

WILLIAM HOPSON

## THE Last Apaches

HE LED A DESPERATE
BAND AGAINST THE
WHITE INVADERS

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED





## MATESA

—had fought like a lobo against the soldiers. He led the aged ones and the widows and children to safety. He brought back thirty-five head of good horses from the Me-hi-cano soldiers. He followed and killed one of the White Eyes scalp hunters.

## NANA

—thought: if I had a hundred more like him, I'd cut off, surround, and kill every patrol of soldiers I could find.
And now he's making a final, faint war cry. A cry of protest from the last of the free Apaches.

# Cast of Characters

- NANA said, "As long as I can ride a pony I shall never make peace."
- MATESA, only eighteen, but brave and hard, fought as Nana had taught him.
- CHINGO, outcast from his own tribe, meant to have Matesa's future bride or Matesa's life.
- MAJOR LIVINGSTON had won over Cochise, Geronimo, Ponce and Whoa, but lost out to Nana.
- COCHISE had been the greatest of all warriors, but whiskey and inactivity had destroyed him.
- BERRA, young and lovely, wanted only Matesa, but captured by Chingo, she risked her life to have him.

# THE III Last Apaches

By WILLIAM HOPSON



Bantam Books · New York

## THE LAST APACHES

A BANTAM BOOK published by arrangement with Bouregy & Curl, Inc.

Printing History
Avalon (Bouregy & Curl) Edition
Published December, 1951
1st Printing ..... November, 1951

Copyright, 1951, by William Hopson

Bantam Books are published by Bantam Books, Inc. Its trade mark, consisting of the words "Bantam Books" and the portrayal of a bantam, is registered in the U.S. Patent Office and in other countries. Marca Registrada

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Bantam Books, 25 West 45th Street, New York 36, N. Y.

## THE LAST APACHES



## CHAPTER I

In the coolness that was beginning to descend upon Fort Thomas that evening, Major B. D. Livingston, the commander, crossed the compound from the officers mess on the way back to his office. Retreat had sounded, the swivel gun was silent, the colors taken away. The flagpole stood naked and alone. Out beyond the entrance, a sentry paced his post back and forth, and Livingston wondered fleetingly what was going through the trooper's mind. Probably whiskey and women...

Livingston stepped beneath the ramada where four beady-eyed Apaches lounged and looked up at him-Coyotero scouts from the reservation that lay to the north. Cochise had made peace, as had most of the others, and was now up there among four thousand others of the various tribes: the Coyoteros, Tontos, Warm Springs, Jicarilla, White Mountain, and the Chiricahuas. Even Geronimo, the treacherous one, with his band of unruly warriors was there . . . though no one could tell how many months he would stay.

Only one band was now left, and it was because of that one that Major Livingston was returning to his office. Old Nana, in his late seventies now, had sent word by Cochise: "I killed men long before the White Eyes soldiers were born. And now they would have me put a tag around my neck and be counted like a Mexican sheep to get food. I shall never make peace."

Not only had he refused to make peace, he had slipped past patrols and the Indian police under Sergeant Chingo, gone into Cochise's camp with his thirty-three warriors, and then fled with their families and children. Patrols from Fort Bowie to the southeast, and other patrols from Fort Lowell to the southwest, near the old pueblo city of Tucson, were combing the desert for him, but without results so far. Livingston had been ordered to stand pat and guard the southern boundary of the reservation as insurance against any sudden breaks.

But the Old Man at Regimental Headquarters, up at Prescott, was blistering the telegraph wires with orders to run down Nana, or heads would fall. Livingston smiled wryly at that one, not blaming the Colonel. He was probably catching hell from the Commanding General of the district, in Winslow.

Major Livingston entered the office and sat down at his desk, nodding to Lieutenant Kelton. He pulled open a drawer, took out a cigar, lighted it, and leaned back, listening absently to the clicking of the telegraph key.

"Nothing new, Major," Kelton said.

"I didn't expect anything," replied the Major. "There's no telling what the cunning old devil will do. My guess is that he'll swing east into New Mexico Territory and the mountain country for a while. When a man has fought other Indians, Mexicans, and whites for more than sixty years and never been caught . . ." He let the rest of it go unfinished.

A big, square-shouldered man in his late forties, with a round face covered by a short beard turning from brown to grey, he had fought through the Civil War as a Colonel and then, because the Army was his life, had volunteered for frontier service with the rank of Captain.

As a professional soldier, he held no personal enmity toward the "hostiles"; neither wanting to kill every man, woman, and child of them, as so many had advocated, nor coddling them as wayward children, as some of the maudlin politicians in Washington wanted done.

His task as a hard-riding troop commander had been to bend all efforts to help bring in or to kill Cochise, Nana, Geronimo, Victorio, Chatto, Ponce, and Whoa. He had applied himself to that task assiduously, earned a promotion to a higher rank, and been placed in command of Fort Thomas. One by one, the various bands had been run down or had come in voluntarily, until only old Nana remained.

Nana had struck once, and now Nana had struck again. Livingston could sense it as he heard the challenge of the sentry to the sound of trotting hoofs followed by a "Go to hell, you cavalry son of a bitch," and saw the lathered horse come trotting in and stop before the ramada.

"Old man Adkins," Major Livingston said dryly. "I was hoping for something better."

The man who swung down from the exhausted horse was gaunt and fiere-faced. His white hair hung to just below the lobes of his ears and had been trimmed there. His white mustache was long and flowing. He owned a huge ranch on San Simon Creek between Fort Thomas and Fort Rowie.

He strode in and stopped before Livingston's desk, glaring at him from a pair of piercing blue eyes that radiated sheer hatred.

"Well, your goddamned Apaches have done it again, Major. Hit my ranch today. Killed two of my punchers, but we got two of them in return. They got away with eleven head of hosses."

Livingston made no immediate reply, for he knew the man. He sat there puffing on his cigar, saying nothing, his imperturbability deliberate. Adkins, who had come west after the Civil War, was known to have been one of Quantrill's querillas. He had settled on San Simon Creek and built a huge, sprawling ranch. In the course of it, he had acquired a Mexican woman without benefit of clergy and raised a brood of children.

The Apaches, trying to hold their lands in the face of ever-increasing encroachments by the whites, had made a few sporadic raids on his place, with little success except to pin cushion sheep and hogs and calves with arrows. Adkins had retaliated in his own way one day when he and a group of his Mexican and American riders had surprised a small band of Apache women and children picking berries. They had shot all but one of them. A two-year-old girl child. And even now the most hardened men in the Territory still grimaced at what old Ed Adkins had done.

He had dismounted with the words, "Young 'uns grow up to be big 'uns," and swung the child by its heels.

Cochise and his warriors had read the story when they found the body, and they struck back savagely at the ranch of the man responsible for what had happened. In the slashing, shed-burning raid that almost succeeded, two of Adkins' offspring, fighting with rifles, had been being the state of the state o

From that time on, of those who advocated wiping out the Apaches, fierce old Ed Adkins had been the most vociferous. He cursed any and all soldiers for their lack of success and would spit at the feet of an officer, It was suspected of late that the four Brawley brothers-Fred, Hugo, Jim, and Buck—had not found it necessary to go all the way to Mexico to sell the scalps they still hunted from stray little parties here and there.

Major Livingston took his time in the face of the old

"When?" he asked.

"Today, about noon or so. We wus all eatin' dinner when they hit the lower end of the sheds and opened up on the house with guns. Repeating rifles! Sharps, .50

calibers! I heard at least two of your damned army guns." "We use the .45-70 Sharps carbine," Livingston said in

that same dry voice.

"Never mind!" roared the old man angrily. "They opened up with rifles, shootin' at everything that moved. Poured shells right through the windows. The rest of 'em hit fer the hoss pasture where 'leven of my best saddle hosses wus. They got 'em all."

"See any women and children?"

"Goddlemighty!" swore Adkins angrily, stomping up and down the floor. "No wonder the damned cavalry never could ketch 'em. Wimmin an' kids! Them wimmin an' kids wus hid out miles away someplace. There wus about thirty of the devils, screeching and vellin' while they got the hosses and lit out."

"Which way did they go?" inquired the Major. He was still puffing on the cigar and, in an unofficerlike fashion, he lifted a leg and rested his jackboot across a corner of

the desk.

"East. They lit out like a streak of lightnin' and I got on a hoss and barreled him in here to tell you you better

damn' well start doin' somethin' about it!"

"We've been doing something about it, Mr. Adkins." Major Livingston said, and let the jackboot ease to the floor again. He rose to his feet, the cigar clamped in a corner of his mouth, "We've known for some time that Nana should be within a radius of two hundred miles from here. Patrols from the forts at Prescott, at Lowell, and at Bowie have been working with Apache scouts to locate him."

"Hah! Scouts! Like them four stinkin' devils out there on the porch, hey? I notice you didn't say anything about

any patrols from this fort."

Major Livingston removed the cigar from his mouth and flicked off the ash with a finger. His brown eyes had taken on an icy glint.

"That is the Army's business, sir, not yours," he said curtly. "You've made your report. We'll take care of the rest of it." He turned to a sergeant who had at that moment stepped through the doorway. "Sergeant, take Mr. Adkins to the officers' mess, and see that his horse is taken care of." It was curt dismissal.

"Yes, sir."

"Just gimme a fresh one an' I'll ride back to the ranch." snapped the old man.

"Isn't that rather risky, sir, in view of the fact that Nana might not have turned east but could have even swung north back toward the reservation?" Livingston said in thin politeness. "He's a very cunning Indian, you know."

"You run yer own business an' I'll run mine," retorted Adkins, and stalked out. He spat at the four Covotero scouts, and then swung to the back of his exhausted horse and followed the sergeant.

Young Lieutenant Kelton grinned, the embarrassment in it partly for his Commanding Officer and partly personal, because he had been a witness to the fierce old man's angry explosiveness. Kelton was blond and fresh out of the Point. Like so many others, he had volunteered for frontier duty in the hopes of a more rapid promotion to higher rank. He loved his duties, the chain of commands in which he was but another link through the various echelons, his own authority and that above him, Military training and tradition had taught him that a Commanding Officer's office was sacrosanct in so far as rules were concerned, and he felt embarrassment because a man like the fierce-visaged old rancher had violated them.

He said, to cover his feelings, "Whew, sir! I've heard of such men out here. I believe they are called salty."

"He was one of Quantrill's Guerillas-though they should have been called White Apaches," Livingston answered quietly. "Twe seen at first hand some evidence of their work, Lieutenant, and it was not a pleasant sight. Burning, looting, slaughter, and rape. Get Sergeant Osman here on the double. I'll have to wire the old man at Prescut for orders."

Captain Cartright strolled in from mess, toothpick in mouth, along with a cigar. A big, competent-looking man in his late thirties. He was Adjutant and, therefore, second in command. He removed the cigar and disposed of the toothpick.

"I just saw Adkins, the Apache hater, suspected scalp buyer, and killer of babies, come in," he said facetiously. And more seriously: "Anything special, Bud?"

Livingston, cigar clamped almost savagely between his teeth, was studying a large map that hung on the wall back of his desk.

"Nana hit his ranch today about noon, apparently to get some fresh horses—and maybe to settle up a few old scores. I'll wire the old man at Prescott for orders, and he'll inform Fort Bowie. I'm leading this one, Jim. As Adjutant, vou'll be in command while I'm gone."

The three of them were studying the map. On it in red lines yas the outline of the huge reservation now holding four thousand Apaches, most of them content, but many, like Geronimo, sullen and rebellious. Fort Thomas lay just below the southern boundary. Far to the southeast lay Fort Bowie, under command of Major Johnston. Southwest was Fort Lowell, near Tucson. The three forts formed a triangle covering hundreds of square miles. The Adkins ranch, on San Simon Creek, was located northeast of Fort Bowie, a little over halfway between Bowie and Fort Thomas.

The Major placed a horny forefinger at a point between Thomas and Bowie. "Here's Adkins' ranch on San Simon Creek. He said that Nana went east. The old fox may have his women and children hid out a couple of

hundred miles over in the New Mexico mountains, or he may not. At any rate, his route east would take him about seventy-five miles north of Bowie. We've got four thousand troopers scattered in forts all over this territory, and vet Nana ducks around us like a cottontail diving between the legs of a covote."

There was a thoughtful look on his bearded face as he sat down at his desk and began to scribble rapidly.

Sergeant Osman came in, breathing a bit faster than normal because he had come across the compound so quickly. He was dark-haired, stockily built, and looked well-educated. He said, "Sergeant Osman reporting to the Major, sir."

Livingston gripped the cigar hard between his teeth and went on writing the message to the old man at Prescott. He knew that very shortly some plain and fancy hell was going to start popping in both territories. He finished, handed the sheet to the sergeant, and said, "Regimental Headquarters."

"Seems to me," Cartwright said, "that with a plain trail to follow, Johnston, at Bowie, could cut it pretty fast with his Apaches."

Livingston snorted and chewed savagely on the cigar. "They're Covoteros, like those four out there. I told the agent to send me some Chiricahuas, but the damned fool has some idea in his head that it's best to use scouts of another tribe. Plain idiocy! They're all Apaches, regardless of the different tribes. I guess the Coyoteros are willing enough, but they spend most of their time in their own territory in the mountains. These Cherry-Cows are desert men and, for cunning, none of them, not even Cochise himself, can hold a candle to old Nana. He's almost eighty years old and he can ride up to ninety miles in a day.'

The telegraph key was clicking away steadily under the skilled fingers of the sergeant. The message was going through to the old man in Prescott. Livingston got up and began to pace the floor, an idea forming in his mind about Nana. Nana knew how the soldiers thought—and could be depended upon to do just the opposite. No Apache in his right mind would try to cut down through the triangle formed by the three forts. Of course, the old fox might go straight on east and then swing north into the high mountain country.

He was still thinking it over, revolving the problem in his mind, when the message came. He read the note the sergeant handed to him, tossed the cigar butt into a spit-

toon, and looked at his two fellow officers.

"Confirmation, gentlemen. The old man is ordering Johnston to ride north and pick up the trail. He'll find a cold trail that will disappear. We're to take two troops and go south. And that's exactly what I'm going to do. I'm going south. A long way-south. All the way to the Mexican border. I'm playing a hunch." He turned to the wall map again. He pointed to the

He turned to the wall map again. He pointed to the area in the triangle. "Here's the line of the San Pedro River. It cuts straight south through the triangle formed by the three forts. Suppose that Nana has his women and children hid out somewhere down there. He needs more horses to mount his people. He makes a raid on Adkins' ranch and leaves a plain trail east for the soldiers to follow. Then he splits up and scatters and doubles back by riding a lot farther in a day than we can as a troop. By the time we find out what has happened, he's halfway to Mexico. All he has to do is duck the patrols working east from Lowell, because all the others from Bowie will be heliographed in to go after where he's supposed to be . . . They may break me for it, but that's the hunch I'm playing."

He stepped to his desk, bent over and scribbled hastily, and handed the paper to the waiting sergeant. "Send that to Major Hardin at the agency and tell him I want Chingo down here by daylight. Jim," to Captain Cartwright, "two troops ready to go at daybreak. Full rations for two weeks. I'll take Troop A and Lieutenant Kelton will take Troop C."

Lieutenant Kelton said, "Chingo, sir?"

Livingston had pulled another cigar from the drawer. He bit off the end of it and spat. "He's a Chiricahua scout. Sergeant of Apache police. Big, ugly, mean, whiskeydrinking, arrogant bastard. About forty years old. But I happen to know that he was born in Nana's band and spent most of his life in it up until a couple of years ago, when Nana kicked him out for some reason or other. He sneers at the soldiers, and he beats the other Apaches around by virtue of his rank as a sergeant. Geronimo has threatened to kill him, but he doesn't dare. But this Chingo knows Nana as few Indians do. So, instead of going snorting off into the desert on a wild-goose chase, I want Chingo to tell me where Nana might go after a raid like this one-and that's where I'm going. And I'll bet you gentlemen the drinks that it's straight into Mexico!"

The message went through, and Livingston sat there at his desk and smoked his cigars one after another as he listened to the bustling sounds coming from all over the fort that told of men working almost furiously to get things ready and then get as much sleep as possible. At nine-thirty, Captain Cartwright reported that all was in readiness: pack supplies, including ammunition; weapons and other equipment in order; horses on the picket lines.

Livingston nodded.

"All right, Jim. I'm turning in for some sleep. You're in command.

He stepped out into the darkness and the coolness it had brought. The four Coyotero scouts had disappeared from beneath the ramada. Livingston moved along the long ramada to his quarters, undressed while he drank a

nightcap of whiskey and water, and went to sleep.

He was awake and dressing before reveille sounded its clear notes in the darkness. By the time full daylight broke, the men to go had breakfasted and were saddled and waiting. The Major made his way along the ramada to his office on the corner, rounded it, and saw the burly figure of Chingo, the scout, talking with the four Coyoteros. Livingston thought, Nobody but one of these Apaches could have come through in the night, but that's the kind of thing I want on this patrol.

