanket under the saddle for her to ride on. She said, " Pretty sure I was going weren't you? I didn't say I was." Burt laughed and said, "You ain't nearly as weak and helpless as you make yourself out to be. I gotta watch it now. You might steal my horse." It was this statement that gave her confidence she had made the right choice and felt a great burden of doubt and fear lifted. She said , "Cain't do nothing for this dress, you'll just have to deal with it." Burt said, "Let's get outta here. I see Pott's getting all stirred up." Burt reached down and lifted Lilly behind him and waved a Good Bye to Potts. Lilly's dress was hiked up above her knees as they left the station.

They were about two miles up the road when Burt stopped in a grove of willows. Lilly immediately exclaimed , "what are we stopping for?" Burt said get off and helped her down. He stepped down himself and said, " Stand still a minute," and got out his belt knife. He grabbed the waist of her dress and split it from the knees down in front and in back saying. " I woulda had you take it off, but I was pretty sure I mighta had a fight on my hands. That'll be more comfortable riding for

both of us.” He mounted and once again pulled her aboard. It was a long day and they talked of places they had been and things they had seen. By nightfall, Lilly knew she had made a good choice.

It was small moon light that let him find a camping place off the trail . He unsaddled as Lilly wondered how he intended they should sleep he said, “You get the blanket and ground sheet, I’ll use the saddle blankets. Find a good spot , I’ve gotta tether Stony so he gets to eat. “ When he returned , Lilly was asleep. Burt wondered why he had ever asked her to come along and even more so what they would do in Holbrook. Was he just letting a pretty face affect his thinking . Did he really care about her or was this another bum decision he’d made.

Morning was pretty rough with only jerky and hard tack to eat. Burt said, “ Reckon you made a bad choice Lilly , I cain’t even feed you.” Lilly replied, “ No , I made the perfect choice. I’ve eaten the very best with some of the worse people alive. I’ve eaten Jerky and corn dodgers before and now I’m with the best person I’ve met in years.” Burt said, “ Your company’s better than Stony’s. Lilly I’m glad you took me up on this trip. Makes me take a different look at things when I’ve got some one to help along.” Lilly knew he really meant to take care of and be responsible for. “Yeah” , she was thinking, “ I hope things will make a good change for both of us. A descent job in Holbrook . I don’t wanna go back to Saloons, but I’m sure someone will recognize me that’s been in Young.” She voiced these concerns to Burt and he said, “ scrub off all that paint and allow yourself to look normal. As soon as I get a job , I’ll get you some girl clothes to wear that don’t look Saloon. “ Lilly said, “ Burt, I’ve got a little money, you don’t have to buy my clothes.” Burt said , “ Good, when we get to town, you stay with Stony. I’ll go in and get some things for you . Just tell me what. I’ll tell’em they’re for my wife about this tall and skinny.”

Lilly said, “ You really mean it don’t you; you’re gonna make a settler like woman outta me. Burt I just cain’t get over you.” Burt said , Yeah I been studyin on it. You’re gonna have to be Mae Hollis my wife. Nothin else will work with folks out here. We cain’t be traveling together other than married or folks will treat you like a kept woman. It sure won’t do your reputation any good and no one’ll want you workin for them. So Mrs Mae Hollis, that’s the way it’s gotta be. No we

won't be really married, but folks will think we are. Are you Ok with that or do we just move along?" Lilly replied. " I've had a hundred proposals Burt, but your's is the first marriage I've had. I'll do whatever you think will work. It might be fun to be married ;ok so now I'm Mrs Burt Hollis." Burt asked , " Do you have a cousin or sister that looked like you that might be a saloon girl?" Lilly said, " You've thought of everything. Burt you're a real puzzle. Are you sure you're not a crooked Banker. In just three days you've made Lilly Mae of the Yellow Bird saloon disappear and where did you find your wife Mae Hollis?" Burt replied, " Met her on a trip to Tucson. Took her right from the Stage coach. Craziest thing you ever saw. Been married ever since. Ain't that the truth?" Lilly had the best laugh she'd had in years. How could she ever believe that someone like Burt would come along and change her life.

