

Coyote Joe.

"Shagbark Bill" derived his name from his inordinate love for shagbark hickory nuts, on which he said he was raised back in the middle states," said the Old Timer.

"He generally had a supply in his pockets and a reserve store in a bag in the boot of the stage. English walnuts, almonds, filberts, etc., were ignored at half the money if Bill saw any shagbarks in stock. He was a stage driver on the old Butterfield route on an Arizona division, and one night when his team came galloping up to the station, with the wheelers' lines wrapped around the brake-rod and Bill propping himself up with his left arm, the leaders' lines in his teeth, we knew there had been a hold-up without his telling us, and as we helped him down the blood on our hands from a ragged wound in his right shoulder told us there had been a fight.

"Saddle up, boys," said the superintendent, before he asked a question and several of the bystanders ran to obey. "Where was it, Bill?"

"Back at Burnt Palms."

"How many?"

"Only two," Coyote Joe was one; "other I didn't know, but he was a greaser, too. The leaders was skittish an' I couldn't draw up in time to suit 'em, an' so they plugged me. No, I dropped my last passenger at Ehrenberg."

"But you've shot once," said the superintendent, as he took Bill's pistol from the seat and examined it.

"Yes, at the strange greaser; he was stannin' in the trail an' I cut loose. I didn't see Joe or I wouldn't have been so hasty, mebbe," and Bill grinned feebly. "Twas Joe that got to me from the bushes on 't'other side of the trail. After Joe got me he stopped the team, an' it might a' been worse. He took some water from his canteen an' washed the wound, then boun' some tobacco on it to stop its bleedin'. Then he went through the express box an' mail, tied his horse behind an' drove the stage for me plumb to the top of the rise back there, all the time sayin' he was sorry he hurt me, but he'd only done it in the line of his business. He made me promise to wait half an hour at the top of the rise, and then said adoyne, an' galloped back up the trail. He's the derndest cuss."

"The posse was saddled and ready by that time, and as we rode away Bill called out: "You'd better loo' aroun' in the bushes thereabouts the Palms for that strange greaser; somehow I got kind of a' dazed, but he ain't far off."

"We looked and found him; it had been remarked on the way that if Bill had had any kind of a show he would not be far away, and he was not; not over ten yards from the trail in the shade of an ironwood, where Joe had dragged him. He could not have lived two minutes with that big 'forty-five' hole through him. On his breast, weighted down with a small bowlder, was a note written in Spanish asking that he be given a five-acre-dell, ably taken from the treasure box with which to pay the expenses of interment; also, another \$100 from the same source to ease the pain of his good friend, Senior Bill, whom he accidentally injured, the accident consisting in "Senior Bill" not knowing that Joe was in the bushes.

"A devil was that Joe; stage robber, horse thief, cattle thief and the Lord knows what else; a sly, shrewd rascal, like the animal for which he was named, but there the similarity ended. For Joe was a reckless dare-dell, ably and solely without fear. He would ride twenty-four hours to attend a fandango, dance all night with his life in his hand with an enthusiasm that left the imprint of his boot-heels in the hard adobe floor, and he in the saddle again before a morning surrounded him. He was known to all the Mexican families from Yuma to El Paso, and as his deceptions were confined to the stock and property of the Americans, he was never betrayed. When the black smelter began to populate a Mexican settlement Joe rode the fifty miles to Tucson in less than four hours, stealing two horses on the way, and carried the call for physicians and supplies. There was a price on his head then, and he was allowed to depart unmolested. Again, when Geronimo and his gang of murderous fiends first broke out, Joe rode before them, alarming the ranchers, and a posse was on his trail then. He would stop and pass the time of day with you pleasantly, or share your meal of bacon and beans in the most unobtrusive manner, although a posse, with a rope, might be hunting him not two miles away. A queer mixture he was of devilry, cunning, courage and tender-heartedness, especially the latter toward women, children and the helpless.

"Six of us took his trail southward from the burnt Palms, and the others of the posse carried the body of his 'buena compania' y amigo' and the \$200 to the station. We were hard riders, but the man ahead of us was the hardest. In ordinary cases we would have taken a different course from that of which we were informed in the note, at least several posess would have taken as many directions, but Joe was not an 'ordinary case.' When he said he was going to Sonora we knew that there he would go if pursued, an' straight as if he had a business date with us; and as a matter of fact the trail led as directly south as the nature of the ground would permit.