He nodded curtly and went into the office, where two lamps on wall brackets threw yellow light on the dull brown adobe plaster, Chingo followed him in. He wore the ubiquitous white deerskin leggings, white muslin loin cloth and pants, a nondescript shirt, and an old Stetson hat, instead of a rag, around his head. But the arrogance was plain in his big face, and on his breath was the odor of the whiskey he had been drinking while making the long night ride.

"What you want?" he demanded in the fairly fluent English he had learned to speak during eighteen months of service with the soldiers. He smelled of sweat and dirt, standing there scratching himself.

Major Livingston eved him, and thought, I'd like to have you in my command for a while, my bucko, I'd teach you a few things about respect for a soldier.

He said, "You know Nana, You lived in his band for many years. Yesterday he made a big raid on a ranch."

Chingo grinned. "Little raid. Only kill two White Eyes and two Apaches, Steal few horses,'

"It wasn't a little raid to Adkins, nor to the old man at Prescott," the Major grunted, mostly to himself. He half-scowled at the scratching sergeant of Apache police. "Where does Nana usually go this time of the year? Where is he now?"

"You go after him?"

"Where would he be?" snapped Livingston.

Chingo grinned again and continued to scratch. "When Nana no fight White Eyes, him in mountains 'long Cochise, Chatto, Ponce, Geronimo. Now him alone, fight many White Eyes soldiers. Him no go to mountains. Go land of Me-hi-capos"

"Just about what I thought," the Major said, "Up to his old tricks, eh? Slashes in for a raid, eludes the soldiers while he picks up his women and children, and then lights out for Mexico, to one of his hidden camps. He knows that we won't cross over after him, because the Mexicans don't like it. So he'll probably make a hard eighty or ninety mile run to where his women and kids are camped, rest up a bit, and then leg it for the Mexican border."

Livingston looked at the wall map and then turned. "Can you pick up his trail south of here near Mexico?

Do you know where he would cross over into Mexico?" he demanded. "Seguro, que si! Me find trail, go after him. Him got

girl Berra. She mine." Livingston was too absorbed with the problems at hand to pay any attention to a girl who was in the band of women and children that Nana and his men had stolen

from the reservation. Captain Cartwright came in, toothpick and cigar in his mouth. He disposed of the tooth-

pick first and then removed the cigar. "Troops ready to mount, Iim," he said. "I hope you

catch him, but I sincerely doubt it. It hasn't been done by Indian. Mexican, or whites in over sixty years."

"We'll see," the Major said grimly, and drew on his gauntlets. He ordered a fresh horse for Chingo, who went to his tired mount and quickly threw off his rawhide saddle with the soft sheepskin seat pad. By the time Chingo had changed to the fresh horse and removed some jerky meat from a pouch to chew on, he had to gallop

a half mile to catch up with the troops. With them went also the four Coyoteros.

They drove on almost due south, heading straight for

They drove on almost due south, heading straight for the border country. With the attack having taken place north of Fort Bowie, it was easy to assume that Nana had gone east toward the New Mexico line. On the other hand, he might have cut back. Livingston paid little heed. Should he run into the band, that would be luck of a kind that troop commanders had dreamed of since before the Civil War, But Major Livingston was not depending upon luck.

upon luck.

About halfway between Fort Thomas and the Mexican border, the two troops struck the course of the San Pedro River and followed it, the shade of the cottonwoods along the water trickle a heaven-sent gift after the long, burning miles across the desert. The distance from Fort Thomas to the Mexican border was approximately one hundred and fifty miles, and at this time of the year that first seventy-five miles had been plain hell. They'd had to hole up in whatever shade they could find during the hottest part of the day, soaked with sweat and cursing, while Livingston, from long experience, knew that Nana would probably be moving on. That was one reason why the Apaches had been so hard to subdue. They lived in a land where no other Indian could thrive so easily and prosperously; a land where a white man, thrown upon its resources alone, would have perished quickly.

But this little band that Livingston and his two troops were hunting could live on jerked horse meat for a main diet, supplemented by berries, cactus pears, and loaves of meal made from ground-up mesquite beans. They could keep warm in winter and cool in summer in big jacals of brush covered over with mud, something a squaw and her children could build in four hours and abandon in two minutes. For a back cradle for a baby, a squaw needed

only some green mesquite branches, a few buckskin thongs for lacing, reeds for shade over the baby's head,

and something to wrap the child in.

These, Livingston thought almost bitterly that day when they came to the San Pedro and the welcome shade of the cottonwoods, were the people whom, armed with bows and arrows and lances, and what guns they could obtain from enemies, it had taken thousands of soldiers

and twenty years of fighting to subdue.

Lieutenant Kelton pulled in close beside the Major. Like the troopers behind them, the officer was soaked

with sweat.

"If the troops from Bowie cut Nana's trail, sir, they may make it so hot for him we'll be here in plenty of

time to intercept the old fox," he ventured.

Major Livingston spat out a wad of chewing tobacco and wiped his dusty gauntlet across his beard. He spat again, watching the distant figures of the four Coyoteros ranging far and wide in search of tracks. Chingo had

completely disappeared.

"That's a big if, Lieutenant. Nana's big advantage is that he can think like a white man, whereas too many of us don't think like an Apache. If my hunch is right, the old devil doubled right back through the patrols and hit for Mexico, hard. I'm gambling everything that Chingo will find them. Chingo crossed this border with Nana's band probably a hundred or so times in the nearly forty vears he was in it."

In this surmise, Major Livingston was right. Chingo picked up the tracks early one afternoon. Livingston's command rode the mile or so to where the burly Apache waited. The four Coyoteros were galloping in wide circles, eyes to the ground, like hounds on the trail of a wolf. Livingston reined up, and Chingo pointed to the ground, indicating the moccasin tracks of women and children who had walked.

"Well?" demanded the Major sharply. "How many women and children?"

"Maybe fifty-five, sixty."

"How many warriors?"
"Thirty, thirty-five."

The bearded Major shifted his weight in the McClelland saddle and removed his hat to scratch his head. "Well," he said reflectively, "the squaws and children tally about what the agent reported. And Adkins said there were about thirty of them that attacked the ranch and ran off the horses. So I guess my hunch was right. The old devil did just exactly what I thought. He had his women and children hidden out somewhere south of Bowie. Then he hit Adkins' ranch and made a hard run to the east, as a decoy. By the time Major Johnston's men picked up his trail seventy-five miles north, Nana was already back south of Bowie and ducking all patrols from Lowell."

He put on his hat again and looked over at Chingo. "How long ago?" he barked.

"Maybeso early sun. Eight, ten hours."

"Hmmmm. If he's carrying his food supplies on pack horses, his squaws and kids, on foot, can cover three miles or more an hour—and keep it up for hours. That would put them anywhere from twenty to thirty miles ahead of us."

There was a worried frown on his face as he unslung his glasses, raised himself to full height in the stirrups, and swept the flat expanse of the broad valley that lay ahead of them. Heat waves shimmered and there was no sign of movement or life. Livingston studied the terrain, gauging the direction the band was traveling. He didn't know how far to the rear old Nana had thrown his scouts, but it was safe to wager that the old desert fox wouldn't be caught napping. The Major shifted the glasses to the

right, where, far in the distance, he caught the hazy outlines of the Mule Mountains.

That was what had brought the frown to his face. Nana's band would be close to the border.

"Lieutenant Kelton!" ordered Livingston sharply.

"Yes, sir?"

"Troops will find shade and dismount. Two hours' rest for men and mounts. Then we're going to ride like hell all night long."

## CHAPTER 2

A LL THAT DAY the little band of Chiricahuas had worked its way down through the Sulphur Springs Valley, heading for the Mexican border and sanctuary deep in the wild fastnesses of the Sierra Madre—the mountain range called by the Me-hi-canos the Mother Mountain. The thirty-one warriors old Nana now had left rode grim-faced. They knew that the White Eyes soldiers were hunting them all over the desert, and theirs was a race against time and distance.

On a jogging pinto pony, old Nana rode at the head of his people, a diminutive figure weighing not more than one hundred and fifteen pounds, looking more like a boy than a man. A boy except for the dark face wrinkled with age, the black eyes still clear and keen despite his more than seventy years, the long-stemmed pipe in his mouth. On each side, the warriors were strung out in a protective cordon. In the center of the cordon rode the older women and smaller children, some mounted double because there were still too few mounts available. The raid on the ranch had proved a big disappointment so far as the number of horses was concerned. On another occasion, many grasses back. Nana remembered that he and Cochise together had burned sheds, killed a number of the people, and got away with more than a hundred head from the hated White Eves rancher who had killed the Apache baby.

Nana turned in the saddle and looked back. There was

nothing in his face to indicate the thoughts going through his mind: that these few with him were all that were left of the free Apaches who once had roamed their lands in thousands. All the others had elected to follow Cochise to the reservation and remain there after the treaty with General Howard.

It had been a long, hard fight. Time and again the White Eyes had broken their word to Cochise, even hanging some of his relatives who had surrendered under a white flag; and that broken faith had been wiped out in the blood of hundreds of settlers and ranchers. The years had been long and bloody, but Cochise, really great man that he was, had known all along that the end for them was inevitable.

Thus when President Grant had finally sent General Howard, the famed one-armed "Christian General" of Civil War days, to Arizona to deal with Cochise on any terms he wanted, the Chiricahua had wisely accepted. And soldiers and settlers alike had finally heaved a big sigh of relief, because Cochise was famous for never having broken his word.

They had, however, not reckoned with old Nana. Nana had said to Cochise on the day they parted, "I am almost eighty grasses now and soon will go to the abode to join those who have gone before us and are now at peace. But all my life I have been a fighter against the enemies of the Apaches, and I shall lead my band and fight until I am too old to sit a pony. I shall never make peace with these White Eyes as long as I can fight. This thing I tell you."

Cochise had said, "I never wanted war with the White Eyes, even when they first came to our land to hunt white iron and yellow iron. It was they who fought us first, who spoke with forked tongues, who took our lands. And now they are many and we are so few. If I continue to fight, I shall soon have no warriors left; none but women and

children to be taken captives and perhaps killed, as so many White Eyes wish. Take your warriors and go. Feed your old ones and cripples that you have hidden away. When you have too many of them, or they are in danger, send them to me on the reservation. I will see that they have food and blankets and jacals. This thing I shall do."

It had been unfortunate for Nana that, while on a raid for horses, a troop of cavalry accompanied by Apache scouts had found the place where he had left his women and children. All had been taken to the reservation. But wise old Nana and his warriors wanted their families with them, and the old man had acted accordingly. He had slipped onto the reservation, past soldiers and Apache police, and had taken the women and children and fled again.

The party moved on down an arroyo, plodding stolidly beneath the hot desert sun that caused the soldiers, soaked in sweat, to curse the Army, the country, and the Apaches in general. The moccasined feet of the women and children made scuffling sounds in the sands, and the hoofs of the ponies, shod with rawhide, clattered among the rocks above. They were tired, thirsty, hungry; they were worn out from the long flight, faces drawn from the ordeal. But there was no complaint, no whimper from the children. Hunger, thirst, flight, danger-they were all a part of their heritage. So was the stoicism with which they accepted the heat that hot afternoon there in the Sulphur Springs Valley on their way to sanctuary in Mexico, where the White Eyes soldiers could not follow.

In the group of women and children who walked and carried the burdens, the girl Berra strode along with a load of jerky meat and corn meal strapped to her young back. She was fifteen now, a small, piquant-faced girl, and very beautiful by Apache standards; so beautiful that Chingo, the Apache sergeant of police who had known her since childhood, had long desired her. But Chingo

had been ordered out of Nana's band for molesting maidens, and Berra was a maiden now.

She had gone through the puberty rites but a few weeks before, and Matesa, youngest of Nana's fighters, already had led his horses and tied them in front of her jacal.

Beside Berra strode Neeta, Matesa's mother. Neeta was perhaps thirty-three or thirty-four, and a widow. Her husband had been killed two years before during a raid on a hacienda down in Chihuahua. She wore a dress of green calico, moccasins of deerskin with hard rawhide soles, and around her neck was a gold chain holding a very pretty trinket filled with white and green stones that glittered and shone in the sun. She had not the slightest idea of the value of the emeralds and diamonds, brought from a raid in Mexico, nor would she have cared had she known they were worth a fortune in yellow iron. The yellow iron that the White Eyes always hunted meant nothing to the Apaches. They knew where there was much of it.

Berra turned her head sideways and looked at the woman who one day was to become her mother-in-law. Near them were Berra's two younger sisters, her mother, and her crippled father astride a broken-down pony.

"Perhaps we shall soon come to water, and then you

can rest," the girl said shyly.

Neeta twisted her head with the strap of the pack just above the eyebrows and looked at the girl from a pair of black eyes. "And then Matesa will come and you can be near him. Better that you be thinking of food to fix for the empty bellies of the warriors and children and old ones. There will be a time for marriage when we reach the camp in the land of the Me-hi-canos where the old ones are hidden."

The girl bent to the load again and strode on. One of several dogs trotting along with tongues jerking in and out set up a loud barking, and was immediately silenced

with a stone thrown by a ten-year-old boy. From behind came the clatter of hoofs, and the girl turned enough to look.

It was Matesa, coming up from his position among the rear guard. He was seventeen now and of average size; about five feet-six, but with the barrel chest and massive lungs and lithe legs inherited from generations of Apache runners. He wore white leggings of deerskin that came to the knee, a white muslin loin cloth, a faded blue shirt, and a band of blue cloth around his head. He did not nod or even look at Berra as he clattered past, but she knew that he had seen her, and that was sufficient. She strode on under the heavy burden.

As for Matesa, he jogged on to the fore of the walkers, the .50 caliber Sharps rifle resting across the front of his saddle. Sweat darkened the blue shirt where the band of heavy cartridges rested over his left shoulder. A good many of the other warriors carried repeaters and jeered at him because his rifle would shoot only once before reloading, but this worried him not at all.

He dropped his splendid horse, one taken in the raid on the Adkins ranch, in alongside the pinto ridden by Nana and then waited respectfully for the old chief to speak, as was customary.

"Where are the White Eyes?" Nana asked him.

"The scouts who came up from behind say they are not back there."

Nama's twisted, wrinkled mouth, now toothless, changed into a hard sneer. "For thirty grasses I have tought these White Eyes—since the time they first came to our land to hunt for furs and yellow and white iron. When these soldiers find a trail, they stick to it like a lobo. We saw their dust two suns ago coming this way, riding fast. They have strong horses and no women and children and old ones to hamper them as they ride. My warriors are fools who will not live many erases. It is better that they go to

the reservation themselves and grow fat like the Warm Springs and White Mountain and Coyoteros, Two of them will go much farther back and try to find those who are after us. You will tell them this thing."

"I will tell them this thing," Matesa replied.

He swung the head of his long-legged mount around and rode back past where his mother and Berra strode along in the hot sun beneath the weight of their burdens. He himself would go back as one of the scouts and hunt for the soldiers, for he had been born in Nana's band and knew the old man. Nana was now nearly eighty grasses and still alive because of his cunning and caution. Time after time he had outfought the soldiers. He had outthought them too, just as on the raid at the ranch when he had doubled back and appeared in a place where he was least expected.

And if Nana said the White Eves soldiers were still on their trail, then this thing must be so.

Shortly before sundown that evening Nana led his tired little band of hunted ones down into another dry arroyo and followed it for a half mile. Here it ended in a cul-desac whose bank rose some fifteen feet above a stagnant waterhole. The sun was throwing long shadows into the arroyo and the shade was welcome. The women and older children dumped their burdens on the ground and went first to the water to stretch themselves out and drink their fill and then refill the empty watersacks carried on an old pony. The warriors closed in and waited, and then stretched themselves out to drink. They refilled the deer bladders carried at their waists, and watered the horses, That done, they unsaddled and turned the horses over to the boys to be led out to pick up what little forage the barren country offered.

There wasn't much, and the gaunt sides of the horses

showed it. Nana would have ordered one of them killed for fresh meat, but neither the horse nor the time could be spared. There would be time for fresh meat and rest once they were across that invisible line the White Eyes and Me-hi-canos were always saying separated the vocountries. Nana had seen no line and thought the whole thing a little foollish. But the line must be there somewhere, because the White Eyes would not cross it.

Matesa rode in, his horse completely exhausted. He had gone back nearly ten miles but had found no signs of the soldiers. But Nana was too old and too wise to accept that as a badge of safety.

They would never be safe until they were in their camp deep in the Sierra Madre.

"Build fires and cook food," Nana ordered the squaws.
"Then put out the fires and rest. Keep the horses close
by."

The warriors had come over and flung themselves down on the sheepskin pads of their saddles to smoke and talk and rest. They were not tired, despite fourteen hours in the saddle. It was the ones who walked and carried the burdens who were tired. It was those same ones who now gathered the brush and started the fires.

Smoke from the fires began to wisp up, and Matesa lay there on his sheepskin pad and watched Berra as she and her mother prepared food. The two younger sisters were still out gathering brush. One was eleven, the other about seven. For, under Apache tribal laws and beliefs, when a woman was found to be with child her husband could not again go into her loins until the child was three years old; for to do so would weaken it. Thus there was a period of about four and a half years between each Apache child. It accounted for the small families and the fact that they could not produce warriors as fast as they were killed off in raids to get food and clothing. They

24

made up partly for this deficiency by allowing a warrior to have more than one wife, some of them Mexican girl captives taken on raids into Mexico.