Things happened so fast for Lilly, she couldn't believe Burt. She was now dressed in riding pants wearing a wide brimmed hat. A saloon Girl she did not look. He helped her cut her hair and looking at herself, she really looked a common house wife. They were camped outside of Holbrook and now Lilly had her own Bedroll and blankets. They had ridden into town and had breakfast . They planned on looking around for a place to stay and ask about work. Lilly stepped down from the porch of the eating house. Suddenly a horse almost ran her down! Burt grabbed her jerking her off her feet. The horse was rider less and raced on threatening other folks on the street. Burt jumped aboard Stony and raced to catch the loose and frightened horse. They were south of town almost a mile before he was able to catch up and grab the trailing reins. Finally able to calm the horse he saw blood on the horse's hip. A bullet wound! The horse had been shot with the bullet making a three inch cut on that hip. There was blood on the saddle fender. The rider had been shot!

Quickly he returned to town and picked up Lilly saying, " The rider was shot. We'll go back and see if we can find him. There's blood on the Saddle. Had to happen pretty close to town. I just hope it was on the trail coming in, otherwise we'll never find him."Burt said, " Lilly maybe I better drop you off, we may get shot at." Lilly said, "No! I go where you go. We'll both get shot. I can protect your back. Let's go!"

In the distance they saw a pack horse standing in the road and Burt said, “ Keep alert Lil, we may be close.” He slowly rode to the pack horse. Lilly took it's lead rope as they rode past. There was no sign of anything. It was fifty yards past when Burt saw blood on the trail. There wasn't much, but sign showed it going into the brush. He called , “ Hello , Hello! Friends here! Hello, hello.” There was no answer and suddenly Lilly jumped down and walked into the brush as Burt tried to call her back. Just as suddenly Lilly answered, “In here Burt! In here Burt. He's been shot!” Burt tied the horses and quickly went to Lilly. The wounded man was old for a range hand, but bore the looks of one. He had two wounds, a cut along the side of his head and a nasty gash on his right leg. Burt could see the blood on his leg needed quick attention. The head wound was a bad cut but they ignored that as Burt cut the man's pant leg off and used part of it to get a tight bandage in place and stop the bleeding.

An hour later, the man was bandaged up, but still unconscious and Burt commented. “Lilly did you see the way he was laying with pistol out waiting for his killer to come looking for him. He's some kind of a tough ol'bird. Might could kill you after he died. I'm thinking , his killer was afraid to come looking for him. He'll be Ok for the moment. I'd like to get him to a doc pretty quick. I'll cut a couple of these willow limbs and make a travois with my ground sheet and Stony can drag him to town. Might could get a wagon out here, but that might take all day. You stay with him and take his gun and knife . He might wake up thinking you shot him.”

Two hours later Doc Peters was saying, “ Yeah it's Ned Crawford, he's been here long before I came . Owns a big Ranch about twenty miles north of here. He comes through here pretty regular and always visits his wife's grave here in The Holbrook Boot Hill. Plants a few flowers around it. Never seen a man that so loved his wife Picks up groceries and goes back ,Never stays more than two days He was just here yesterday. Looks like someone tried to kill him on his way home. Crazy damn people; always trying to take something some else owns. He's had trouble with lots of folks over the years, mostly Bankers. When the Cullles robbed the Holbrook Bank, he came to the rescue and bank rolled the Bank here and the one In Young town. They still owe him a big sum of money. One of the biggest mysteries is

where did he get the gold to bail out both Banks. Had to be about six thousand in gold and there has never been a sign of gold anywhere on that Ranch of his, but here he is at almost every visit paying for his supplies with gold. Sometimes he brings in a wagon. Killing the man won't get his gold. I think someone wants his Ranch thinking there has to be gold somewhere on it."

" You said your name was Hollis. Mrs Hollis I know it's asking a lot, but could you and your husband hang out here with Ned. I've got a baby to deliver and that won't wait. Ned has a concussion and lost some blood. These pills will help him some when he comes around. Burt said, " Doc we were looking for a job. We'll be glad to stick around until we can talk to him. I'll go tend his horses and put'em in the livery. That good riding horse of his needs a few stitches, but I can do that. Yeah, we'll hang around till you git back."