"We had been in the saddle forty-eight hours with the exception of two stops of three hours each at water holes separated by forty miles of blistering sand. We saw him once late in the evening on the summit of a 'hog-back' about 1,000 yards from us; for a moment horse and rider were silhouetted against the evening sky, then, as we raised our rifles for a chance shot, he waved his shavers in 'adios' and disappeared over the opposite slope, where, later, we were obliged to dismount and feel our way down. He had

stopped to eat supper with a countryman, and later to steal a fresh horse from a rancher. He might have picked us off one at a time at several points on the trail, but we had no fears of that, for in all his career Joe had never been known to 'kill.' He was one of the best shots in the territory, but relied more on his powers of endurance and knowledge of the country to effect his escape, and his knowledge of certain trails was shared only by the wild sheep and eagles.

"All night we pushed on southward toward Bitter Spring, the next water hole. The sun, a great ball of fire, was already two hours above the eastern horizon when our tired and hoof-worn horses reeled into the sear shade of the few scraggly cotton-woods. There were evidences of our man having been there, and recently, for the water had not yet cleared in the hoof tracks in the mud about the spring. After drinking our jaded horses literally dropped in their tracks, and for an hour we allowed them to rest, at the same time throwing quantities of mesquite beans and ironwood boughs before them for forage. A scout about the spring, one of the posse, brought the information that the trail headed directly east from there.

"Horse beat out an' huntin' rougher groun' to hide in," said one as he shaded his eyes from the morning sun and looked closely towards the bare hills some five or six miles away.

"They's a tenderfoot an' his family took up a ranch over there in Cottonwood Canyon, an' it's more likely he went over there to steal another horse," said Doc Cutler. Shortly after we were in the saddle again and on the trail that the tenderfoot had been seen, the horse was being forced to its utmost. For a few hundred yards the trail showed the animal to be on a run through the sand, and then it slowed down to a trot, then a run for a hundred yards, then a trot, here the rider had flung himself from the saddle and ran with the horse for a mile. We could not understand it; we were not pushing him hard; he was at least two hours ahead of us, a greater start than at any time since the pursuit began.

"I'll tell you my lity, boys," said the captain of the party, a taciturn, grizzled old government scout. "I've ben watchin' them smokes yender on the peaks sence daylight an' I don't like 'em. I believe them 'Packy devils' in our agin' an' headin' this way. Chances is that Joe seed 'em too, an' he ain't breakin' fer rough groun', preferin' to do his fightin' in the hills rather than in the open. An' after a moment's silence, 'one's where his head's level, an' we'd better follo' suit. We gouter git to water an' we couldn't hold the spring back there an' hour, it strikes me that Cottonwood Kenyon is the place if 'tis in the line of our smokes, an' then again it's more likely that that tenderfoot'll need help. We won't lose the trail, I know that greaser or old. He's got a white side in his soul 'spite of the Injun that's in him an' he ain't likely to be off if wimmen an' children's a ne'er doin' help."

"We crowded our horses to their best and in about half an hour came in sight of the settler's cabin built in the center of a canyon some 200 or 300 yards wide. Cottonwood Creek, an insignificant, threadlike rivulet, trickled over the stones in its narrow channel eight or ten yards from the house. A corral built alongside the cabin with a brush shed at the farther end contained several horses. As we neared the corral from the down-hill side a number of short, shrill yells came to us from up the canyon, yells that like the whirr of a rattlesnake, once heard, are never forgotten. A score or more Indians, some on ponies and others on foot, were running toward the cabin, while others scrambled down the canyon walls.

"Jeez! ez I thought; hell's broke loose, an' comin' down the kenyon like a cloudburst! Run for the cabin, boys!" yelled the captain, and every man snatched his repeater and cartridge belt from his saddle. We had the advantage of distance, and as the cabin door closed behind us the Indians were a good 150 yards away, and evidenced their disappointment by a scattering volley, but the bullets hit harmlessly into the heavy slab door.

"Welcome, seniors," said a smooth, soft voice as the curtain turned from barring the door. It was Coyote Joe, strong and smiling, his teeth showing straight and white from his black moustache. "Welcome, and how did you leave mi buena amigo, Senior Bill. Doing well, eh? Inueno, mi compania, ah. Por Dios, but he was foolish; would stand in the trail after I had warned him of Senior Bill. I turned aside seniors, as you see, or we would not have met. I saw the smokes on the mountains; I have always lived here and read them as a book. I thought of Senior Wilson here and turned aside, and, Por Dios, here you are. I knew you would come, but I feared not until too late; but you are welcome, seniors." Again that smile, and Joe turned to

a loophole, under which he had placed a box and on it his revolver and knife. His rifle he held in his hand. A few shots scattered the Apaches back up the canyon, and then we turned to take stock of our surroundings.