But Matesa was young and wanted only the girl now busy at the fire.

One of the warriors said, "There is no sign of the soldiers and we are safe."

Old Nana, sitting on a near-by rock, removed the longstemmed pipe from his mouth and spat. The gesture was one of sneering contempt. He removed his flat-brimmed hat and laid it on the ground, his grey hair hanging down his back in two short braids.

"You will not live for many more grasses," he said contemptuously. "You will fall before the bullet of a White Eyes soldier. Do you not understand that we are the hunted? It is they who pursue us. The pursuer picks his own time and place. The hunted ones must be on guard at all times. How many times have I told my fighters these things!"

Matesa got up and removed the heavy cartridge belt and placed it beside the Sharps. He walked past where his mother was preparing food. She was bent over the fire, its flames reflecting back from the pretty stones dangling at her throat. He climbed the bank of the cul-de-sac and strode up to the ridge above. Up there, several of the boys were leading the horses from one bunch of grass to another, feeding them as much as could be found. Now that camp had been made, they were laughing and chattering and gibing at one another.

Matesa watched them curiously as he approached a huge saguaro cactus with his throwing ax in hand. He remembered his own childhood days with the wandering band, the fall hunting trips to get winter meat and skins, the return of the fighters from raids, the impatience of waiting for enough grasses to pass until he could be one of them.

He was that now, the youngest fighter in Nana's band. He thought of it as he cut out a big chunk of the wet, tubular root of the huge cactus and carried it to a rock. With the flat side of the throwing ax he beat the root into a green, pungent mass. This was the soap the Apaches used to cleanse themselves.

He removed his shirt and loin cloth and began to soap himself, rubbing in the pungent lather around his neck and armpits and torso. With the water from his deer bladder, he rinsed himself off. Afterward, he stood there drying himself in the air, the muscles of his lithe body

rippling every time he moved.

He went down the slope again to the waterhole, refilled the deer bladder, then squatted at the water's edge and began trimming the bangs across his forehead, sawing a few at a time with his knife. He knew that Berra, working over the food, was watching him, and a quiet smile came to his young face. Some of the lounging warriors must have seen it, for a ripple of laughter came from among them.

"His horses have been in front of the jacal of Berra

and he is impatient," called out one.

"He wishes to be beautiful in the eyes of Berra," called another.

Matesa paid them no heed, nor did he look at Berra. He knew that her young, piquant face was tucked down low over her breast as she helped her mother to prepare the food. This was an old thing among the Apaches, this gibing at a young warrior soon to be married. It was an old thing to laugh and talk when the Apaches were alone. Only in the presence of others did their mouths tighten down, the silence envelop them, the black eyes begin to burn watchfully.

Matesa finished cutting his bangs and trimming his hair straight across at the back of his neck. He rose and saw the look in his mother's eyes. It said, Your food is

ready, my son. Your father has gone to join the others in the abode and you have taken his place. Come. Eat.

He tied the rag around his head again and went over to the fire, accepting the food his mother gave him: meat and corn cakes. One of the Apaches, during the raid on the Adkins ranch, had snatched up a sack of corn meal from a shed that had refused to burn.

Berra was but a few feet distant, but he did not look up. And again that significant laughter rolled around the fires.

The boys feeding the horses had tied them and come down to eat, and there wasn't much talk now as the band of hunted ones ate their meager food while darkness came down and the desert began to cool a bit. Nana's second wife, forty years his junior, had fed him first; now, having finished eating, he sat there on the rock with one leg over the other and packed the bowl of the long-stemmed pipe and began to smoke reflectively. He knew that the White Eyes on the reservation must have been furious when they discovered that the women and children of his band came up missing during the regular "count." Those White Eyes gave an Apache a tag and made him appear at regular intervals, with his family, in order to get the regular allotment of beef cattle for so many people, plus other staples. But they refused to understand that Nana and his men wanted their families back with them.

It had been an easy matter to slip in past the soldier patrols from Fort Thomas, past Chingo and the Apache police, to the ravine where Cochise and the others were living in jacals, and then slip out again. But there had been insufficient horses for them all. Cochise had been able to spare only enough for the old who wanted to return and the young who could not walk the long miles each day; and the raid on the ranch of the hated White Eyes Adkins had been one of necessity rather than pref-

erence. It had proved a bad mistake in view of the few mounts obtained, for it told the soldiers, baffled up until now, just about where he and his people were.

He beckoned to Matesa and sat there smoking as the young Apache approached. Nana remembered when he had been born into the band, how he had watched him through childhood, as he watched all the youngsters, remembered when his father was killed. It was Nana himself who had led that hard raid against the big hacienda.

He thought, He is a full-fledged warrior now, hold and strong. If I had one hundred more like him, I'd turn our land they took from us into a mass of flaming ranch houses, and I'd fight the soldiers to the very gates of their forts.

Matesa came to a halt before him. He stood there in respectful silence, lithe-legged and young, his body clean from the scrubbing. The other Apaches were coming back from the cooking fires. The women were packing the food again and putting out the fires, covering them with sand.

"You are young and strong," Nana said, "Go out with the young ones and watch over them while they feed the horses and then sleep. In four hours, we will travel again,"

"Four hours!" complained a middle-aged warrior.
"The squaws and children are tired and the soldiers are
far away. The old ones would rest."

"They are still alive because I have led them for more than fifty grasses," was the blunt retort. "And so are you. I saw you born into my band forty grasses past, the year Chingo was born. I saw my crippled warriors and the old ones teach you to become a fighter. It is my wisdom and experience that has kept you alive. We move on until we reach the land of the Me-hi-canos. If you wish to remain here and take a soldier bullet in your belly, then do so."

Matesa had turned, rifle in hand, and gone down past

the place where he had eaten. This time he looked at Berra. She smiled in that shy way of hers and went on raking sand over the fire with a small moccasined foot.

Matesa moved on up the slope to where the horses were tethered in the darkness. He was not tired, but impatience gripped him and he wanted to be on the move. He knew Nana and was worried about the soldiers. Had they not been burdened by the women and children and old ones, he would have been content. A band of warriors alone could cover up to ninety miles in one day; had done it many times. And if necessity demanded it, Matesa was young and-strong enough to cut the throat of his faltering horse, take a chunk of meat from its loins, and go on another ninety miles on foot before he stopped.

He sat down on a rock in the gathering dusk, waiting for the boys to come up and start feeding the horses again. He thought of the camp where the aged ones and a few others waited, far to the south. There the water flowed clear and cold from a big spring and the grass was belly high for the horses. There were deer and other food in profusion and it was easy to raid one of the Mexican villages for corn and blankets and calico for the women and girls. There were plenty of berries to be gathered and stored away in skin sacks against the time when the cold winds would come whistling down around the jacals of brush covered with mud.

That was when he and Berra would lie in their deerskins near the warm fire and tell the Coyote legends and laugh while they waited for their first child to come the following spring. Then he would leave her and go with Nana to harass the White Eves soldiers.

A slight breeze had sprung up and the night was cooler. He heard the boys come straggling up the slope, laughing and talking and shoving one another.

"Noise is the sound of a fool," he reminded them sharply, "Would you tell the Apache scouts who come with the White Eyes soldiers where we are hidden? The time to make noise is when we are not hunted."

They accepted the rebuke in silence, because they knew it to be just. Only in their hidden camps, when there was no danger hanging over them, must they laugh and play and run races and shoot arrows.

## CHAPTER 3

MATESA sat there on the rock for an hour, the Sharps upright between his knees, listening to the distant yapping of the coyotes and, now and then, the heavy roar of the far-ranging lobo wolves. He was sick inside at the thought that there were so few of them left who were still free. Only Nana and thirty-one warriors and their women and children and old ones.

The sound of a footstep came from the darkness below, and Berra slipped quietly up and seated herself beside him on the rock. She sat there without speaking, content

only to be near him. It was he who spoke.

"You should be resting. We will leave in three more hours." She said, "I am young and strong like you. I can carry

my burden with ease. Let the tired ones sleep." "We have far to go in the night."

"Do you think the White Eyes soldiers will find us?"

she asked in that shy way of hers.

"These things I do not know, Berra," he answered her. "It is Nana who knows these things, because he is old and very wise. I am but one of the fighters who must protect the women and children and aged ones if we are found."

"I hope they do not catch us and return us to the reservation," she said. "Ever since I have been twelve grasses, what I see in the eyes of Chingo frightens me. He was at our jacal many times while my family were captives. That is why we were so glad to come with Nana. But I would have come, anyhow," she added, and smiled at him in the darkness.

"Someday I shall kill Chingo," he told her. "He has had three wives but left them all because he likes the feel of young maidens. And now he wants another. It was why Nana drove him from the band two grasses ago and he became a socut and police for the soldiers."

She sat there beside him as the night wore on and the stars finally told him it was time to go. The tethered horses were silent now, resting, the boys asleep on the ground near by. Berra rose with him and slipped down the slope through the darkness as Matesa went to the horses.

"It is time to go," he said as he woke up the tired youngsters. "We are still in danger and must flee some more. There will be time for sleep when we come to the land of the Me-hi-canos."

They got under way within the hour, winding up in single file to the flat floor of the desert above. As usual, Nana rode at their head, leading them, a tiny figure humped up in the rawhide saddle, his small mocasined feet in the willow stirrups. Half of the thirty odd warriors rode with him. The others, including Matesa, brought up the rear. The women and children were strung out in between, the packs of those who carried burdens humped up high in the darkness. The stars were out, and the big lobos, roaming far and wide out there, sent out their hoarse howly.

They were the big fellows whose huge fangs could hamstring a cow with a single snap of the jaws and then cut her throat with a second. Matesa heard them and remembered the story of how Gochise, many grasses past when he was a young leader, had caught a Mexican buyer of Apache scalps. And of all the people the Apaches hated, none incurred more venom than those who paid White

Eyes and Me-hi-cano scalp hunters for Apache scalps; fifty gold pesos for a baby, one hundred gold pesos for a squaw, one hundred and fifty gold pesos for a warrior.

Cochise had caught the man and put him into a hole near an anthill at sundown, buried to the neck. But fate had decreed that the unfortunate victim was destined not to suffer. For during the night a huge lobo wolf had come along and decapitated the man with a snap of its jaws.

The night was a black curtain around them, thrown over protectingly to aid them in their flight. They wouldn't raid or fight at night when it could be avoided, because during the hours of darkness the ghosts of those who had gone to the abode mounted their ghost ponies and came down to sit in a mounted circle around the fires, to listen while the Apaches talked and laughed and told the Coyote legends. The coyote was a very clever fellow and, for that reason, was the hero of the legends.

And those who had gone to the abode, but now were riding their ghost ponies alongside the little band that Nana was leading to sanctuary in the land of the Me-hicanos, were at peace. There must be no fighting to disturb them.

That was why Matesa sent out his thought spirits and told them that the soldiers were hunting them because of the raid. He sat there in the saddle and felt the slow rocking motion of his walking horse and told them that the raid had been necessary to get more horses in order that they could flee faster and remain free. He knew that the peaceful ones now riding with them would understand, but he asked them to use their influence to guide Nana on a route where there would not be any soldiers.

The old ones and those who had died in raids must have heard but were powerless, for just at daybreak the two troops of cavalry under Major Livingston struck. Hard.

It was shortly after four in the morning when the long

summer day began to pull back the black curtain in the east. The horizon had turned from black to dim grey and the plodding figures began to take shape. The dark humps on the backs of the squaws and older children turned into packs. The legs of the ponies became less blurred. It was dawn, but there would be no stop for breakfast. That invisible line that the soldiers could not cross was not far away. Just a short distance now—and old Nana krew it.

They were traversing the east side of a sharp incline leading to a ridge above; below was another of the obiquitous arroyos. There was a coolness and a freshness in the air that brought new strength to the bearers of the burdens who plodded along stolidly. No sound broke the ethereal silence that lay like a cool arbor over all the land.

Not until a line of blue-coated troopers suddenly appeared from the arroyo a little farther south and the heavy roar of a 45-70 caliber Army carbine split the air.

Old Nana reacted automatically. His yell of warning and command rang out even before the sound of the big rifle had died away.

What happened then was what might have happened had the little band of hunted ones been drilled in military tactics. The squaws and children dropped their packs and began to run toward the ridge that lay to the cast. The rear guard of Apaches, Matesa among them, swung to face the charge. The warriors up front with Nana spurred to the ridge, flung themselves down, and began to pour in a Jine of fire over the heads of the women and children running toward them.

It was up to Matesa and fourteen others with him to take the brunt of the charge.

Major Livingston's original plan of attack had been a direct head-on ambush of the party from the curve of the arroyo that concealed both troops, a total of one hundred and twenty men. Chingo and the four Coyoteros had told him that the party was now following the arroyo and would do so for several more miles. Livingston had placed his troops at the point where he thought Nana would approach about sunup. But old Nana knew this arroyo as well as the Major knew the Fort. It was narrowing down ahead, and rougher. Thus, three hundred yards from the trap, he had swung to the left and started for the smoother terrain of the desert floor above. Then, some trooper either had gotten an itchy trigger finger or had discharged

his rifle accidentally.

It had saved Nana and the sixteen warriors near him from being slaughtered. By the time the soldiers had mounted and scrambled up to higher ground, the little band already was fleeing up the incline toward the ridge above.

Matesa wheeled and saw them coming, the blue of their uniforms showing through the dust and the early morning light. He saw part of them peel off and make for the ridge where old Nana and the others in front had fled. He saw a second part swing off and make a lunge for the women and children, to cut them off from the warriors on top. He saw the last third of them, about forty in number aided by two Coyoteros, spurring at him and the fourteen with him.

He shot a soldier out of the saddle and then reloaded as he spurred over toward the women and children. He saw Berra break out of the now screaming women and children as the troopers swirled in among them. Chingo was spurring after her hard. Matesa leveled the big 450 caliber Sharps at the figure of the hated sergeant of police and pulled the trigger. But with the recoil of the weapon against his shoulder, he knew that he had missed.

The others with him, who had laughed at his single shot, were pouring a deadly fire into the troopers with their repeaters. They were emptying saddles so fast that the soldiers had pulled their revolvers and were charging in firing. Matesa shot at Chingo again—and again he missed. And before he could reload, he saw a young Lieutenant, standing high in the saddle, saber upraised, come lunging straight at him. Their horses collided and almost went down. The trooper made a hard, slashing cut, a cut that would have beheaded Matesa had it landed. But the rifle was in his left hand now, the deadly throwing as in his right. The saber broke in two as it struck the upraised barrel, and Matesa, his body within two feet of the other, struck a savage blow that cleaved in the man's temple.

Matesa broke free and wheeled away, trying to extract another shell from the heavy belt over his shoulder. His horse gave out a shrill scream and collapsed; but Matesa had felt it and flung his feet free of the stirrups. He hit the ground upright and began to run for the protection of the ridge where the front guard, flat on their naked bellies, were pouring streams of death into the troopers. He saw a big bearded man, the officer in command, spurring and yelling orders to his men. He saw that the soldiers had cut into the women and children and, with drawn sabers, were heading a goodly portion of them down the incline, much as men would herd wild cattle. Chingo had just swooped in the saddle and swept Berra up in front of him. Matesa didn't dare stop now until he reached the ridge and its protection. He wanted to kill Chingo, but to pause would mean death. A slug from a revolver kicked up dirt beside him, and then another geyser spurted up, but not a third. One of the warriors up above had shot the pursuing trooper from the saddle.

Matesa reached the ridge, fell panting, and looked for Chingo and his captive.

Saddled horses, seemingly dozens of them, were galloping and trotting around in the confusion. A few of the empty saddles were of rawhide with sheepskin pads, but most of them were McClellands. The soldiers whose job it had been to cut off the women and children were moving them toward the arroyo below the incline where the fight had taken place. Berra's father, mother, and two little sisters were among them. Chingo still had Berra in front of him, holding her tightly as she fought and screamed and bit at him. He slapped her savagely in the face, and Matesa, unable to get an open shot at him, lined the sights of the Sharps on the horse and shot it from beneath the two of them. He hoped to give Berra an opportunity to flee toward him and also to put Chingo into the open where he could kill him.

The horse fell kicking, but Chingo was too wise in such matters to be caught. He rolled free with Berra in his arms, and then, holding her in front of him as a shield, began backing toward the lip of the arroyo; and Matesa's heart sank as the pair slid from sight over the lip of the bank. It had taken weeks of planning, of riding, of hardship to get Berra this near to freedom, and now she was gone, starting the long, hot trek back to the reservation.

As for Major Livingston, he had been completely stunned at the terrific volume of firepower displayed by the outnumbered band of fugitives. He had expected that the hostiles would have a few old Spencers and possibly a Henry or two. He had been totally unprepared for the devastating fire that had come from .50, .52, and .56 caliber Spencers, which fired seven shots from a tube in the stock and could be fed fast with extra tubes. He had heard the reports of the Henrys that fired thirteen at a time without reloading. And his men were using new and better guns, of much longer range, but single shots!