It was late afternoon when Ned came to confused and ready to kill. His questions Burt tried his best to answer. No they didn't see the shooter. He was out when they found him and Doc Peters was out delivering a baby and yes his wife Mae was the prettiest woman he'd seen in a long while. " Yeah, Mister Hollis, you're a very lucky man. My Betsy was like her. God, I miss her. She was a bitch to live with but a finer woman never lived. Said you was lookin for work. I'll take you on if you know anything about horses. Gotta pretty good herd up in the Mongollons. Me and ol'Bolink live up there. Every year I bring in ten or twelve riders to bring the herd in so I can get'em bred to my Tennessee stallion . I've got a big nuncce stud to watch the herd when they're lose. He keeps the wild ones away I operated on him years ago and he's mean as hell. Cain't breed my mares after his operation, but he still has the equipment and kills off the competition. I've got plenty of work training if you're a mind to." Burt said, " Ned, you better take a couple of these pills and get some rest. We'll talk in the morning. We'll be here until doc gets back. Just give a holler if you need anything."

Doc Peters didn't return that night and they stayed in his sick room with Ned. They had bedrolls and there was plenty of room. It was the following afternoon when doc returned. The birth had taken forever and he was a tired man. Burt and Lilly agreed to stick around. They had plenty of time to question Ned and agreed to go with him to the Mongollon Ranch of his. He was most grateful for their help and

offered Burt an advance before leaving so they could get clothes and whatever supplies they might need. He agreed to furnish anything they might need. Burt was concerned that he might be rushing things to head to the Ranch right away, but Ned insisted. Lilly became concerned for him after they had ridden ten miles and insisted they stop. He argued with her and finally said, “ Mae, you’re just as nasty as Becky. Do you treat your husband like that?” Lilly laughed and said, “ Yeah, he can be a bastard sometimes!” Ned was pleased with her reply, and agreed to stop.

That night they arrived at the Ranch house and met Bolink, the ranch cook that began complaining that Ned had bought the wrong stuff. They had a strong discussion about his going alone and getting shot. Bo said, “ Ned, you know damn good and well they wanna kill you. You ain’t got no family, git rid of you and they don’t owe a dime. That six thousand you loaned ‘em goes up in smoke and what about this Ranch and all your horses. Them Murdock brothers’ll git it all. Hell you know they’ve got half their family running the court and land Office.” Ned said, “ Bo you’re right some but not all. That loan is registered with that Territory office and so is this Ranch. The Ranch and note belongs to the Territory if I die with no heirs. They ought to know that, but they’re too damn greedy to realize it.”

Burt said, “ My Dad knew a lot about that stuff. He was worried about his Ranch too; afraid the someone would show up and claim to be an heir if he had no family. He was afraid I’d get killed like my two brothers, but he lost the Ranch anyway to some Banker. I came home to nothing. I know he had money somewhere but I never found it.” Bo exclaimed, “ See there Ned. You die and I don’t know where to look for your gold mine. You won’t tell me where to look.” Ned replied, “ Bo as long as I’m the only one that knows, they cain’t find it and they cain’t threaten to kill me or you for it, as they did Becky. You know they’ve had half a dozen prospectors wandering all over my Ranch looking for it. They’ll never find it, I can tell you. I made sure of that after Becky died.”

Ned had six young colts corralled that needed castrating and training. He and Lilly went straight to work on the horses. Ned sat back and directed them. This became a daily routine. Burt and Lilly became concerned as Ned wasn’t healing as expected the wounded

leg was fine, but the head injury began weeping and they both became concerned. Burt made a quick return to town for medicine and opium for pain. Ned continued to get worse. Soon, he began getting a fever and was cold all the time. Lilly and Burt begged him to go back and have Doc Peters check him. Burt made two more trips to town as Bo and Lilly stayed up all night keeping a roaring fire going , so Ned would feel warm. The house was like an oven, but Ned was still cold. Lilly was becoming scared and lay down next to him to give him some warmth. Bo was concerned with what Burt would think and pleaded with her to get out of Ned's bed. Ned curled up to her and slept.