"The cabin was a two-roomed affair, with a loft, all built solidly of cotton-wood logs. The roof was of stout poles thatched with tules, and covered with adobe. A trapdoor in one corner of the punchon floor led to a rude excavation or cellar, in one corner of which huddled Mrs. Wilson, a wide-eyed, nervous little woman, with two small children, clasped in her arms and by her side two badly scared girls, one of 15 and the other 17. When the captain told her that we were six men who knew how to shoot, and 'all had guns,' she seemed relieved, and at once began to bewail the day they left their 'Nebraska' home. The captain rudely interrupted to inquire after her husband, and this brought on another attack of fear; he had gone down the canyon looking for strayed stock that morning. Then, when the Mexican or Indian or whatever he was upstairs had come they were nearly scared out of their wits. They could not understand all he said, but he drove them into the cellar and shut the door on them; then they heard him fasten up the house. The captain came up the ladder slowly. That cussed greaser had deliberately surrendered himself to a fate worse than the posse had reserved for him for the sake of that helpless woman and children. He could easily have escaped the posse, but he stopped to defend them. He would help come or die in it. The old captain could appreciate a sentiment like that, and there was a kind of expression in his eyes as he looked at Joe. Ordinarily his companionship was not as desired, but as he 'sized up' his sneaky figure, quick eyes, and rapid movements, in which there was not a trace of nervousness, the captain admitted that he was not a bad man to have beside one in a scrimmage like the one ahead of us.

"Again came those shrill yells from up the canyon. "Senior Wilson" shouted Joe. Far down the canyon was a cloud of dust, and in front of it a black speck which soon resolved itself into a horse and rider coming at top speed. The Indians had seen him, too, and were coming from above, a rider in the lead, with a posse of mounted men on either side near the cliffs and heading him off. Joe first discovered the ruse, and a rapid fire was maintained, which sent them back from the open, and Wilson gained the cabin unhurt. His horse was shot, and he and children, and after a brief visit to the cellar he returned and took each of us by the hand. As he held out his hand Joe glanced quickly at the captain, who nodded and, turning to his loophole, gestured with his hand across his eyes and muttered: "Damn it, why shouldn't he? He's a man, an' ez good a fighter ez any of us." There was a whole sermon in that look and muttered comment.

"On either side it was a good 150 yards to the hills, and with a view to cultivation, the ground had been cleared of every rock and shrub, and was perfectly open; a horned toad could not have crossed it unseen.

"They don't keer so much fer us ez they do our ponies an' hosses," said the captain, an' the men made a dash for the night. Boys, we'll lay down an' leave Wilson an' the girls to watch an' call us at the first sign." Motions to Joe, we climbed to the left, and the seven of us, tired out with our days and nights in the saddle, were soon asleep. Towards night we awakened much refreshed.

"A batch of 'em's been foolin' around up there in the gulch out of range for a good while," said Wilson as we came down. Joe ran to where he could see up the canyon, and then to the rear to look at the water. "Carra, ez diablo, they have stopped the water!" It was true. They had dammed the stream, and there was no water in the channel save a little that had collected in pools below large boulders. A glance at the sky made us fearful, as if a large olla that had been hung outside at the corner of the house had been shattered by a rifle ball.

"Quick, Senior Wilson; all your backs are cantinas; soon will the children be all gone, then what will the children do?"

"But what are ye goin' to do, Joe?"

"Fill everything that will hold water."

"But they's a gang of 'em scattered over there along the cliff."

"But water we must have, senior captain."

"Agreed, an' by — I'll go with you."

"But, senior —"

"That's all right, Joe; but I'm boss."

"If the senior will—but if he will dip the water up from under the bank Joe will carry it to the house."

"No, Joe, that's —"

"No, senior captain is the taller; Joe would climb with it."