His horse went down, struck squarely between the eyes, and the Major went rolling. He saw his men mounted and on foot running for the arroyo. He knew when he was whipped and he was professional soldier enough to realize

it. He ran, too.

He leaped over the body of a squaw and child, the child's lower jaw blown away by a heavy caliber bullet, and went into the arroyo where the captives were huddled and his men were now beginning to make things hot for the Apaches on the ridge. Then the last of them disappeared and there were no more targets at a time when the sweating, dust-covered troopers were eager for a sight of them

"Goddammit!" Livingston swore feelingly. "Out-gunned by a band that we outnumbered four to one. One third of the troop slaughtered. Lieutenant Kelton!" he roared, "Lieutenant Kelton! Where's Kelton?"

"He's dead, sir," panted a burly, middle-aged sergeant. "I saw him close in on a young Apache with his sabertheir horses collided-but he got it right in the face with a battle ax. I was trying to get to him in case others closed in, but my horse was shot from under me. Orders, sir?"

"All dismounted men will catch horses and mount, Twenty will remain here and guard the captives. Give me that mount," he commanded a trooper, and swung into the saddle.

They rode and climbed afoot back to the scene of that sharp, savage action. Chingo was trotting along on foot. He kept looking up at the Major and grinning.

Mounted troopers began grabbing up reins for those on foot. Major Livingston rode slowly among the sprawled bodies and heard the cries of the wounded. The surgeon and his aides already were at work, and Livingston thought, Well, I said they might break me for playing this hunch, and now I suppose they will. He saw again the bodies of the Apache woman and her five-year-old child with that bloody gap where a chin had been, and he thought, If I ever find the troopers who fired on the women and children, they'll shovel fresh horse dung for so long they'll look like a tumblebug's ball.

38

Chingo came loping up on a horse bearing a rawhide saddle. He was still grinning.

"Well?" barked Major Livingston savagely. "What the

hell's so funny about it?"

"Get girl back," said Chingo. "She mine."

"You spent your time running down a girl when you should have been fighting. For two cents I'd put you in irons. You follow me."

He rode over to where the sweating surgeon was working on a moaning soldier. The trooper had been shot through the thigh.

"How many wounded, Captain?" he demanded.

"Thirteen, sir. Five of them badly." He nodded toward where they lay flat on their backs. "I'm afraid there's not much I can do for three of four of them. The others will be able to ride."

"Well, do what you can for them. We're going to try again."

The troopers all were mounted and converging upon the spot where Livingston sat his horse talking to the surgeon. He wheeled and loped over to his fallen horse. His shoulder still ached from that tumble. He swung from the saddle, recovered his field glasses, and spurred into a lope up the incline toward the ridge above. The top tip of the sun was rising into view and throwing a vellow light on the broad expanse of the valley, A bloody sunrise, Livingston thought, and called the troop to a halt.

He raised the glasses. Nana's band, the women and children running on foot now, had covered a surprising distance and were still going. They were about nine hundred yards away.

"Sergeant!" barked Livingston.

The Sergeant spurred up beside him. "Yes, sir?"

"You will take command of what remains of Lieutenant Kelton's troop. Deploy your men to the east, while I take the west. Keep a distance of at least three hundred yards, out of effective range of those old Spencers and Henrys. They caught us at close range, and won a distinct victory in the skirmish because of greater firepower and cover. Now we'll show them what these carbines can do at a much greater range. If Nana and his warriors break and run for it, you will leave twenty of your men to guard the rest of the captives and follow me to the border but not across it. If Nana elects to fight, use the longer range of your weapons to battle them. Clear?"

"Yes, sir." The sergeant saluted. "Quite clear, sir."

Major Livingston set off at a gallop and his men followed. In the distance, he could see the band of about twenty-five warriors and possibly twenty women and children. He had captured the others.

The squaws and children were walking and trotting by turns, disappearing from sight into low spots and then reappearing. Livingston saw no sign of Nana, and he guessed that the old chief had fled on across the line to safety and left the others to get by as well as they could. What he didn't know was that Nana had beckoned to Matesa and the two of them had disappeared into a shallow gully. They had crawled to a point of vantage where the soldiers were only some six hundred yards to the west, the sum in their eyes.

Nana indicated the huge weapon Matesa carried. "Hit something," he ordered.

Matesa flattened himself out on his belly and waited patiently until the troopers, riding by twos, stopped and bunched up. Then, at six hundred yards, he drove a .50 caliber slug squarely into the belly of one of the horses. The horse belonged to Chingo the scott.

The troopers sheered off another two hundred yards and the Apaches disappeared. Now and then Livingston caught sight of them, but only brief glimpses. His strategy had failed. Nana wasn't running from his women and

children. The Major tried a change of tactics. He made a hard run to cut them off, only to find that the band had sheered off, hidden from sight of the sergeant, come up out of nowhere with those repeaters, and sent the troop in a hasty retreat.

It went on that way for four hours, until at last the Apaches reached an arroyo running north and south, ideal for the warriors to defend both sides from above while the women and children plodded along below. The Mexican border was now but a short distance away.

Some officers would have disregarded the rules and gone on across and followed the foodless and waterless little band until it was captured. It would have been easy to do so, for there was no sign of life anywhere. No Mexican patrols. Livingston could have gone across and in all likelihood never been discovered. But Livingston was a soldier who followed the rule book.

He gave the order to retreat, and rode glumly back along the route he had come, inwardly cursing the thought of what lay ahead. The burial of the dead, the slow progress back with the wounded, the report he'd have to make to the old man at Prescott. The Colonel had wanted action or heads would fall. Well, by God, he'd got what he wanted, and nearly fifty heads, white and Apache, had fallen.

The burly sergeant, now riding beside him, expressed his own thoughts. "You know, Major, you can't help but admire those devils. They fight like trained soldiers, not a one of the captives whimpered, and now, without food or water, they're hitting it out across country that undoubtedly is the outer rim of hell."

"They're hostiles!" snapped Major Livingston to cover his own mixed emotions of anger, frustration, apprehension from higher up, and a new esteem toward Nana as a man who had outthought them all and then outfought them, "They'll make out, I never heard of one of the devils dying of thirst or hunger yet. You just worry about getting the ones we captured back to the reservation . . . You'll take the remainder of Lieutenant Kelton's troop and the five scouts."

He looked back at Chingo, riding double with a trooper, and then ahead again. He'd played a hunch, and it had worked. Too much.

Major Livingston rode on, glumly,

## CHAPTER 4

South of the Mexican Border, Nana's band of Apaches much reduced in numbers now, plodding on stolidly across the hot wastes. Mareas saw the last of the hated White Eyes and Chingo disappear, and turned his attention to the situation at hand. He knew that the band was now in bad circumstances. The women and children who had carried the food had dropped it all when the attack came and they broke for the protection of the ridge. And Chingo, the cursed one, had, as his first move in the valey, shot dead the horse that carried the watersacks.

Five of the warriors had been killed. Six others were wounded, two of them badly. They were lashed in their saddles and squaws walked on each side to steady them.

Matesa sat there in his rawhide saddle, his black eyes burning, and watched them. No wailings at husbands and fathers killed. Nothing from the warriors whose wives and children were now in the hands of the White Eyes. He had lost Berra and the future he had looked forward to was shattered.

Old Nama turned in the saddle and sent back his call. Matesa, off to one side, heard it and gigged his mount. It belonged to one of the warriors who had been killed. The widow, a sturdy young woman of twenty-two or so, was plodding along a short distance away. Her name was Stona. Matesa came abreast of Nana and pulled in a ta walk alongside of him. The old man was smoking away

at his long-stemmed pipe as stolidly as though nothing had happened. He had, for sixty years, outthought and outfought, first, other Indians and Mexicans and now the White Eyes.

He removed the pipestem from his mouth and pointed to where, far away, the beginning of the Sierra Madre

loomed in the morning sun.

"It is almost noon now, and the squaws and children can go no farther without rest and sleep and food. When we come to the waterhole ahead, I will have one of the horses killed for meat so that the women and children and warriors will not have empty bellies. When you have eaten and rested, take the strongest horse among us and ride ahead to camp where the old ones and the others are hidden. Bring back berries and and meal and sacks for water. You are young and strong and light and can ride better."

Matesa was hoping that Nana would mention how well he had fought against the soldiers that morning. Nana said nothing about it. It was as though his mind had, once they were safe again, relegated the affair to the past and forgotten it.

Matesa said, "This thing I will do."

He dropped back to take his place in the cordon again. There was little likelihood that Mexican patrols would be in the vicinity, and certainly not at this time of day. Now that the Apache menace was a thing of the past, the garrison commanders, who had never liked to fight the Apaches anyway, because they were always getting whipped, preferred to remain nearer quarters and devote their energies to hunting horse thieves and runaway peons.

Nevertheless, the Apaches rode on guard. It was an excellent reason why old Nana was still alive after more than sixty years as a raider.

Camp was made within three miles, at another of those

stagnant waterholes whose location was known only to the Apaches and the wild animals that roamed the desert at night in search of food. The women and children, tired and sleepy though they were, promptly went to work, the women gathering brush for fires and the children running from one stunted mesquite tree to another to gather the beans and later grind them into meal between two flat rocks.

One of the warriors had cut the throat of a horse and the squaws were skinning it. Matesa selected the best horse in the band, another from the Adkins ranch, watered it, and gave it to one of the boys to lead out to forage.

Within two hours the camp looked entirely different from what it had been when they first arrived. The whole band-women, children, and the warriors-were eating ravenously of roasted meat and ash cakes made from the ground-up mesquite beans and cooked over live coals. The hide of the horse was pegged out to dry, for from it waterskins would be made. True, the hide should be tanned first, but there was no time for it. They must get to the camp where the old ones were hidden, before a patrol of Mexican troops stumbled upon them.

Matesa ate until he could eat no more and then lay down in the shade of a mesquite tree to sleep for an hour. He had not slept in thirty-two hours.

It was his mother who came over and awakened him at the appointed hour. She was leading the horse, which looked much better, and again, as always, the rays of the sun threw off bright reflections from the white and green stones at her dark-skinned throat. She carried his rifle. cartridge belt, his deer-bladder canteen filled with water, and to the rawhide saddle she had fastened a chunk of fresh horse meat.

He closed his eyes and lay there for a few moments, stretching and twisting and vawning the sleep out of a lithe young body that was demanding more. But Nana had said many times that one reason an Apache lived so long and could still ride was because it was good to go hungry and cold and without sleep for long periods, and then, when there was food and rest, to eat much and sleep longer. Matesa rose and strapped the water-filled bladder to his waist. He slipped the cartridge belt over his left shoulder and took the ride and reins.

"I have put meat on your saddle," Necta said. "Nama has told the others while you slept that we will rest and hide here for two days in order to make water sacks and gather the beans of the mesquite and the red pears of the cactus that grows on the ground in the shape of a cow's ear. From here we will go one night and half of the day to the next place of water that you know so well."

He knew. Another waterhole about fifty miles away, Almost since his birth, seventeen grasses back, he had known all these things, because he could remember them not long after he could walk and was removed from the cradle on Neeta's back except on long marches.

He said, "I will return."

He said, "I will return.

He bade her no good-bye. He made no move to touch
her in any parting gesture of affection. Such things were
unknown among the Apaches. Whatever emotions they
experienced lay in their eyes, their lips, their whole faces.

He led the horse to the waterhole and drank beside it, forcing in the water until he could get down no more. He swung into the saddle and glanced over at Nana. The old man should have been asleep, as were the rest of the warriors and most of the women and children. But Nana sat in the shade of a mesquite and smoked the long-stemmed pipe. Beneath another, the two badly wounded warriors lay flat on their backs, covering the terrible pain in their bedies beneath an impassive cast of countenance.

Matesa set off without another word, working the longlegged animal across the desert in a southeasterly direction, trotting and galloping it by turns, and then walking it a certain distance. It had been told by the white ones many times how any Apache could get more out of a horse than any rider in the world. Matesa drove it on, a lone dot out there on the great expanse of the Mexican desert.

The miles rolled past and so did the hours. He saw the mountains far in the distance, purple now but coming closer with every stride of the horse. He was thirsty, but he made no move to touch the water in the deer bladder. In mid-afternoon he stopped in the shade of a giant saguaro cactus, loosened the rawhide girth and rested the horse for thirty minutes. At the end of that time, he cinched the saddle again and removed the deer bladder from his waist. He took two swallows, holding the water in his mouth and throat, and then swallowed. The rest he gave to the horse.

At eight o'clock that night he rode the faltering animal into a rocky arroyo, watered it, staked it in the green grass that grew for a short distance around the edges of the waterhole. Then he flung himself down upon the sheepskin saddle pad and, too tired and sleepy to roast meat, slept through until early morning.

Dawn was breaking when, stiff and hungry, he built a fire and went to the tree from which he had hung the meat. The meat was gone. He had hung it too high for a coyote to reach, and he had been too exhausted and worn out to hear his horse snorting during the night. But the track marks on the ground told the story. A hungry lobo.

Matesa saddled the now-rested horse and set off. All that day he climbed higher and higher until, at evening, he came at last to the mouth of a ravine two miles long. Here the grass grew to the belly of a horse and deer were in evidence. Quail by the thousands fluttered here and there, some so gentle they merely trotted off to one side and watched the passing of horse and rider. Matesa heard their evening trills and the sound did something to him. This was the way that the Apaches should live. To be free among the wild things. It was their heritage-to be alone,

away from all other peoples.

He rode on another mile and rounded a turn in the ravine. Here the water was a trickle, and on each side were a dozen or so jacals of brush and mud. For this was the camp of the old ones who no longer could hunt for themselves. Here Nana kept them, along with a few widows and divorced women, seeing that none went hungry. Here, unless there was danger and they had to be moved, the old ones would live out their lives, waiting until it was time for those in the abode to come and take them away on their ghost ponies.

There was a deserted air about the place that puzzled Matesa. No dogs barked, none of the old ones appeared, and there was no smoke from the ash heaps before the door of each jacal. Nothing. Then a dog howled in the distance, a long, rolling, mournful sound. And at the same time Matesa saw the crumpled heaps of calico and buckskin sprawled about in the grass. There were seven or eight of them, and they had been too old to flee, for one glance at the clouds of flies swarming around their ghastly looking red skulls told the story.

During Nana's absence, scalp hunters had found the

camp of the old ones. They apparently had struck the camp by surprise, and there couldn't have been too many of them, not to have killed more. But it appeared as though the others had fled and hid in the tall grasses and the brush. Matesa swung down and began to circle, like a lean, dark hound, his burning eyes on the story told in the dirt. There had been four men who wore boots and the four had ridden steel-shod ponies. And he remembered when they had stolen the women and children from the reservation how Cochise had told of the four White Eyes brothers-the Brawley brothers-and how they took scalps of women 48 and children and sold them for gold pesos in the land of the Me-hi-canos. The body of a Coyotero Apache, carefully hidden, had been discovered, the scalp gone, and the four men were suspected. They had been ordered on pain of arrest to keep off the reservation.

These things Cochise had told to Nana at hidden gatherings while Nana and his fighters were on the reservation under the very noses of the soldiers who were hunt-

ing them.

And now, if Matesa's suspicions were correct, they had come deep into the land of the Me-hi-canos and found the hidden camp that had never been discovered before. To Matesa's mind, this was an astonishing thing. Whether Me-hi-canos or White Eyes, how had they found this place?

Matesa followed the tracks for more than two miles. They led to the south, which meant to the mining town of Santa Maria, where the Me-hi-canos dug white iron from the ground and the chief of the Me-hi-cano troops

paid gold for Apache scalps. Matesa sent back a long call, and then repeated it. He rode back toward the scene of death in the ravine and again sent out the calls at regular intervals. Presently he heard a distant answer, and rode toward it. Then he saw them rising up out of the grass, slipping in through the underbrush by ones and twos and in little groups; some old and withered and stooped, but who had managed to stumble away. There were a few widows and divorced ones and a straggling of children. They gathered around him into a small compact group that continued to enlarge itself, looking up to where he sat the saddle, so young and lithe and strong. The only warrior among them

"You came by our home?" asked a wrinkled old man who was partly supported by his aged squaw.

"I saw what was there." Matesa nodded. "Eight of the

old ones have gone to the abode to join the ones who ride the ghost ponies and are at peace. I will name each one and then their names must forever not be spoken again."

He called off the names one by one, speaking slowly and distinctly, and a few wails began to come from some of the women and children. Then he turned his horse and rode at a walk as they followed him back to a camp that was no longer hidden and no longer safe. He was pretty certain that the four men who had done this territe thing would come again—and perhaps soon. Thus, for the moment, Nana and his people far down there in the burning desert, almost without food and water—and with wounded on their hands—must wait. Nana had warriors with which to defend his people, and he had horses for meat, and he had a lifetime of experience in facing such problems.