Bo was terribly worried, but kept the fire going. He was shocked and surprised when Burt returned and even encouraged Lilly to stay with Ned. Never seen the like. A husband keeping his wife in another man's bed! A week went by and every night Lilly slept with Ned, while Burt kept the fire going. Bo did what he could, but he said, " Ned, these young folks are the greatest you'll ever meet. There's nothing they won't do for you. I think you should take their advice and go see Doc Peters. They can take the wagon and help you get in and out. I can hold things down here at home. Ned you know you're not getting any better. Without their help, you would already be dead." Ned agreed to go.

Once in Peter's office, the doc was disappointed saying to Ned, " Worst I've seen Ned. You should have come see me earlier. You have a temple infection and it's bad. I hope you come out of it. I'll do what I can, but you're gonna have to stay here." Ned exclaimed , " Hell no Doc! Murdock's killer's find I'm here, they'll come shooting. I gotta git back to the mountains, they'll kill all of you. Gimme something will you and let me go." Doc said, "Ned you'll die before the week's out, if you leave here.' Ned replied, " Have Burt and Lilly come in here and get me some paper and pen. I've gotta stop Murdock ! It's that Bastard's killer Kingsley that put me here. I'm sure it was him that shot me; wears a brown hat with rattlesnake band. I saw him. Gimme that paper, Burt, how do you spell your and Mae's name ?"

Later Ned handed the paper to Doc Peters saying, " Doc sign this as my witness. Sign right under my name and Burt you and Mae do the same. If I get killed or die for any reason, my Ranch belongs to you two and Bolink. He'll need your help. He's almost as bad as me. I know I

ain't known you long, but I have no family and there's never been anyone like you and Mae. Burt I do want you to do me a favor if I die. Please plant my Geranium flower plant on Becky's grave after my death It was her favorite flower, I want this and I know Becky will be smiling down. Some folks think I'm strange because of my habit, but believe me Becky will be happy. I've kept her plant alive and well since her death. She knows it will die with me." Burt assured him he would do it, but that he was gonna beat this infection and said, " Ned, you are giving us a new life you know. How can we ever thank you? Lilly and I are gonna stay right here by your side. If trouble comes we'll handle it. No one will come through that door alive." Ned said , " Son it's not all free; you'll have to fight and maybe kill to keep it. I know you'll care for ol'Bo. That's all I ask. Ok , let's see what magic pill this ol'sawbones has for me."

There was no magic pill. Ned went into a coma and four days later he died. Lilly and Burt were broken hearted. Burt took the wagon back and brought Bo in for the burial. Doc Peters said, " Burt, Ned had me post that paper he wrote. I made Judge Myer's put his seal on it . He's a shirttail relative of the Murdocks and he wasn't too happy doing it, but we can go to the Holbrook register and get you, Bolink and Mae a Title to the ranch. Ned was buried beside his Becky. Lilly was broken hearted, but Burt said, " Mae, I hate to do it, but we're gonna have to make tracks before Murdock puts a wrench in our title to the Ranch. We're taking our paper to the title office today. Ned's not even cold in his grave and a fight's gonna start over his Ranch, but I'm not backing down from another gunfight. That afternoon ,they got the papers and title to the ranch. There were no objections and Burt was suspicious. He said, "Mae honey we're in for some kind of trouble. These people are just too helpful. Their thank you is phony. Keep a gun handy; they've gotta kill all three of us now."

The trip back to the Ranch went as normal. Lilly and Bo talked memories of Ned, but Burt had a tense feeling. Three and more times he checked his guns and Lilly's. the closer he got to home , the more tense he became. Finally he had them halt and got out to look at the trail. " Yeah there it was horse tracks!' three or more horses had come this way. He said , ' Bo, we're gonna walk in. I know you cain't ,but Mae and I are. Get behind the seat and bring the wagon on the trail.

We'll take the woods Mae, you ok with shooting someone; we have three men at least somewhere between us and the Ranch house? " Mae said, "Burt I don't amount to much with a pistol, but yeah, I'll shoot. Let's go!" Burt had to move along to keep up. Lilly seemed anxious for a fight. She sure didn't show any fear. Suddenly she raised a hand and stopped motioning Burt to come to her. She pointed to the barn , there were shadows there . The late sun threw long shadows and Burt could easily see they were set to be behind them as they drove to the house ;a perfect setup to kill all three.