"Now, boys, we're goin' to make a dash for the creek; they's a crowd of 'em behind that ironwood top, an' after back up that little butte that stands jest above. Giv' 'em a few rounds, then we'll open the door an' everybody standin' out of range, and they'll be dazed at the points named with water, and Joe was on his way with two buckets full before the Indians knew it. Another man, a dapper fellow, the foliage of the ironwood, a gallon of bullets in the soft logs, but no one was hurt. Another turn, and three or four red devils showed themselves from behind the butte to secure better aim. Only one crawled back, the others rolled to the foot of the cliff and were quiet. Back to the edge of the bank again, and Joe, glancing up the gulch, yelled and pointed in that direction. A dozen or more of the Apaches, mounted on their swift ponies, and only showing a foot or shoulder, were coming as silently as the wind over the soft sand.

"Quick! Up, senior captain, they are on us!" and reaching over the bank Joe pulled up the captain. Each caught up a bucket and gained the door, but not a moment too soon, for a dozen rifle bullets were imbedded in it as it closed. There were a few dead ponies after the charge, and later a few riders as they tried to gain the shelter of the cliff. The night passed in careful watching. They'll try to stampede the horses tonight," said the captain during the evening, an' we musn't let 'em get nigh the corral; lucky it's a full moon." They only tried it once, and that was along toward morning. When this sun rose there were more bodies lying on crimson patches of sand, but the horses were safe. The day passed quietly, and night came on, bringing with it a suspicion of clouds fringing the peaks to the south.

"Cloudy night, maybe, senior captain," said Joe, pointing to the peaks.

"Yep," and the captain looked anxious.

"Captain," said Joe, "tomorrow there will be no water, not enough for the woman and children. How long can we hold out? No, not long. No, wait for help; Geronimo is undiable. See you the smokes to the southeast? His scouts fool the soldiers. It is forty miles to the east. Our must go."

"But it's almost sure death to leave here."

"Si, senior."

"No, we'd better cash in together."

"I will go, senior."

"But the chances is a thousand to one agin' you."

"Si, senior, but I will take that chance and if—well, it's only Coyote Joe, you know," and he smiled meaningly.

"That's so," and the captain stroked his grizzled chin while that kind look again stole over his face.

"And, senior, captain, if I get through I'll come back."

"Who th' 'ell's-a-thinkin' about that—but I'll talk with the boys." The situation was canvassed in detail and all agreed to Joe's plan but Wilson, who was a "law-abiding citizen," and when he learned the identity of the volunteer messenger protested against permitting him to escape so "easily." He was in favor of ridding the territory of such dangerous criminals. Joe caught the drift of his argument. Again that pleasant smile.

"Let Senior Wilson go; his chances are nothing as compared with mine, but, Por Dios, he is a brave man."

So, Wilson said his place was there to defend the woman and children, and it was impossible to convince him that those fiends out there were thirsting to put us to the torture and his family to a captivity worse than death. He was a "good" man and as "nervy" as any of us had he lacked experience with Apaches. He was of the opinion that Joe would carry the dispatch, but after that we were a posse comitatus and it was our duty to keep our man. He suggested that the dispatch should also disclose the identity of the messenger and request the commandant to put him under guard until called for by a posse. Joe was peering out a loophole and did not hear this; the old captain muttered something that sounded like an oath behind his beard, but aloud he said at right and winked at us.

"I know the Apache tongue as well as my own, seniors," said Joe. "While the shadow of the house lies on that side I will slip to the channel of the water, then down it to the camp of the party below. I know well how to get out of their hands; and he laughed, a little harshly I thought. He stripped, then said: "May I take your hands, seniors?" Then he drew the captain to one side.

"Senior captain, there are many dangers between me and the fort, forty miles away, if you have any courage and will win, the soldiers will be here by daybreak. If they do not come, and you get out, look for my body between here and the fort. But remember, always keep one cartridge each for the woman and children. You know what I mean, captain. When all hope is gone, it will be much easier death for them. Your hand again, senior captain; adios."

"The door opened noiselessly in the shadow, and, with his knife in his teeth and his hand on the wall, he was gone. Only an instant we thought we saw him as he wriggled over the bank; after that he seemed to have become part of the waste of sand around us.

"We too: 'turn-about' dozin' as death the night, which was as still as death itself; not even the hoot of an owl or the yelp of acoyote broke the silence. Along about 2 o'clock the storm, which had been gathering about the peaks, broke in all its fierceness. A few moments before the fringe of heavy black clouds had overtaken the moon in its race to the west, and the canyon became black as midnight. Then a thunderbolt seemed to strike and shatter the peaks above, and the report went reverberating and re-echoing away. A moment later and another came, and with it a stock mule fearful, as if the earth had yawned and hell had vomited a hundred yelling fiends about the cabin. A bright glare of lightning showed a mass of Indians and a number with a huge log poised on their shoulders before the cabin door.