Fifteen or twenty ponies were grazing in the deep grass, switching their tail sazily. They were fat, rested, and gentle. Matesa caught one, switched the saddle from the exhausted mount he rode, turned it loose, and mounted. After a time all the hidden ones came in. He rode over to where they were grouped, waiting for his leadership, looking to him for the next move. There was no wailing now. The old ones had gone to the abode to join the peaceful ones, their names must not be mentioned again, only the hulls that were left must be buried. For violent death was no new thing among them. It, too, was a part of their way of life.

He sat there on his horse and listened while they told of how the shots came and how they all fled and, later, how the four men hunted for them in the deep grass. Yes, they were not Me-hi-canos. They were four big White Eyes and all wore beards.

So, Matesa thought, his sign had been right. They were the four White Eyes brothers Cochise had spoken of.

"Where does Nana ride?" asked one of the old men.

Matesa told them of the raid on the reservation, of their flight, of how Nana had hidden the women and children far away and then rode north again to raid the ranch. He told of how they had eluded the patrols until they were ambushed early in the morning of the big fight.

He could not speak the names of the dead, but he mentioned families who would not have a warrior, relatives who had lost one of their blood, and again there came a

few wails

He said, "This camp is no longer a safe place for the old ones and the others. Tomorrow you must pack your belongings and I will lead you to another home. And now among you are widows and divorced ones who are

low among young and strong. You will dig the holes and place many stones first so that the coyotes can not get in."
"This this gwe will do," replied one of the widows. She was in her twenties, a heavy-set young woman, and she was sibout four months gone with child. Cochise had long ago laid down iron rules that no young Apache girl must be taken by a man except in marriage. It was this thing of molesting young girls that had caused Nana to drive Chingo from the band and threaten to kill him if he ever came back. But when a woman was widowed or divorced, she had no warrior to hunt for her or protect her in battle with the White Eves and Me-hi-cano troops. Her only way of repayment, the only thing she had to give in return, was herself. Her body was for the asking of any warrior not married. The fact that she was no longer a virgin made the giving of her body not a sin but a duty.

When she bore a child, she named the man whom she thought was the father, or the man she wanted, and it was his duty either to take her as a wife or protect her until she had another child.

"Will Nana find and kill the scalp hunters?" she asked

"They may be gone by the time he arrives with his people, some of whom are sick with bullets. I'll hide you away in a new place and then I'll trail them."

The able-bodied squaws and the older children took knives and hatchets and went to work on an open grave. Some of the others began the work of carrying stones down and piling them near by. When the grave was down to about four and a half feet, the remains of the old ones who had gone to the abode were placed on a layer of stones, and around them were piled more stones, then a layer on top. By the time it was done, no coyote or lobo could ever dig in. Dirt was then tramped down hard and the surplus carried away and scattered carefully. By the time the job was finished, there were no signs to show any White Eyes or Me-hi-canos where the old ones lay burried.

On the following morning, the camp was alive early, bustling with activity. The horses had been brought down and the squaws were busy with both cooking and packing their belongings.

Matesa had been gone for more than three hours. There was a very late moon and it made travel easy in the night. He heard the coyotes and lobos talking, and once a big bear lumbered out into the open from a berry patch and stared and sniffed at him. He paid the bear no attention, because it was the brother of the Apaches and must be neither killed nor eaten.

He covered the ten miles eastward in good time, ranging down a long slope into a wild country where few men had ever been. Now and then a heavily armed patrol of Mexican troopers would go in if there was occasion for it, but for forty years the Apaches had killed everything in the form of man that dared enter this country. That was why the hidden camp where the tragedy had taken place had been safe for so many years.

It was but one of many such camps Nana knew of.

Matesa came at last to where a small creek worked its

way down through scattered evergreen trees and worked on down southward to come out onto a plain. Where the trees thinned out and the ground became more level, Matesa saw the humps in the moonlight. He left his horse tied to a tree a hundred yards away and moved forward through the morning stillness, crouched low, rifle in hand. His black eyes saw everything. There was no sign of life around the jacals. Some of the mud had fallen through and left gaping holes, and grass grew high around the doorways. Matesa went to the water's edge and, bent low, worked his way up and down for two hundred yards looking for tracks of horses. There were none. Nothing but the claw and pug marks of coyote, lobo, bear, badger, and deer. Satisfied, he mounted again and started on the return journey.

It was mid-morning when he met them coming, the old ones too aged to walk riding double. A few others rode, but those who could walk were on foot. The rest of the horses were under packs in which the possessions of the little band were piled high. Cooking pots and other clay utensils; knives, axes, baby carriers; deerskins, blankets and quilts not made by the Apaches; bags of berries and jerked meat; and a hundred other things-all they possessed.

Matesa turned his horse and fell in beside them, "You will be safe there," he told them, "The grass grows high around the jacals and there will be need of fresh mud above. But the other camp must be guarded until a rain has washed out your tracks. This thing I will do."

He left them wending their way down a long slope where again life would take up its interrupted way and they could eat and sleep and work in contentment and without fear. The distance between the two camps was about ten miles and it took him little more than an hour to reach the old camp where the massacre had taken place. He would have preferred to take them another

twenty or thirty miles more, still deeper into the fastness of the great range. But they were old, they must travel slowly, and they must not be too far away when Nana arrived. It would be up to Nana to decide.

His horse already had traveled twenty miles since long before dawn and Santa Maria was twenty-five miles away. Matesa swung up and began following the tracks of four steel-shod horses.

## CHAPTER 5

JUST WEST of where a great towering mountain slope looked down upon the far reaches of the great Mexican desert, the little silver mining town of Santa Maria lay snuggled at the base like a lone dirty grey dog sprawled in deep alumber against a slanting adobe wall. A long, long time ago the old Spanish Conquistadores—the Conquerers—had come through on their path of conquest and a search for the kind of riches they had taken from the Indians far to the south. They brought with them not only the sword but also the Faith, in the form of Iesuit padres.

But the King of Spain was not only a practical man but a greedy one, who believed, and rightly so, that the new land was rich in gold and silver. He granted the Jesuit padres the right to build churches, to propagate the Faith, and to find and mine precious metals . . . and give him a big share of the proceeds. The kindly Jesuit padres soon won the confidence of the friendly Indians, who embraced the Faith, and then took them to the foot of the great mountain slope to a ledge of rock where small slabs of pure silver could be peeled off with a hammer and chief.

The Jesuits began mining operations, using the obedient and docile Indians to drive a tunnel into the mountain, as well as sink several shafts. To bring up the rich ore from the depths below, the padres devised long poles with crosstress set into nothes. Day after day, the patient

Indians went down into the depths with their rawhide sacks, filled them with ore, slipped the headstrap into place around their foreheads, and climbed the crude laddens from one level to another, dumping the contents in a pile before the crude charcoal-fired smelters. At regular intervals, the King of Spain's share was loaded on pack mules, two big bars to a mule, and sent off through the wilderness to the nearest seaport to be put aboard the creat sailing vessels.

This had gone on for a long, long time; long enough for the new generations of padres to grow tried of feeding the proceeds of their labors to generations of distant monarchs. They began to withhold the King's share, and action was prompt and retaliatory. The Jesuits were forbidden to do any more mining in New Spain and ordered out of the country, told to return to Spain or accept higher Church action.

Believing this to be only a temporary measure, the padres complied. But they first ordered the Indians to cover up the mines, bury all church and other treasures, level the church buildings, and then never reveal to anyone except the Jesuits the secret of what lay in the mountain and in the earth at its base below the looming heights.

This the Indians did, and then waited for the Jesuits to return. Instead came the Franciscans, who were not miners. Generation after generation passed, and each succeeding one knew the secret but none of them ever broke the oath given to the long-departed Jesuit padres.

Then there came a time when the crust of the earth grew restless like a giant in slumber and wanted to shift position. It shook itself as a dog shakes water from its dripping coat. Village after village was leveled. Trees by the thousands were ripped loose by the roots and came sliding down like green matchsticks dumped out of an oxcart full of soft dirt. The roars of the earthquake's avalanches could be heard for a hundred miles. The Indians

156

never came near the place again, though they no longer were called Indians. They were called Mexicans, because now much Spanish blood had been mingled with that of their ancestors

One of the many landslides along the west slope of the Sierra Madre bared the tunnel of the old Santa Maria. though the debris itself, millions and millions of tons of it, still covered the ancient mines below. A new mining camp sprang up quickly on the desert plain at the foot of the mighty slide, and it, too, was named Santa Maria.

On this particular afternoon, Matesa pulled up in an arroyo and swung from his horse. He moved up to the bank above and, from this vantage point, surveyed the town sprawled at the foot of the great slide a half mile away. He saw the long rows of dirty adobe buildings housing the families of the miners, the commissary, and the garrison which lay north of town. The large number of horses in the corrals told him that the Me-hi-cano troopers were not out on patrol, but probably were having the afternoon sleep the Apaches liked because it made a surprise raid on a hacienda so easy.

Matesa had followed the tracks of the four horses with ease, because the ground was soft in the desert below the Sierra Madre's great hogback range. And now the trail still lay plain before his eyes, leading straight into town.

For hours he lay there on his belly, motionless, as the sun swung over toward the distant floor of the desert. A few buzzards circled aimlessly, necks craned downward, and a lizard ran by a bush. There was a blur of movement as the snake's head flashed out and speared it. Matesa watched lazily as the snake moved leisurely away to begin the process of swallowing its victim. Now and then, rumbling, crashing sounds came from the tunnel as the Mexican miners pushed a car of dirt and rock out to the end of the dump and sent the rocks tumbling down below.

Matesa watched the tiny figures pushing the distant

iron cars along the rails, and with his contempt was mingled a strange kind of wonder at the way these men worked like slaves. For what reason? The land was abundant with food-many berries, vegetables and roots, plus many kinds of meat. There was sufficient clothing from the tanned skins of many kinds of animals. A good warm jacal of brush and mud could be constructed within four hours. A man was free to roam and hunt and ride. Yet these White Eyes and Me-hi-canos spent their lives hunting white and yellow iron. All one could use it for would be to make bullets, and any Apache knew where there was enough for that.

He was still thinking it over when the sun was low and the long line of tired, dirty miners began to trudge from the tunnel. Somehow, they reminded him of ants crawling out of a hole in the ground. Anta! He would have to tell his mother about that one

Darkness came down and lights began to go on in the town. It was then that Matesa mounted his horse and rode in a long circle all the way around the west end and came in from the south. He was much closer now. He heard laughter, the bark of dogs, the sound of guitars. Now that Berra was back on the reservation, he was half-tempted to raid a house and carry off a young girl captive as a wife; but there were other things of more importance on his mind now. He wanted to find where those four White Eves with the beards would be.

He left his horse tied in a brush clump about two hundred yards south of town and began working his way forward through the night, stopping now and then to snift the air like a wolf. There was a much larger building than the others, a commissary, and near it, across the street, was a big cantina. Matesa made his way toward the rear of the larger building. Halfway there the huge mastiff bayed him.

It came out of the night at a bound, eager to attack him

but afraid to close in. It crouched with forelegs outspread. three feet from his crawling figure, gaping jaws wide in savage barks as it tried to work up courage to close in. Its body odor was as repugnant to Matesa's nostrils as his was to the brute's. He shifted the razor-bladed throwing ax from his belt and into his right hand but, instead of raising up, he threw sideways, the blade making one lateral turn. It struck the center of the wide, gaping jaws and knocked the animal flat, gurgling sounds emanating from it. The sounds ended in a dull thud as he drove in its skull.

He lay there for a few moments, flat on the ground. But apparently the citizens of Santa Maria were inured

to such things, for nobody came to investigate, On the back porch of the commissary, he paused, crouched in the darkness, rifle in his left hand and that deadly throwing ax that had killed Lieutenant Kelton in his right. He looked across the street into the cantina, and there, through an open doorway, he saw his quarry. Four big White Eyes whose faces were covered by beards. Matesa's eyes began to burn savagely as he stood watching and listening to their coarse laughter. The vellow iron they were spending in there for the liquor of the Me-hi-canos had been paid for with the scalps of eight aged men and women too old to defend themselves and too weak to run.

Temptation caused him to shift the ax to his belt and half lift the rifle. For the first time in his life he wished for one of the repeaters that nearly all the other members of Nana's hand carried But Matesa lowered the rifle. He was an Apache who could wait, and when the time came, he wanted them to know, to see, and have time to remember.

He moved back to the center of the porch and examined the rear door of the commissary and the great loading platform where the freight wagons came with their goods. He could do nothing with the rear door or the two heavily barred windows. To remove those bars would entail hours of digging adobe with the throwing ax. All he needed was a small hole sufficient for him to slip through.

He set to work with the ax, eyes on each end of the porch, rifle and knife within reach, and in less than an hour he was inside. He moved cautiously, feeling, exploring, sniffing. The one thing he most wanted at the moment was food. He scarcely could remember when last he had had enough to eat. His nose soon carried him to smoked hams, and he cut great chunks from one and ate hurriedly. He cut into a soft, smelly object that was round, and tasted cheese for the first time in his life, though he didn't know what this strange Me-hi-cano food was. But his greatest delight came when he discovered a jug and tasted the contents. It was castor oil, the one sweet the Apaches loved above all.

He tilted his head and let the oily liquid slide down his throat.

Now for some cartridges, the real reason for entry into the store. He had less than a dozen left. He started to move, jug in hand, when a sound came from the rear where he had dug the whole through the wall. Voices came excitedly and then faded, as the two peon miners, passing the rear of the store, sped across the street to tell Colonel Juan Escalona y Grajeda, Commandante of the local garrison, drinking with the four Brawley brothers, that the commissary had been robado.

Inat the commissary had been 1700ado.

Matesa, the jug of castor oil forgotten, leaped forward toward the opening, which now was but a pinpoint of light in the pitch blackness of the store. He crashed into objects and over barrels. He fell over a counter and felt himself amid bolts of cloth that he wished he could take back to the women. He crawled and stumbled and was almost at the opening when there came shouts and the

sound of running feet. Matesa was wriggling through the hole and onto the porch when Colonel Grajeda's big form loomed into view, pistol in hand.

There was time only for a quick shot and the .50-caliber's heavy roar went rolling across the country, its flash lighting up briefly the faces of the four men who wore

the beards.

Colonel Grajeda let out a roar of pain and grabbed his right hand. The huge 350-grain slug of lead had ripped the pistol from his fingers and sent it spinning. One of those misses that was in reality a hit. The four Brawleys promptly dived back for the protection of the corner of the building. Grajeda saw a dark, lithe form leap from the porch like a black panther and go speeding away in the darkness, and he knew that no Mexican that ever lived could run like that.

"An Apache!" he roared, "An Apache Indian! Call out

the garrison!"

Matesa heard the roaring voices and was up in the saddle, wheeling to the west. The horse began to unlimber itself into a run, rocketing around and through greasewood as its lean young rider hunched himself up in the saddle. He heard the sounds of a badly blown bugle as though the bugler were excited, shots, shouts, screams that were high-pitched; and had he known that his presence had sent terror into the hearts of the people, that doors were being barred and women huddling in corners, his heart would have leaped with joy.

He completed the circle of the town and came in from the north again, heading for the corrals of the garrison. He saw dimly running forms and was certain that all of them were over there. Boldly, he loped up to the corrals. opened gates without dismounting, and dashed inside.

Within two minutes every horse belonging to the garrison was fleeing northward with a lone rider herding them. Nor would they ever be seen again. Matesa drove them the twenty-five miles that night to the abandoned camp, caught one and slept until mid-morning, and then began the return journey back to Santa Maria.

The four men with the beards were still there—and he remembered how the old ones had looked with the flies

buzzing around their heads.

## CHAPTER 6

ON THE afternoon following the "big" Apache raid on Santa Maria, Colonel Juan Escalona y Grajeda stood in the same cantina where he had been the evening before, a booted foot resting on the cottonwood rail, drinking tequila. He held the glass in his left hand because the fingers of his right hand were temporarily useless. Grajeda was certain that the shot hadn't been deliberate, but one of luck. And though his hand still pained him, and he now knew first hand how it feels to have a pistol shot out of it, the Colonel considered himself a very lucky man.

The subject of the raid had finally worn itself out, though loss of the garrison's entire horse herd rankled acidly in the Colonel's soul. For that reason his report to his superiors, written the night before, stated that a band of sixty Apaches, under the notorious Nana, had raided the camp and been driven off only because of the bravery of his men and himself. Two mules had been borrowed from the priest at the church and two soldiers dispatched to the nearest haciends for remounts. A half-dozen swarthy-faced waqueros had arrived with the new herd, and all was well again. The big raid—and the Colonel, with the aid of tequila, already was convincing himself that it had been a big raid—was a thing of the past.

The Colonel shifted the boot and its spur rattled a jangling protest. The spur rowel was of six spikes filed to needle points, and each of the spikes was almost three inches long.

"I am a Spaniard and I wear the rowels of my ancestors who conquered this country," the Colonel was wont to boast. "I am a direct descendant of one of the Generals who first came from Spain."