He looked at Lilly , she had her hand over her mouth in horror as she realized what it meant. He motioned her to follow him as he moved wide of the Ranch house to come in behind it there were four horses, but only three men behind the barn. Where was number four! It was Lilly that spotted him in the barn loft where he could get a look down the road coming in and notify his comrades. He could also do some killing from there Far down the road Burt could see Bo approaching. He would be a sitting duck for the killer and what would they do when he realized there was only one man in the wagon. Burt decided he wouldn't wait! Bo was in danger. Taking careful aim , he said , "Mae honey, I've gotta take that man out in the loft. I'll try to wing him then start shooting. Don't stand or move, but empty that pistol at those three men. Honey we haven't got any choice. They were gonna murder us without a chance. Ok here goes!"

Burt's shot dropped the man back from the loft door. He got a hit or very close swinging his rifle to the men by the barn. Two were down as he fired and he heard the empty click of Lilly's pistol. That girl had fired all five rounds in faster time than he would have believed. As he jacked a third shell in , the other man jammed his hands in the air dropping his gun. Bo had stopped the wagon and had his rifle out. Burt watched that loft window as he motioned Bo to come on in. . There was no movement at all. He wondered if he had killed the man as he walked toward the barn He was almost to the first man down when he saw the standing man cut his eyes to the side door way and spun around as a man came out shooting at him. A bullet burned his arm as he fired at the man, then again; the man went down, his gun falling away from a bloody arm . Burt quickly swung the rifle to the standing man. Lilly came running to him and Burt handed her his pistol saying ,

“ Shoot if he moves!” pointing toward the standing man. Burt could see the man in the doorway was dead and his shooting arm was hit in the loft shot. Burt picked up his hat. It was brown with a rattlesnake hat band. This was the killer that shot Ned. He wouldn’t be doing any more shooting. Lilly was shaking and the standing man began pleading with her not to shoot. Burt put an arm around her and took his pistol. She was glad to feel his comforting arm He said, “ Honey , go wave Bo in. They ain’t going anywhere .” He began collecting guns after making the other would be killer sit down. Burt said to Bo as he drove up. “Keep a rifle on’em Bo. I think these two are dead and that first man there is wounded. I’ll see what we can do.”

The wounded man was stomach shot. He could live , but his chances were not good. Burt said to the man that surrendered, “ Get up and help me get your friends in the wagon. We’re going back to Holbrook. Mae you and Bo can stay here, I’ll get’em into the sheriff. That one needs Doc Peters. I’ll be all night getting them there; take all them guns in, they won’t be needin them.’ Lilly said, “ Burt, I’m going with you. I cain’t let you leave without me. I’ll need a day to quit shaking. Please , I have to go too.” Burt said , “Ok, but we’re riding our horses in. I don’t wanna listen to that man in pain or share the wagon with two dead men. That one ain’t wounded. He can drive it in. We can ride along in back.” Lilly said , “Burt can I ride with you on Stony, please”

The trip to town took all night. The wounded man didn’t make it and Burt was glad. Most belly wounds he’d ever heard of were a terrible pain and torture before dying. He suspected this and didn’t want Lilly to witness it. He was aware that she was becoming desperately attached to him. He tried to measure his own feelings that way. Yes, he had wanted to care for her since he had seen the depression and sorrow in her eyes. Now they both owned a Ranch and what was he going to do about that? He reached an arm around and pulled her closer to himself. She lay her head on his back and he could feel the wetness of her tears. “ Yeah, “ he was thinking, “I guess I’d miss her and worry about her too” He didn’t realize that those were tears of sorrow for the man she loved and could never hope he would love a saloon girl.

Sheriff Robbins of Holbrook had heard like everyone that Ned had died leaving his ranch to his ol'partner and some young unknown relatives. He wanted a complete story of the attempted murder and gunfight. Burt pleaded no knowledge of what he knew about the Murdocks and their attempt to get Ned's Ranch. It was strange to Burt that Robbins mentioned that no one had ever found Ned's gold mine and did he have any idea where it could be on that big Ranch. Burt felt his questions were not just casual talk and spread his hands saying. "You know as much as I do sheriff. This survivor of the gunfight will plead innocent. Maybe those that planned to have us killed will come to his defense. If I ever see him again on my Ranch, I'll be hauling him in too." Robbins said, " Just a minute now! You cain't be making those kind of threats, I'm the law around here and just come to me if you see people trespassing." Burt was getting a little hot and said, " Sheriff, I guess I lied, I won't be hauling him in. It's twenty miles to my Ranch and there's a lotta coyotes needing a grub stake!" Burt spun away and walked with Lilly to the eating house. Maybe hot coffee would take the bad taste outta his mouth. Lilly grabbed his arm and walked close beside him.