"To the corner over the cellar door," yelled the captain, an' every man shot straight in front; empty your guns an' club 'em! Crash came the heavy log, and the door fell inward. Our rifle fire flashed in the face of the cumbered with the dead. Another crash and the rear door gave way, dividing our fire, and the room was filled with fighting men. Every man shot blindly, but with fearful effect, though the stifling smoke into the yelling fiends were obtained and they were bayoned by snaky red fingers as they descended. The last thing I remember of the light was as if a mountain had fallen on my head, and as I went down I saw Wilson and the captain back to each other, the cellar door, moving a swath around them with their rifles, and then—fainted away, with a sound like the notes of a bugle ringing in my ears.

"When I recovered an army surgeon was passing his fingers tenderly but firmly through my hair. "There is no fracture," he was saying; "only a severe contusion. He will be all right, barring a bad headache, in a little while." It was just as I lost consciousness that a company of the 11th saw me in the canyon on a gallop, and I heard the bugle sound "charge." The captain and Wilson had kept their feet, but as the Indians fled, they had dropped from sheer exhaustion, a giving way of the nervous tension. Doc Cutler was found, half strangled, un-

der a big Apache, who had Doc's knife in his side. The other three boys were in worse condition, but their hurts consisted of cuts and bruises. The Indians had been so maddened that it was impossible for them to use their firearms.

"But," said the lieutenant in command, "what kind of men are you to order the arrest of your messenger? Why, damn it, sir, that fellow is a hero. He ran the Indian pony to death, stole another from a rancher who would not believe his story, killed that horse and came the last mile on foot on a dead run. He fought like the devil when we put him in the guard-house, and he was a good deal more with us." The old captain growled something in his beard and glared at Wilson, who was just then trying to quiet the fears of his wife and children. When the troopers returned from the immediate pursuit a detachment escorted us, Wilson's family and all to the fort. There we found that Joe had dug his way out and escaped, and I did not even hear the officer in command reprove the guard—not even when it was ascertained that Joe had gotten away with his own arms and a government horse. I even thought there was a twinkle of approval in the officer's eyes as the soldier on guard made his report, but that is only a suspicion. But the soldier led through it all with the face of a stone, and how was the officer to know that the hole was dug after Joe escaped? Anyway, a Mexican can burrow out of an adobe as easily as a gopher. Well, we returned to the stage station without Joe. "Yes," we said, "we were close on him, and would have caught him if the Apaches had not cut us out."

"A few years afterward I asked the old captain if he had ever seen Joe since. "Yes," he said, "seed 'im an' heard 'im both. 'Twas down below the line. They was some trouble with the Yaquis, an' Joe wuz mixed up in it some way. They was stannin' 'em, 's' senior to do that an' report 'em shot while tryin' to escape than 'is to guard 'em. They wuz takin' 'em out one by one an' as they passed he said, "Buena Dios, senior captain." I thought I knowed the voice an' lookin' aroun' by God, sir, it wuz Koyote Joe, an' he wuz grinnin' jest like he did that day he opened the cabin door fer us down on Cottonwood. Well, I got the officer of the firm's squad to wait a bit, an' then I ruzzled aroun' an' found the commandante an' told 'im some things I knowed about Joe. He said he wuz not certain about Joe bein' guilty, but that he was ketchin' with the rest. I seed that commandante wuz a man, every inch of 'im, an' wanted to do it square thing. We figgered aroun' awhile, an' then called in the officer of the squad an' told him. He wuz willin' ez the commandante, so instead of loadin' half the rifles with ball an' half with blank eztridges, he loaded 'em all with blank. I was 'lowed to say a few words to the condemned,

an' when the squad fired Joe fell ez an' just seed, "Gracias, si senior." 'S' natural ez life, and with the other 1 sec. I lost I want be long now 'til his body wuz turned over to his friends. I'll be bustin' you agin, you Arizona Half-breed later I seed him in a mesquite way. He just grinnin' agin, humped just an' sez, "Hess an' hors, Joe, an' he wuz shavin' an' an' sez, "mebbe; quiet shak." He grinnin' an' shoo'd han's, sabé? He's the derndest cuss."

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