And this was indeed true. He was a pure Spaniard, as was the absentee owner; the kind the Mexicans hated with a hidden, sullen bitterness. He was a big man, a little heavy and florid of face because of heavy drinking and plain debauchery in general. His bell-bottomed pantaloons flared out above boot and spur, his bolero jacket was adorned with gold lace, and his huge straw sombrero with the needle-pointed crown, known as a "Chihuahua" hat, partly covered the long black mustachios that the Colonel always appeared to be stroking.

At the moment, with only one good hand, the Colonel

was holding his tequila glass.

As Commandante of the local garrison of soldiers, his job was to keep order in the town, see that the mine manager held back no proceeds from the smelter to the absentee owner in Spain—the Colonel and the manager were rapidly becoming rich—and cover the surrounding country with daily patrols to prevent raids by marauding Abaches.

Colonel Grajeda, however, knew that the hated Gringo troopers already had subjugated all but one small band of the Apaches, and he saw no reason for such foolishness. He preferred to remain in town and look over the growth and progress of all the young girls. He had an all-consuming passion for young girls of fourteen or fitteen, and because of police powers that were absolute it was whispered about that only when the Colonel was away did the miners allow their daughters to appear on the street.

Through the open doorway, two small boys were playing at bullfighting, one with a gunny sack and the other holding two sticks to his head. A she dog lay in the sun with three pups digging away at her milk-swollen dugs. A

few Mexican women were entering the commissary, still chattering excitedly about the "big" raid. Behind the five men at the bar, the back door was wide open in an effort to get the benefit of any cross breeze blowing through. The five men were outlined between the two doors, the four Americans gun-belted, coarse, uncouth-looking men. Grajeda had only recently paid them several hundred gold besos for seven Apache scalps, all with grey hair.

"I consider it my duty as a Spaniard," the Colonel was saying, "to bring as many half-Spaniards into the world as possible, and breed out the Indian in future generations." He rolled the glass in his stubby dark fingers. "My ancestors conquered them. Their ancestors worked this very tunnel as slaves. And now it's my duty to make them

forget that they ever were Indians."

Buck Brawley, the oldest of the four brothers, grinned at him. He was in his mid-thirties, his beard a dirty yellow, his teeth brown and beginning to rot. He chuckled out loud.

"Your ancestors, Colonel, oughta be damned glad that them Indians wasn't like these Apaches are now. If they had been like that bunch of scalps we brought in fer you, there wouldn't be a drop of Spanish blood in this coun-

try today. It'd be pure Apache."

Colonel Grajeda grinned right back at the American and his three bearded, grinning brothers. "My friend, don't try to, as you Americanos say, pull the wool over my eyes. The scalps you brought me were of those so old it must have been mere child's play to take them. They were no longer a menace to the Mexicans, I bought them, and gladly, because for eighty years they have been a scourge to Mexico and Mexicans. I know within reason that the old men you killed must have killed many a Mexican in his warrior days."

"Dog eat dog," chuckled Buck Brawley. "The law of the jungle. They raided you to git food and stuff, an' you

paid fer their scalps with gold. Me-me an' my brothers ain't takin' no sides. Scalp hunting ain't jest exactly popular up in the Territory of Arizona these days, but we don't let that worry us. As long as you pay fer scalps, we're goin' to try to keep on gittin' 'em."

"As long as you bring them to me, no matter where you get them—as long as they're Apache scalps—I'll pay you gold for them."

"Does thet go fer reservation Apaches, too?" asked Buck Brawley, winking at his three brothers. They had not told the Colonel that four scalps they had brought him a few weeks previously had been taken on the reservation and that one of the carefully concealed bodies had been found

"As long as the scalp is Apache," the Colonel said firmly. "And now in return for my generosity, when are you going to lead me to the camp where the others are?"

"Others? There wasn't no others, Colonel."

"You make a poor liar, my friend. Or, rather, you insult my intelligence as an officer and a Spaniard. I've taken a few scalps from women and children myself. Those you brought me were very, very old, and I know they were not alone. They couldn't have been, for the simple reason they would have been unable to find food for themselves. There had to be others."

"Shucks, Colonel," Jim Brawley, the tallest of them, cut in. "They scattered like quail, an' you oughta know Apaches. They won't come back. And not a man of your

outfit nor ourn could trail one of 'em ten feet." "A very poor excuse for not bringing me more of their scalps," scoffed the Colonel. "Poor judgment, poor shooting. It's fortunate for you that you never run into Nana

and his small band. Very fortunate."

Buck Brawley's bearded face hardened and his bold glance narrowed. "How much will you pay in gold fer Nana's scalp?" he asked with deceiving softness.

Colonel Grajeda used his good left hand to down the contents of his glass and waited while the huge, obese bartender, or *cantinero*, waddled forward and poured him another.

"Five thousand gold pesos," the Spaniard said very softly. "And you and your brothers are all fools even to consider trying to get that scalp. It hasn't been done in

sixty years."

"Maybe it wasn't tried our way, Colone?" said Fred, the youngest of the four. He was blond, about twenty-two, and as tough as any of his brothers. "We got a friend up there on the reservation who was born in Nana's band. His name is Chingo and he's a sergeant of Apache police. He's the feller that raids all the canyons where the Apaches-particularly the Coyoteros that he don't like—are makin' tiswin. He gets rid of it and then turns around and sells them as has money workin' fer the Government—he sells 'em plain good whiskey. And do you know where he eits it' From us."

He didn't mention to the Colonel that afternoon that it had been Chingo's directions that had brought the four

brothers to the camp of the old ones.

Grajeda shrugged. He started to say, "Very well, my friend, go ahead and try," and let it go at that. He never spoke the first word, for from a distance of two hundred yards away there came the smashing roar of a big Sharps rifle. With the sound, Fred Brawley gave a single scream of surprise and pain as he was literally slammed up against the bar as though by an invisible band. Then he rolled off its sour-smelling edge and struck the floor and lay there on his face with a torrent of crimson pouring from his mouth.

The four other men had reacted automatically, leaping toward the open rear door, pistols in hand. All they saw was the figure of a lone young Apache Indian, rifle in hand, calloping away almost leisurely toward the north. Matesa had tracked patiently and come back to wait patiently. He had served notice that the Apaches neither forgave nor forgot.

On an afternoon several days later old Nana sat beneath an evergreen tree near the stream, his back to the bole and the ever-present long-stemmed pipe in his toothless mouth. His wise old eyes were quietly taking in the activity about him. Four of the wounded were up and around again. The others were in the newly repaired jacals. It would be a long time before they would ride and hunt food and raid again.

Most of the children had come in from a long ramble among the surrounding hills; wild, carefree youngsters who had felt no parental restraint from the time they were old enough to toddle along after the others. They lived in absolute and complete freedom, these children, playing ball and running races and hunting small game with bow and arrow. It was only when they grew older that the crippled and the old men who could still ride would consent to begin their "education" that might one day save their lives. This meant instruction in concealment, which they already knew, the coyote and other wild-life signals, the location and reading of smoke signals by day and signal fires at right, and trailing.

And now, Nana reflected, watching the squaws at the evening cooking fires, there was but a pitiful handful left to train. The White Eyes had killed off those who would not make peace and had forced the others to become herders of cattle and diggers of ditches to make the water run down to the crops. This, old Nana grunted to himself over the pipe, was a thing for the Pimas and Yumans. Not Apaches. Certainly not Chiricahuas.

Movement came from the lip of the western ridge which Nana sat facing, and he watched Matesa ride down the declivity at a walk, the carcass of a spike buck deer in front of him. He had killed it with bow and arrow because the fighting of late had almost depleted his precious supply of cartridges for the big Sharps rifle. He was still suffering pangs of disappointment over the outcome of the raid on the Commissary in Santa Maria.

He rode past the jacal where his mother worked over a fire in front of it, halted, and let the carcass of the deer slide heavily to the ground. He was unaware of his young strength, of what Nana was thinking: He fought like a lobo against the soldiers. He came and led the aged ones and the widows and children to a place of safety. He brought back thirty-five head of good horses from the Me-hi-cano soldiers. He followed and killed one of the four White Eyes scalp hunters. If I had a hundred more like him, I'd cut off, surround, and kill every patrol of soldiers I could find. And now he's making a final, faint war cry. A cry of protest from the last of the free Apaches. If we stay here, the Me-hi-canos will someday find us. If we go north to the lands that were taken from us, the White Eyes would quickly run us all down.\*

Nana's wife was heating water in preparation for a stew. He removed the pipe from his mouth and called to her.

"Go get me some of the loins and cook it for my supper.

Tell Matesa to come."

She picked up a big knife from a stone and went obediently and in silence, as an Apache woman should do, to help skin and divide equally the meat. Matesa had swung down and was unsaddling his horse. He said to his mother, "Cook the liver for me," and turned the animal loose to join the herd under guard of the boys down on the flats below the camp.

\* Author's note: In this surmise, Nana was mistaken. When Cochise died in 1874. Nana was elected to take his place as chief of all the little bands now raiding. Geronimo was on and off the reservation, and at the age of eighty-two, Nana was riding up to ninety miles in a single day. But at this particular period he and his little band of people were the only free Apaches. He made peace only when he was too old to ride.

He nodded in answer to Nana's wife and hung his cartridge belt over a peg protruding from the jacal that was the home of his mother and himself and two of the aged ones she cared for. He strode over to where the old man sat on the rock with his back to the bole of the tree.

He was what Nana had been sixty or more years before as he stood there before the diminutive figure with the wrinkled face and wise old eyes. He waited in silence for

Nana to speak. Nana spoke.

"You have become one of the best of the few fighters I now have left to keep us free," the old man said. "But I have seen for days what is in your eyes since Chingo stole Berra during the fight and made her captive again. It is not what should be in the eyes of an Apache fighter."

"She was but two months past the puberty rites and I had already tied my horses in front of her jacal," Matesa

replied.

Nana returned the long-stemmed corncob pipe to his mouth and smoked thoughtfully for a moment before removing it again.

"Once I too was young and my loins were hot. But Berra is a captive now, under guard on the reservation three hundred miles from here. You have lost her to the White Eyes and this thing bothers you. But you forget that there are others here, the widows and divorced ones."

He pointed with the wet pipestem to where a short distance away a young woman of about twenty-two was helping to skin the deer. It was Slona, wife of the warrior who had been killed but recently in the fight with Major Livingston's troops.

"There is Slona, who is now a widow and depending upon you for food and protection. She is young and strong. Take her up among the trees and lie with her in the tall grass and forget this thing that eats at you." "Berra watered my horses," Matesa insisted stubborn-

ly. "I do not wish to take Slona."

70

"Then stay here and wait. It may be that one day we shall be cornered and forced to make peace or die. Then

you can go to her on the reservation."

"You forget about Chingo," Matesa replied. "Two grasses ago you drove him from this band because he molested the young girls while you were away. He tried many times to molest Berra even before she went through the puberty rites that made her a woman. He is a sergeant of Apache police and can take what he wants. He will take her soon."

"You forget," old Nana said coldly, "that Cochise is still Chief of the Chiricahua people and will protect her."

"You forget that Cochise is becoming old and sick and drinks much of the White Eves' whiskey." was the stony

reply.

Nana's black eyes snapped in swift anger, but he made no outburst. He was already planning in his mind to groom Matesa for the leadership of the band when the years took that mantle from his own aged shoulders.

He said patiently, "You know what happened when we went after our women and children. The White Eyes followed us for days and days and finally ran us down. They got back many of the women and children as captives and killed more of our fighters. They would do it again. Chingo is older and wiser than you. He would take some of the Apache police and run you down and cut your throat."

Matesa stood there before him, the weight heavy inside his young body. He knew full well that the old man spoke

the truth. But . . .

"Some of those here are tired and wish to go to the reservation to live near Cochise and in peace," he suggested, trying a new strategy. "They are in danger here unless we go deeper into the mountains. Have you forgotten that Cochise told you to bring them to him when they hampered you in flight and fighting? What if the three White Eyes scalp hunters who are left should come here with Me-hi-cano soldiers? Would you have those old ones and the others who wish to live in peace now die and be scalped for gold pesos?"

Again, the old man with the wrinkled face sat there puffing thoughtfully on his pipe. Finally: "I will send out my thought spirits tonight to those in the abode. I will do what they say. If the answer is good for you, then take those who wish to go and guide them to Cochise. If not, then you will stay here."

Matesa turned on the hard rawhide soles of his moccasins and walked away. He returned to the jacal and waited until the deer had been cut up and carried away. His mother put the strips of fresh liver on the coals. She had not spoken until now. He had lain on his sheepskin saddle pad and waited.

"You have been talking with Nana," she said, turning the strips on the coals.

He nodded glumly. "I wish to return to the reservation for Berra. He will tell me in the morning. If the signs are right, would you return with me or remain here as one of the free ones?"

"Since the scalp hunters have come to this land for the first time and both the Me-hi-cano and White Eyes solders hunt us all the time, I have a feeling inside that our day of the old ways is done. If you go by the right signs, I wish to go with you and live in peace near Cochise and the others of our people."

## CHAPTER 7

THE NIGHT came down dark and silent except for the howls of the coyotes and the hoarse roars of the far-ranging lobos. The fires died down into warm ashes and silence enveloped the jacals where the last remnant of Nana's hunted ones slept on their deerskins. Five of the warriors were out on night guard, calling the coyote signals at regular intervals. Matesa slept beside his heavily breathing mother. Nana still sat motionless beneath the tree.

Presently there came the sound of slow footsteps and the medicine man appeared. He was past ninety, a wrinkled, mumnified man who weighed one pound for each of his years. Nana rose.

He said, "Give me your hand, old one, and we'll climb the ridge to where the moon throws light so that the ghost

ponies abroad tonight may walk sure-footed."

He took the faltering one's arm in a grip that was still strong enough to handle a half-broken pony, and the two old men began the climb up out of the ravine to the ridge above; one weak and infirm and the other still strong and lithe.

"Thope he's out with us tonight," Nana said to the panting older man beside him, referring to Mangas Coloradas only as a person and not by name, for Mangas Coloradas had been one of the greatest of them all. "But he may be with those on the reservation." "He will be where it is best," panted the other. "I knew him when we were a great and strong people. Not so good a fighter as Cochise but so wise and good for our people."

They finally reached the top and came out into a clearing and paused to regain their breaths; two very old men who knew sadly that the sun had set upon their former way of life. The old days of freedom were gone. The way of the White Eves had taken its place.

The moon threw its pale yellow beams among the trees, and the coyotes still howled and the big lobos threw back as contemptuous challenge. The night air was fresh and cool as Nana squatted down and bowed his head over the buckskin shirt and began to send out his thought spirits. Two aged men in prayer.

More than two hours later they worked their way back down the incline. The medicine man stumbled off to his jacal. Nane took his place on the rock beneath the tree.

He was still sitting there at dawn when Matesa emerged from the jacal, wearing a shirt now against the morning coolness, and came and stood wordlessly before him.

Nana said, "I was on the ridge last night with the medicine man. The old ones whose scalps were taken by the four White Eyes and sold for gold pesos to the Me-hicanos were there and are now at peace."

"Did they tell you what I must do?" asked Matesa.

"They will go with you on the trip," Nana replied, the words making Matesa's heart sing. "They will go because some of the old ones will not arrive at the reservation. They will need help when they leave for the abode."

"If they go," Matesa said harshly, "it will not be because of White Eyes soldiers or scalp hunters or ranchers."

"They will go," Nana said softly, and then sent out a call to arouse the camp into activity.

It came alive at once. Grey smoke from the fires rose twistingly. The boys hurried out after the horses in the main herd, galloping and whooping gleefully. The five warriors who had been on night guard moved into camp for breakfast and sleep. The wounded sat around and

yawned and grumbled.

There was a suppressed excitement and a little sadness among them this morning. This meant the parting of friends and relatives, though they would meet other friends and relatives on the reservation. And Matesa was disappointed at the few horses Nana had allotted him. Should he be forced to move to another camp, they would be needed for the old and young, their belongings, and much food cached away.

The warriors caught and saddled the horses, Upon these, Matesa mounted double the old ones who wished to return to be with Cochise. They could hold each other on. He put some of the younger children upon gentler ponies. The women and older children who wished to go

along would walk.

There were about twenty of them, including Matesa's mother, Neeta, and Tuka, the only other fighter in the band who owned a .50 caliber Sharps. Tuka would never fight or use a rifle again. His right shoulder had been shattered and now, under the crude muslin bandages, looked twisted and hunched.

Matesa mounted into the rawhide saddle, as all the others crowded around the little party. Old Nana came padding through on his moccasins. He looked up at Ma-

tesa, sitting tall and lithe in the saddle.

"This thing you wanted and I did not," he said coldly. "It would be better even for those who wish to return to remain here. But it is their wish to go, and you have the fires of youth in your loins. But this thing I tell you, Take them through safely-past the soldiers and the scalp hunters and the ranchers-or you will not return. This thing I sav.

"This thing I understand," Matesa replied.

He gigged his horse into motion, and his mother and

the others on foot lifted the packs to their backs. It was one hundred and fifty miles to where the land of the Mehi-canos ended. It was more than one hundred and fifty miles from there to where Cochies lived on the reservation. Matesa knew the task he had set for himself as the little party moved slowly up the ravine and began working its way among the hills and valleys and over the ridges of the great mountain range toward the floor of the desert so many miles away.