It was a month after Ned's death that Burt remembered the promise he had made to plant a certain geranium on Becky's grave. He asked Bo about it but Bo didn't know of a geranium flower. He said, " Nope Burt. Never heard of a flower by that name. You say Ned wanted one planted on Becky's grave. I don't know where you could get one of those, the only flowers I know of are on that rocky outcrop near the west water hole. I don't know what they are." Burt went to take a look and yes there were geraniums growing along this rocky out crop. His first thoughts were, " Ned wanted me to dig here. This is where the Gold mine is! I'm gonna dig some!" He returned excited and asked Bo and Lilly to come with him, He'd found the Gold mine! Wrong!

There was no sign of gold! A big disappointment, but Burt said, " I don't guess we need the gold anyway, this ranch should support us pretty easy. ' Bo said , " No, I'm sorry . I didn't think of it. I still owe three thousand to the Bank. I got a loan for Ned when his Becky was sick and he was in Arizona. They know by now I'm an owner. Ned was gonna pay the whole thing off, but has been fighting with the Murdocks over what they owe him He pays my bill every six months or so to keep

them from taking what little I own. He pays them in gold every time. Five hundred dollars each year. Always said he didn't trust that Green Lincoln money. I don't know where he got the gold and it's always been a mystery where he got six thousand to bail out the Bank. Now that he's dead the Territory will want his affairs cleared up. I'll just bet the Murdocks are sweatin blood right now. Ned always said there'd come a reckoning when he died. He was always writing letters to the government. Burt, I don't understand all this banker stuff. Maybe you can look through Ned's things and find some answers."

Burt replied, " Bo, I know Ned thought a lot of you as a dear friend. Mae and I promised him we'd stay and see that you were taken care of. I don't understand everything , but with what work he's done in the past with horses, Five hundred should be no problem." Bo replied, " I wish that was true Burt, but over the last few years neither of us could do much and most of what he made was spent during round up. Sometimes he even used some gold for that. Yeah, he had a gold mine some where, but like you said , it sure ain't where the flowers grow; there ain't a smiggen of gold dust even."

Burt asked, " Tell me about Becky and what happened there." Bo replied, " Ned got a letter from some friend in Arizona. Neither he or Becky ever said what it was and he took off to see this friend. Drove a wagon and took two good horses with him trailing behind. Said he had a big job to do for a good friend that was in trouble. He was gone for over a year. Him and Becky wrote letters back and forth . I had to make monthly trips to Holbrook. Becky took bad sick and I hauled her into Doc Peters. He sent us by stage to a Globe doctor and I made trips back and forth to sell horses and pay the bills. Becky was in Globe for two months. Half the horse herd belonged to me and I was able to get a loan from Murdock for fifty six hundred dollars to cover Becky's bills. Now that's been six , no seven years ago. Ned came home to a mess and it was shortly after that the Matty Culle gang robbed the Holbrook bank cleaning them out. That robbery broke both the Youngtown and Holbrook Banks. Cattle men, farmers and businesses were desperate for the money that was stolen. This is when Becky convinced Ned to make them a loan so the poor folks of this county wouldn't lose everything. That turned out to be a big mistake. There was something wrong with the paper that Ned signed.

A bigger problem arose though when everyone thought Ned had found a gold mine It was a year later when Becky died. Ned said it was because she had been threatened with a man killing him if she didn't tell the location of his gold mine. Her health was bad and this worry just killed her. He swore after she died no one would know the location where he got his gold from. I guess he kept his word. He always told me that I'd find it If he died before I did. Burt, that's everything I know and I don't know where to look, he never let me go with him except to town. I had too much trouble riding a horse."

Burt said, ' I'm stumped Bo. He said it was Becky's Geranium that he'd kept alive since she died. I'll wait awhile before I plant a flower for him. It sure won't live long in that desert. He really loved his Becky and I wonder if he didn't blame himself for her death. Look I don't wanna pry into your stuff, but I need to see his letters from the Territorial office. There may be some answers there."