They traveled slowly and leisurely those first three days, though impatience burned deep like a pure flame inside Matesa. Alone, he could have made it in not more than four days.

He curbed his impatience and shot plenty of fresh meat with bow and arrow and waited while they stopped to fill themselves upon fresh berries. It was cool and water was plentiful.

At the end of three days they came down out of the mountains and reached the floor of the desert. It stretched away in seemingly endless miles to the west and to the north, much farther than the eye could see. Here the heat began to strike at them and the waterholes were far apart. There was little talk among them now as they began the long, hot trek. Matess asw his mother striding along beneath her burden, the green and white trinket dangling at her dark, sweaty throat. Near her walked the young widow who was four months with child. Her burden was double; one in her belly and one on her back. She walked in silence and made no complaint. It went on that way for days until they reached that invisible line separating the land of the Me-hi-canos from the land the White Eyes had taken from the Apaches.

It was now that Matesa redoubled his vigilance and began to make long, swinging patrols. For this was the place where the Me-hi-cano troopers patroled and watched for the White Eves soldiers and others to make sure they did not cross that invisible line. On the other side were the White Eyes soldiers and those ranchers who would kill at sight of an Apache.

He kept them to the arroyos and hid them at night with sand over the fires. The boys fed the horses as best they could and kept them close by, sleeping with picket ropes tied to their wrists.

It went on that way day after day and night after night as the hot miles unreeled with maddening slowness and that insufferable impatience gripped Matesa's mind. He thought only of Berra. Berra and Chingo . . .

He rode below the skylines and made his long patrols early and late, and the sickness came down inside of him heavily the day he knew that his little band of helpless ones was being stalked.

He first sensed it that afternoon when, turning in the saddle to face a faint breeze that cooled their hot, sweating bodies, he saw the touch of dust wafted up from back of a ridge far to their rear. There was something about it that wasn't just quite right; and only the eye of an Apache would have detected it.

It wasn't a mere gust of wind rolling along the top of a ridge. The shape of it was not right. The dust had been stirred up. And yet there were no horses or cattle of the ranchers in this vicinity. He had seen no strange riders or pack trains or soldiers. He had expected no soldiers, for he knew that after the fight, word of it would go out on the magic wires to the other soldiers that Nana was in the land of the Me-hi-canos. They would know that he would need much time to lick his wounds, and it would be long. perhaps many months, before he returned. It was one of the things that had given Matesa the confidence to bring the old and young with him. The soldiers would not be expecting it.

He staved close with the band the rest of the afternoon and did not go back to investigate. He had given his word to Nana that he would guard them, and there must be no chance of a surprise attack while he was gone. He made a dry camp that night, huddling them down in a shallow arroyo over small evening fires and then quickly extinguishing them. He saw the aged ones lying on their deerskins and watching him with faded eyes. The long trip was beginning to tell on them. They were beginning to tire, and perhaps they, too, from long experience, sensed that there was now an unknown, hidden danger, that something was wrong.

Matesa finished his supper of meat and corn cakes and dried berries. They had come to a huge patch of pear cactus that afternoon and he had stood guard while the squaws and children gathered small sacks of the succulent red pears. Now he ate two of them, wiped his hands on his muslin loin cloth, and turned to his mother and Tuka, the crippled one.

"There are those who follow us," he said to them in a voice low enough not to reach the ears of the others. "The ghost spirits told Nana that this thing would be.

You will say nothing."

"Nana knows," his mother answered. "Look over there to where Tepa lies. She will not be with us when we reach Cochies."

Cochise."

He looked. He saw the tiny figure of a woman who had been very, very old even when he had been born into Nana's band seventeen grasses before. She lay on her right side, weak and tired and coughing. Her once black hair was now almost snow-white.

"Those who have gone to the abode will be waiting for her when the time comes," he answered his mother. "Nana said they would be with us on this journey."

On foot, an hour later, he began his long circling prowl, a dark shadow bent low over the ground in the yellow light of the partial moon. He became worried about an attack during his absence and hurried back. When he slipped into the arroyo, he heard soft thudding sounds and saw several forms on the opposite slope of the arroyo. His mother's form loomed up out of the night.

She said simply, "It is the old one. The ghost ponies

have come for her."

He walked with her up the slope to where the grave was now finished. Again, it was layers of rock below and above, the dirt tramped down hard, the rest of it scattered, and grass placed over the raw new sore on the desert's burned face.

When it was done, Matesa stepped to the head of the grave and spoke in a low voice to the others gathered around. "Her name was Tepa. The ones from the abode have taken her away with them on a ghost pony and she is a peaceful one now. Her name will never again be spoken."

spoken."

He scouted for two hours at dawn the following morning, found nothing and again the band moved on its slow, plodding course northward.

It was on the fourth night, when the moon was much

brighter, that he found the horse tracks.

There were the tracks of four, all steel shod. That could mean two riders with two pack horses. He crawled on his belly for two hundred yards with his face almost

against the tracks. By then, he knew the answer.

Three riders and one pack horse. Three riders whose horses' tracks were exactly the same as those he had trailed to Santa Maria. The three scalp hunters with the vellow beards.

These were the men who had raided the hidden camp and killed the old ones and sold the scalps to the chief of the garrison of Me-hi-cano soldiers. Now they were on their way north again and apparently had struck his trail by accident because they had no way of knowing of the little party.

Three of them against himself.

## CHAPTER 8

It was almost midnight when Matesa completed his final circle and returned to the camp where the others lay in a small tight group along the floor of the arroyo. They were all asleep, their tired bodies drinking in rest from the meager food supplies and now the clean desert night air. The boys were near by, two watching the horses while the others slept.

Matesa slipped past where the aged ones lay in each other's arms against the chill that would be in the air before daylight. He thought, What easy victims, now that they are old and shrunk. When the men were younger, any one of them could have tracked down and killed all three White Eyes now somewhere out there in the darkness. He himself could have done it had he dared to leave them armed only with knives and axes.

And now the aged ones lay there like the sun-dried, shrunken mummies of the many dead people he had seen. Only one thing mattered now, and that was to get them

through to Cochise.

He went to where his mother lay sleeping and picked up his deerskin; then he climbed back to the top of the west lip of the arroyo. There, with the two rifles, a throwing ax, and a knife, he settled himself down to hours of vigilance until the coming of dawn. There was hardly a sound in the great stillness where the old ones who had gone before were riding their ghost ponies. Even the coyotes seemed to be quiet tonight, he thought. He watched a night owl swoop by in a slow sailing motion, and knew that one or two of the long-tailed field mice out foraging would end up in its stomach before daybreak.

He felt reasonably confident that if the remaining three of the four who had raided the hidden camp in Sonora made a night attack he could hear them before they got among the helpless ones. He could kill one or two with the rifles and take his chance in hand-to-hand

combat for a finish fight.

But the Brawley brothers either didn't know the exact location of the little band they were stalking or were biding their time. They didn't come in. Matesa lay there until the first faint streaks of dawn struck the horizon and began to turn it into a grey line. He rose, shed his deerskin covering, picked up his weapons, and dropped into the arroyo. He strode over and shook the only warrior member of the little band by his good shoulder.

"Take your rifle and go to a good place above and use your eyes. We must not leave until I know where the three White Eyes are to be found. If I hear your rifle, I shall

come fast."

80

The crippled man pushed himself upright with his one good arm and grunted at the pain in the other. He took the weapon and climbed the lip of the arroyo to the west. Matesa went up over the east ridge and moved swiftly northward, a lean, dark figure that made no sound, burning eyes seeing everything. When the light increased the range of his vision much farther, he broke into a lithelegged trot, the massive lungs beneath his barrel chest rising and falling. It was those lungs and legs that enabled him to capture a wild horse on foot by simply walking and trotting it down to a point where it could go no farther. He had seen his father do it one summer on the annual hunting trip into the Mogollons. He'd seen some of Geronimo's unrulk fiehers do it. too

But these were no horses he was stalking this morning. He had to find those three bearded men where they were camped; what direction they traveled; how far away.

The arroyo twisted northward for a mile more and then faded into another flat expanse of the arid land around him. He kept to the higher places but below the skyline. He knew that every foot forward he moved away from the camp would be that much longer to get back, in case of an attack. The crippled warrior might frighten them off or even kill one but they had to be found. It was the way Nana would have done it.

"Nana should have given me two of the warriors, as I asked," Matesa grunted to himself. "It would be an easy matter to kill these scalp hunters and then there would

be no more danger."

He moved up the side of a rocky ridge and flattened himself at the top. He knew almost every foot of this country, because he had been taught by his father and the others to familiarize himself with every ridge, every waterhole, every big rock. It might mean the difference between life and death.

He peered over—and then he saw them. They were camped about three quarters of a mile away in a slight swale among some scattered mesquites. Smoke was rising in grey wisps from their breakfast fire, and it told him that they would not attack. Men who could slip into camp and kill the old ones, as they had done, would be concealed and with no fire.

Matesa guessed then that they would wait for the right place and try a daylight ambush that would kill him the first shot. After that, it would be a small matter to run down the squaws and children and then come back to get the aged ones who no longer could flee.

He shifted the big rifle to his other hand and went jumping down from rock to rock until he came to where the ground was level, and again he went forward in that lithe-legged trot. The sun was trying to peep into view now and the Brawleys were preparing breakfast. Their horses were picketed near by. They had made a dry camp because the only water within miles was being used by their quarry.

Buck Brawley was squatted down on his haunches near the fire, frying pan in hand. He raked out some coals and put the pan on and then reached into a pack for some bacon. Jim was using the last of their precious supply of water to make flapjack batter. He was stirring it half savagely, a kind of determined preoccupation on his long face.

"I still think you're wrong and I'm right," he said, and lifted his bewhiskered face to look at Buck. "We could'a slipped in there last night and got the whole bunch of them. They only got two warriors with 'em, and I know Goddamned well that one of them bucks has been hit. He don't know nothin' about scoutin', maybe, just settin' there on his hoss all day among the squaws," he sneered with biting sarcasm. "I think yo're a dammed fool."

"I think myself we could'a got 'em, Buck," Hugo put in from where he was breaking up small mesquite limbs for

the cooking fire.

"Oh, shore," grunted the oldest of the brothers. "We just slip in there in the dark on some people who have the ears of a coyote and could hear us comin' a half mile away. Fust thing you know one of us gives off a grunt and he's ready for the buzzards. Both of you oughta have better sense than that, and you know it. So stop worryin' about thet water. All we got to do is keep close and wait till we find the right spot to kill them two bucks with rifles and ketch the others out in the open where they can't run away from our hosses. If we work it just right, we ought a be headin' right back to Grajeda with a load of scalps that'll make our pockets bulge. We're good for at least hat'll make our pockets bulge. We're good for at least hat'll make our pockets bulge.

two thousand dollars on this bunch. Then we'll head back fer the reservation and hook up with Chingo again."

Hugo straightened and began rolling himself a cigarctte. He was now the youngest of the three since they had buried Fred down there at Santa Maria and then decided to return north again. The shot that had killed Fred had told an all too plain story; Nana had returned to the camp where the scalps had been taken and one of the warriors had trailed the four of them to the mining camp.

"We better step kind of light around that reservation country," he said. "And as long as Nana is still free and raidin', I just wouldn't want him to get his hands on me. I'm in favor of takin' this batch of scalps back to Colonel Grajeda and hauling our freight all the way outa this country. We're goin' to live a whole lot longer that way, the way I see it."

He almost saw it for the last time right at that moment, for on the heels of his words came the heavy roar of a big rifle from a point of rocks two hundred yards away and a bullet screamed past his jaw. Two inches closer and it would have been a hit.

The Sharps kicked hard against Matesa's shoulder, and a wisp of acrid smoke puffed out and began to spread. Through it, he heard a startled yell, then more yells, and saw three men making a dash for their picketed horses. He flipped out the smoking shell and pulled hard at another from the loop in the belt over his shoulder. The Brawleys were bawling orders to one another, but the orders were not needed, for the three of them were leaping astride horses without saddles and bridles.

Buck Brawley had just flung himself half over a horse when Matesa fired again. With the second roar of the Sharps, the horse caved and went down, its back broken. The huge slug of lead had passed between Buck's arm and side.

He made a leap at the next and last horse on pickettheir pack horse. Hugo and Jim were thumbing shots from their six-shooters at a target two hundred yards away, a target that was invisible except for the faint spot of powder-smoke haze, but this time Buck made it. The three of them lunged into the desert at a run while Matesa frantically reloaded and fired again. But the range was too great and the targets moving too fast for him to waste

any more of his precious ammunition. He rose to his feet and stood there watching them, his black eyes burning with satisfaction and yet with disappointment. Two hundred yards was the closest he had been able to crawl and still retain the protection of rocks in case they had used their rifles. He had been certain that he could kill one of them and perhaps two; and now the danger that might have been eliminated was merely postponed. He doubted if they would hit for Fort Bowie or Fort Thomas for the soldiers. He hoped that they would. He could leave his little band to be taken in and go on after Berra alone.

But he knew these bearded men, so hated by the Apaches and even hated by the White Eyes soldiers, too. They would be back. They were scalp hunters who, after the raid on the camp of the old ones, had returned to the

land in the north and had picked up his trail on the way. He stood there watching them flee until they came out on a high point about five hundred vards away. Here they pulled up on their bare-backed mounts and swung around and stopped as though to wait. So, he thought. They will wait until I go for the others and then return for their saddles and goods.

It hurt him to spare another of the precious cartridges, but he did it. With the huge .50 caliber Sharps leveled over a rock, he exploded a cloud of dust almost in their midst at a distance of five hundred vards. He saw them

scatter into a run again, picked up the four empty shells, and made his way down toward their camp. The fire was still sending up its wisp of lazy smoke and there was an overturned pan of white batter on the ground.

The horse was dead but he went over and cut its throat with his knife to blêed it. Then he cut green mesquite limbs and placed them on the fire and removed his shirt. When the smoke plume went straight up into the sky, he knelt with the shirt in hand and covered the fire. He sent up one pulf ball after another, waited a brief interval, sent up some more.

He knew that the wounded warrior Tuka would see and bring the little band. He hoped that somewhere a sharp-eyed scout with a patrol would see and bring the soldiers; for impatience was riding him harder every day; impatience and the fear that by the time he arrived at the place where Cochise was camped, Chingo already would have Berra in a jacal.

He remained on guard and waited.

It took the band more than an hour to straggle in. He stood there as the squaws and children deposited their burdens and then helped the aged ones down. His face was expressionless and so were the eyes of his mother, but he knew that Nana would find out this thing he had done. He had told Nana that he would protect them, and he had fulfilled his duty by protecting them and bringing them food.

"I'm going to trail the White Eyes," he said to the wounded warrior. "I think they will run far, for they are without food and water and rifles. If they bring the soldiers, or the soldiers have seen the smoke signal, I shall leave you with them and go on ahead to find Berra."

One of the boys had saddled and ridden his horse. He swung up and loped off across the desert where the tracks of three steel-shod horses lay deep in the sand. He fol-

lowed the tracks for five miles before pulling up on top of a ridge. They were heading north and east, and he knew exactly where they would lead.

Far, far up there lay the ranch Nana had raided that morning on his return trip to Sonora, when he had needed more horses for his old ones. There they would go to get more saddles and gun. But they would be back. This thing he knew.

He turned and rode slowly back to his little band. The sun shone down brightly on his straight young body and

dark face.

For the next three days the band camped at the waterhole, while the women and older children cut up and dried fresh horse meat, and hunted for mesquite beans, berries, and prickly pears. During those three days Matesa seldom rested. Each morning at daybreak, he mounted a fresh horse and was gone until dark, riding up to sixty miles in wide circles, looking for tracks; always looking for tracks and hoping to see soldiers.

He had been tempted to take his charges to Fort Bowie and turn them over to the soldiers there. But the fear and

the instinct of the wild were too strong.

He put down his impatience and fears, and waited until the time was right and then struck out again. He left a plain trail this time, traveling as fast as those on foot could walk, driving them to the point of exhaustion, heading toward those faraway mountains where he might have a better chance to survive if the three scalp hunters returned.

The days dragged by endlessly one after another as the band made its slow, crawling progress across the desert, heading toward what was to be their final "home."

## CHAPTER 9

As for the three Brawley brothers, Matesa had been uncannily correct in his surmise that they would head for the big ranch far to the north. That was exactly what Buck, the leader of the trio, had decided.

He sat his horse on top of a ridge, cursing as few men ever cursed. They had covered fifteen miles; fifteen of the most torturous miles men had ever ridden after being used to good saddles with stirrups to ease the weight from their crotches. Normally they would have walked and ridden by turns. But the surprise had been so complete and the panic so sudden that none had dared grab for a saddle or even a rifle.

Hugo glanced over at Jim and shrugged, as though to say, Let him go ahead and get it out of his system. He said, "He still don't know how lucky we are, Jim. They missed easy shots at two hundred yards, they got us out here without rifles, and if they foller us we're finished. Let him cuss and let's git goin'. We got a long way to go

before we hit old Ed Adkins' ranch."