In a wooden box under Ned's bed, they found letters that confirmed his giving the Territory registry his permission to demand the bank make that money available for his heirs upon his death. The territorial office indicated there would be a few months delay. Burt said, " There's about a week between letters. Yeah there'll be a delay, We'll get busy with some horses. There's two we could sell right away. From Ned's papers it seems that he sold most of his horses to Sam Laymon at the Hobbrook livery stable that black mare is about as pretty a horse as I've ever seen. Mae , honey how about we take these two in . They're ready and like Ned said, " if they belong to some one else, I don't have to feed'em." Lilly said, " let's go hon, I need a few things." Burt said, " Ok but you've gotta ride your own horse." Lilly was unhappy about that but it was a day's ride. She was thinking, "Maybe Burt was getting tired of her, but it seemed that lately he always called her Honey. I'll have to be happy with that. I love him and I hope he has feelings for me."

Burt on the other hand was wanting a little more than friendship from Lilly and it was tough riding with a pretty girl wrapped around you. A real marriage was on his mind. He had heard her tragic story from the time of her mother's death to when he met her. It hurt his heart when he thought about it. The ride was easy and it was

necessary to camp over night and come in the next day. He let Lilly go to the Mercantile while h went to the livery stable.

Sam Laymon said, “ No damnit, I heard about Ned. He was a good friend. You’re this Burt Hollis I’ve heard about. Yeah, I’d love to buy, but I’m strapped for cash. You probably haven’t heard but there has been a killing in Yountown. Joel Murdock , the banker there was killed by his wife at that Yellow Bird Saloon she claimed self defense. It was really a mess. Gus Haynes the owner was over spent and lost his saloon. He came by here needing a wagon and team. Had four girls with him, but no money . I allowed him some leeway on the girl’s jewelry just to get’em outta town before Robbins heard they had got off the stage. I can give you two hundred for that Gray gelding, but that beautiful mare is outta my range. I know ol’Ned always got five hundred pretty easy for horses like her.”

A startling thought came to Burt. He needed a ring for Lilly if he married her and said , “Let me see the jewelry stuff Sam, I’m looking for a ring.” Sam brought out the stuff and right away Burt said, ‘I’ll swap you the horse for all of it Sam. I can use it I think.” Sam smiled big and said, “ Done , it’s yours!” Burt couldn’t believe his luck. When Lilly came looking for him the jewelry was already in his saddle bag. He said, “ Honey, they’re sold. You wanna stay over or go home, we could get a room.” Lilly looked at him and Burt said with a smile. “ We’re married ain’t we.” Lilly in tears almost said, “ Burt please don’t make fun of me!” Burt grabbed her saying, “Honey it’s time we made it legal don’t you think, or don’t you wanna marry me.” Lilly burst into tears as she hugged him in disbelief. Burt said, “ It’s early in the day, we can find a priest.” That was easy to do, but the priest wanted a ceremony and Burt said, “ Father we haven’t got time for a ceremony and we’re just passing through. She needs a husband , I’m sure you understand.” The priest said, “I see! Let me get a parchment and write it up.” A half hour later They walked out with a marriage parchment that shown Lilly Mae Reynolds Married to Burt Hollis. Burt led Lilly to his horse saying , “I’ve got the ring here.” A stupefied and shocked Lilly fainted as Burt placed her mother’s golden necklace around her neck. A very concerned priest ran out fearing this pregnant girl needed a doctor. Burt caught her and carried her to a bench in the shade. He

hoped the priest would go back in the parish before Lilly came to and cussed him out.

Later after regaining her senses and outta names to call Burt she wanted all the details and cried with happiness for this man that had completely changed and saved her life. He had known immediately upon seeing the neck lass that it was her's from her description and knew also that from the other jewelry he could have a ring made just for her. There was no need for him to say anything, Burt loved her. Later Burt said, "Honey, I've been in love with you since I first saw you. Yeah I knew you were a saloon girl, but were is in the past. It's what you are to me now that counts. You were special and I forced you to take my name hoping you wouldn't refuse. It worked!" Lilly replied, "You're a real Bastard, but I do love you. I'll get even, I'm your real wife now. Burt, you can't even imagine what you mean to me. I hope I can be the wife you want." Burt said, "We'll get a room and stay over." Lilly said, "No we won't. I've slept in the dirt with you and that's how I want our wedding day to be. The night sky is so beautiful and I can ride behind you on Stony again. Burt, you have no idea how wonderful it was when I went with you from the Stage station. My life changed that day and it's been wonderful. Let's go home."

Bo couldn't figure them out. They were so happy and it affected him also. Burt said, "Bo, I'm going through more of Ned's stuff. His letters to Betsy are very personal and I feel like I'm ticking my nose where it don't belong. Some of his writing is pretty rough. I'll get Mae to read it. Her eyes are better than mine.' Later he asked Lilly to scan Ned's letters for any reference to what he did in Arizona. It soon began to make sense. His friend Johnny Ruggles had been hurt in a mining incident and apparently died some time later from injuries. Johnny had given Ned all of his mining equipment. Burt immediately questioned Bo and he replied, "That wagon had to be junked. Loaded with all that heavy stuff. Ned put it in the barn. It stayed in there for about a year with Ned taking stuff from it until Becky died. I think he lost all interest in gold mining after that. Some of it is still with the wagon in the scrap pile. He never used some stuff. Said it was too heavy to use in the hills. He took to drinkin pretty heavy for awhile. Losing Becky almost killed him. There's a pile of glass back of the house. He shot whiskey bottles for target practice. I bet he shot up fifty cans and

bottles. He loved that whiskey, but one day after visiting Becky's grave he swore off the stuff and seldom ever took another drink. Maybe Becky got after him about it. He was always complaining about how she was a Bitch, but anyone else saying that about her was asking for a fight." Burt thanked him and went to see the remnants of Ned's wagon. There was little to see. The heavy crushing wheel and a few iron containers were about all that was left. Everything rusted beyond use. Burt had some experience with gold mining , but here there was no clue. It appeared that Ned had used some of the equipment to go do some mining, but where? He said to Lilly, " Honey maybe someday we'll find the answer, but we'll try to get a couple more horses ready for sale and get a Geranium to plant on Becky's grave when we take'em in."

It was while Lilly was hanging clothes that she saw a mound on a small rise jut out of the back yard a short ways. What caught her attention was flashes of color she saw through the weed growth. Going out there she discovered a flower struggling to grow between the weeds. It was a Geranium! Quickly she went to get Burt and Bo. Was this Becky's flower? Bo said, " I never thought of this. That's little Ned's grave. Becky's only child. He only lived a few days . The birth was really tough and she had no more children. Burt said, " This has to be the flower Ned wanted on Becky's grave." Lilly was crying saying " Honey, this breaks my heart. What love there was in Ned's life.I guess Ned saw this flower as Becky's. I'll dig it up and take it with us. He wanted it to be the end of a family I guess ."

Days later they once again made the trip to Holbrook and took the Geranium to Becky's grave . it was easy to see the depressions and some dead stems where Ned had planted flowers for Becky over the years. Selecting a place in the middle as Ned had instructed him , Burt very carefully dug a hole for the Geranium. Striking what he thought to be a rock , he stuck his hand in and pulled out an Overholt pint whiskey bottle filled with Gold!

The End

Epilogue:

Nine more bottles were found in following years. Becky's dying Geranium was not the ending of a family, but the beginning of one. Ned had led Bo to believe he was on alcohol while all the time filling the bottles and planting them under a flower in Becky's grave site and in later years planting a flower when he dug a bottle out. The metal container's in the wagon junk had carried the gold from Arizona when Johnny Ruggles died and locked in Ned's barn until he could bottle and bury in all. Ned wanted folks to think he'd found a gold mine . He had, but it was in Arizona.

Geranium Joel Murdock banker wife Mable Gus Haynesowner of Yellow Bird Saloon John Hoel sheriff of youngtown Whiskey Gold whiskey bottles of gold buried in the ground above becky's casket . Ned planted flowers at every visit to disguise the time s when he neded gold. to dig up a bottle Culle gang robbed the Holbrook Bank which owned theyoung brsnch manage by joel murdocksheriff Robbins of holbrook