"Might as well," Jim said laconically.

They gigged into motion again, heading for a water-

hole some ten miles ahead. Buck was still cursing.

"Just you wait," he gritted, part of it rage and part of it pain. "I ain't through, I ain't through! I'm comin' back and wipe out that bunch if it's the last thing I ever do."

"It probably will be, as I warned you before," Hugo re-

88

plied with dry humor, "I never much went in for all this stuff in the first place-"

"Hell, you didn't!" snarled Buck. "You was right in there-"

It went on that way for two more hours, until at last, still aching, they reached the waterhole and flung themselves down painfully to drink. Afterwards they sat down for a few minutes of welcome respite, the fear of that lone young warrior with the long-range rifle still strong.

"What I'm scairt of," Hugo said, rolling a cigarette, "is that young devil will cut a long circle around us and open up with that Sharps. We wouldn't have a chance."

"Why not?" snorted Jim. "We got six-shooters an' can hole up among the rocks. He wouldn't leave them wimmin an' kids long enough for anything like that."

"They'll make this waterhole tonight," Buck agreed, as though to himself. He licked at the cigarette. "So we keep right on goin' lickety-split. But I'm thinkin' ahead. What do we tell Ed Adkins? You know how he hates Apaches, particularly since it ain't been too long since he got raided by 'em again. If we told him the truth, he'd let out a roar and come racking down here with his men and kill every man, woman, and kid in the band. Then what happens to us when the soldiers find out? They'll want to ask some questions as to what we was doin' around them Apaches. You know what that means to us, after they found that buck we scalped. We'll go to the penitentiary and we might even git ourselves hung."

"Meaning what?" Jim asked.
"Meaning," put in Hugo, "that we're just goin' to keep
on fooling around until we get our necks stretched. We oughta go back to Texas as soon as we can get some more saddles

"You can go where you please," grunted Buck, getting painfully to his feet. "I'm heading for old Ed's place. I'm tellin' him it was Mexican handits from below the border. They took everything we had except three hosses to keep us from starvin' fer water. We'll throw away our guns to make it look good. Then we'll come back with a new out-fit and git that bunch. Well, let's rack 'em on toward Ed's place . . ."

It was Ed Adkins himself, standing on the veranda of his huge, sprawling ranch house, who spotted them. He saw the dots far out on the desert to the south, and instantly identified them as riders. They disappeared back of a ridge for a time and then later came in sight below the great corrals and the long sheds. He stood there, picking his yellow teeth with a match, as the three rode up.

They were in bad shape, that he could easily see. They wore no shirts and their backs were burned a flaming red from exposure to the hot sun. The shirts long since had been used for pads to sit on. Their lips were swollen and cracked. Adkins stood there in silence as they rode up

and stared down at him with dull eyes.

Buck Brawley was the first to speak. "Water, Ed," he croaked, and slid from his horse. He staggered onto the porch and grabbed at a roof support to keep himself from falling.

"Kinda rough goin', eh?" The old man grinned. "I told

ye to keep outa thet kentry."

Faces had appeared from all directions, and he let out a bellow as the three men staggered toward the doorway of the huge living room with its welcoming shade. They collapsed into chairs and simply sat there, still dull-eyed. Hugo made a feeble effort to remove his boots and finally succeeded. His feet were raw, swollen, blistered.

Twenty minutes later, Buck Brawley sat with a tumbler of whiskey in one hand and his blistered feet in a pan of cold water. Adkins' piercing eyes were watching him

keenly.

"Bandits, ye say, Buck? Stripped ye of everything except three bareback hosses. Ye real sure they wasn't Apaches?" "Who ever heard of Apaches turnin' anybody loose?" snorted the eldest of the three bearded men. "They'd'a

pegged us out in the sun."

"They would have you three, anyhow," cackled the old man. He knew who had killed and scalped that reservation Coyotero, even if the damned soldiers didn't. "But have it yer own way. We'll git some grub down ye and ye'll be all right in no time, except fer sore tail bones," and Adkins went off into more cackles.

Despite the ordeal they had gone through, an ordeal that would have proved fatal to men of less tough fiber, the three bearded brothers did not tarry long. There were many sufficient reasons not to. If that little band reached the reservation and reported what had happened out there, the soldiers now making routine patrols would forget about Apaches and start hunting the Brawley brothers. It was now not only a matter of hatred and revenge and money—it was a matter of death or the penitentiary

Thus it came about that early the following morning the three sat their saddles and looked down at Adkin standing on the porch with the match working at his yel low teeth. The three were well-mounted, well-armed, and

carried food-filled slicker rolls.

Buck said, "Well, Ed, I guess we'll be on our way. We're obliged to you fer the hosses an' stuff. We'll pay it back But if the soldiers happen to drop by on patrol, we'd be more obliged if you didn't say anything about us bein back up in this section. They sorta don't like us fer some reason."

"Maybe on account of thet Apache they found scalped,' Adkins replied, and cackled at the look on the faces of the three men. "Ne'mind, ne'mind, you're safe. I don't like the sojers any more than I do the 'Paches. Three thousand of 'em after Nana, an' all they could do was git back a few of the wimmin and children. A hundred and twenty trooper ag'in thirty of the red devils—an' they still got

licked. Lost a third of his men, old Livingston did. Guess he won't be so Goddamned smart-alecky next time I git raided."

He told them the details of the fight they hadn't heard about, and after they were away from the ranch, Buck Brawley spoke of something that was in the minds of his two brothers. "So it was a young Apache kid, only one in dol Nana's band, who killed that Lieutenant in the fight, eh? It was a kid Apache who trailed us into Santa Maria and shot Fred with a \_50 caliber Sharps, It's a young Apache kid with a \_50 caliber Sharps, It's a young Apache kid with a \_50 caliber Sharps leadin' that bunch out there toward the reservation. You know what I'm hinkin'? Well, don't say it. Come on, we got work to do!"

They headed straight back the way they had come, wondering if Adkins would be curious enough to send a man on their trail for a few miles. Buck Brawley ignored the possibility and turned west as soon as they were out of sight of the house. They had figured out about how far Matesa's band could travel in a day, having followed them, and had a pretty good idea of about where they

could pick up the trail.

In this they were right. Seventy miles west of where they had secured new equipment they struck the familiar tracks of large and small mocasins, plus a number of horses. By mid-afternoon of the following day, when they were still traveling light and fast, Buck Brawley dismounted behind a ridge and unslung old Ed Adkins' prized field glasses for the third time. And this time a grunt of satisfaction came out of his bearded mouth. They were close enough to see through the glasses—the humped-up figures of the old ones riding double; the smaller figures of the young riding double and sometimes treble;

the ones on foot plodding beneath their packs.
"All right, damn you!" Brawley hissed savagely to the
distant band. "Here's where we square up for a lot of

things!"

02 He turned and nodded in satisfaction to his brothers,

sliding down to rejoin them. "Where's that little bastard who's so handy with a

Sharps?" Jim asked.

"Same place as usual, Up there with his head just below the skyline and watching like a hawk. That boy is my special meat."

They swung up, turned their horses away, and presently

the desert swallowed them up.

Just as dusk was beginning to show its first faint signs, Matesa led his exhausted little band into another arroyo and called a halt. There was a waterhole three miles farther on, but the distance was too great for them to go on. Those long, burning days across the desert were taking heavy toll on old and young alike.

But they could see the mountains not far in the distance now, and there was a coolness in the air that was new. Matesa watched the weary squaws and the older children dump burdens that, though heavy to them, now contained but little food. He had shot a few jack rabbits with a bow and arrow, and twice he had come upon and killed a few wild pigs. And that was the best he could do. The corn meal was gone, with no chance for him to forage for more. They were subsisting mostly on jerked horse meat, prickly pears, a few berries when they could be found, and mesquite beans ground up into coarse meal to make gruel for the aged ones.

The boy who led the water horse brought him up, and the older children took down the skin sacks while the

squaws helped the old ones down and to their deerskins. Matesa rode over to the warrior with the bulletsmashed shoulder. The wound had healed very little, but

the man was an Apache and he could still ride.

Matesa said, "These old ones are tired and there is little food. Take the best horse in the band and ride to Cochise. He will tell the White Eyes that we are coming and to send food. This thing I say."
"This thing I will do," agreed the other.

Matesa turned his horse and rode up out of the arroyo and onto the flat of the desert again. It was sloping upward a bit more each day of their progress, and the mountains were very near now. He started his usual circle to scout and was just one hundred yards away when the first crashing report of a rifle came. Two bullets screamed by his face and another struck his horse. The animal leaped high into the air with a shrill scream, and Matesa, caught by surprise, left the saddle as the nicked animal went lunging off into the desert. It probably saved his life.

He made a leap toward a cluster of rocks and went down behind them just as a slug struck one and went droning off into the sky. He heard the women and children screaming, heard more booming of rifle and pistol. And even at that distance he saw the same bearded faces, heard the same hoarse yells. Triumphant, this time.

He lined the sights of the .50 caliber and it gave off its familiar roar and kicked back hard against his shoulder. One of the men half-wheeled and spun around and then went down under the shocking impact of a 500-grain slug of lead. Two others had leaped to the bank of the arroyo, one firing a repeater at Matesa, the other working a sixshooter into the arroyo. The bullets threw up dirt around him and spanged off the rocks, something in their tone indicating that the man working the lever of the gun was becoming a bit panicky.

Hugo Brawley made a beautiful target for the Sharps as it roared again from a distance of one hundred yards. He never knew what hit him.

Matesa leaped to his feet, reloading, and sped forward. He heard Buck Brawley's vell of dismay at the death of his two brothers and there was both frustrated rage and panic in it. He saw the man bend down for a brief mo-

ment to snatch something and then break to run.

And at thirty yards Matesa missed him. Brawley's sixshooter began to boom, and Matesa again fell flat as the man scrambled up and out of sight. He was running on foot and Matesa sped into the arroyo and bent over the body of one of the bearded men. He grabbed up a rifle and leaped up above, but the magazine was empty and he had dropped his own gun.

He heard the drum of hoofs beating away through the darkness and for a few moments he stood there listening to the sounds growing fainter and fainter. The man would flee faster than he could trail him at night. Slowly, Matesa turned, the biting hurt of it deep inside him. The ghost riders had told Nana this thing would happen-and they knew. Again they would be waiting with the ghost ponies.

He stepped over the body of one of the bearded men and looked about him. Two of the aged ones were dead, the others huddled up together on their deerskins. The warrior was dead. A child lay curled up on its side as though asleep.

Matesa stepped over and looked down at the body of one of the widows. She was a comparatively young woman, his mother.

The pretty green trinket with the chain of yellow iron was gone from around her neck.

On an evening several days later a band of sixteen Apaches led by a single young warrior topped a grassy ridge and saw smoke down below. Some of them rode double to hold each other on. A boy of ten rode with two youngsters, one in front and one behind. Two little girls of seven straddled a gentle old Apache pony.

Their young faces were drawn and tired, no laughter

in them now. They were thin, worn out, hungry.

Matesa led them down the incline into the ravine where three jacals of brush covered with mud squatted against a bank. He rode up and stopped as squaws and children came out. The squaws took one look at the aged ones and began lifting them from their horses. The children slipped and fell off to the good earth. Their eyes were on the big cooking pots at the fires.

A squat-looking and well-fed warrior came forward; a Covotero.

"You are a Chiricahua," he said.

Matesa nodded. "Where are my people?" he asked.
The other waved a hand toward the north, "Over there,

Maybe one day's ride, maybe two for you," and he nodded toward the aged ones who now lay on their deerskins, too weak and tired to sit up.

weak and tired to sit up.

"They are hungry," Matesa said, though he knew he
need not ask. The squaws already were working hurriedly
over the steaming pots, clay bowls in hand.

Matesa went over and sat down on the grass, and the Coyotero squatted beside him. "You are of Nana?"

"Nana."

"The White Eyes soldiers hunt much for him. Where does he ride?"

Matesa turned a hand toward the south. "In the land of the Me-hi-canos, after the fight with the White Eyes soldiers. I have come from there with the old ones."

An exclamation of surprise broke from the other, a loud

grunt. "And you brought these old ones and the children all the way from the land of the Me-hi-canos?"

"One moon and three suns." Matesa added, "The tribes are good here among the White Eyes?"

are good nere almong the Write z yeers
The warrior burst out laughing. "Sometimes not good.
Too many Apaches too close, not far away like when we
were free. When far away all good friends. Hunt together,
fight together. Now the Coyoteros mad at Warm Springs,
Warm Springs mad at White Mountain. White Moun-

He went off into roars of laughter and the tag dangling from his neck shook

A squaw brought Matesa a large clay bowl filled with stew. Matesa set to in silence, filling himself on the huge chunks of American beef bought from cattlemen by the agency. He looked over at the old ones now eating hungrily and thought of the burning heat, the pelting rains, the long hours of sitting humped up on a jogging pony, and the scalp hunters who had given him no chance to hunt food for these old and young he had guarded. It was best that they had come.

He finished the contents of the bowl, wiped his hands on his thighs, and sighed with contentment. The three pots in front of the jacals were empty.

Matesa said, "The old ones are tired and can go no more, and I must go fast to Cochise. They would stay here until I find my people and have them send food and blankets?"

"Of course. Many the times when we were free I remember how our tribes visited and hunted our winter food together. I will keep them here until Cochise comes."

Matesa got up and went to his horse. On the saddle was an extra rifle, the Sharps that had belonged to the other warrior. The guns belonging to the two scalp hunters he had hidden

He unfastened the thongs holding the scabbard of the dead warrior's rifle and then took the almost empty cartridge belt that still contained four or five rounds of ammunition. He came back and handed them to the other man, who seized them eagerly.

"These I will hide! When we made peace, the White Eyes took away our guns. Now when we fight them again, I'll have a good rifle. If you go to see Cochise, leave your rifle here and I will hide it until you return, or Chingo the Chiricahua will take it away from you,"

"I will leave it. But I shall not remain here among the others. I shall go back to Nana."

"It would be wise for you to stay here. All the time more soldiers ride the desert looking for Nana. They will kill you all, because they are too many."

Matesa did not answer but went to his horse and swung up. He left the old ones and the others who had looked to him for food and protection on the long trek. He had done his best. No Apache could do better than that.

## CHAPTER 10

On an afternoon some time previous to the arrival of the starved little band at the jacals of the Coyoteros, the scout Chingo left the agent's office and mounted his pony. He was in a surly mood and just drunk enough, at the moment, to leave his job and go find Nana. The session in the office had been a stormy one, with a threat of dismissal. The agent had literally bawled hell out of him because of his contempt for the soldiers and the fact that when he made the tiswin raids in the canyons he usually ended up drunk and mauling the other Apaches.

But Chingo had known they would not dismiss him. Quite a number of the Chiriciahuas now on the reservation were the former unruly ones who had ridden with Geronimo-and destined to slip away and raid again. It was Chingo alone they feared, and nobody knew it better than the agent. As for the sergenat of police molesting the girls in violation of Apache law, these things the agent

left for the Apaches to settle among themselves.

And this law Chingo had broken many times since he had become a sout. Most of the Apaches cared little about such things, except when they had returned from raids and were celebrating by feasting and drinking tismin. Only then did they become amorous and take their wives to the jacals, while the unmarried warriors took their choice of the widows and divorced ones.

He had married three young wives and divorced them

all, and now he wanted to marry Berra. During the weeks since he had captured her in the fight with Major Livingston's men, she had stood adamant in the face of his threats and plain bullying.

"You'll never get Matesa," he had jeered at her. "We'll run down Nana's band and I'll kill him this time. I shall

not miss again."

"You will not kill him," she retorted. "He is young and fast and strong. You are old and fat and ugly."

"I am a sergeant of police," he boasted to her, changing his tacties. "I make thirty gold dollars a month. I can buy you dresses of bright color-and I'll kill any Apache who looks upon you. I can do it because I am a sergeant of police."

She knew that what he spoke was the truth, though she hid her fear. He could make life miserable for her family, because her father was crippled from old wounds and could do nothing. So she had gone to Cochise.

But the once powerful and feared Cochise was a changed man now. He was getting old and the whiskey he drank with the officers, against army regulations, was softening his body and will. The army officers stationed at the agency particularly liked and respected him and, for that reason, let him have much of the whiskey he craved. And because Chingo was under yearly contract and no longer under a chief's jurisdiction, Cochise could really do nothing. He had made vaque promises to Berra that he would talk with Chingo, but she left his jacal knowing that it was useless.

A few years before, Cochise would have, under the same circumstances, ordered Chingo to leave the girl alone. Had Chingo disobeyed, the famed leader of the Chiricahuas simply would have marched him out into the brush and blown off his head with a shotgun. He had done it more than once in his long lifetime, thereby proving that his word must never be broken. He had proved it

when he kicked Geronimo and his band of unruly ones out because of insubordination, and had warned Geronimo that if he ever came back he would kill him.

Thus Chingo rode away from the agent's office with the knowledge that sooner or later he could force Berra into marriage. If she again refused, he'd simply take her by force.

He cut deep into the hills and rode for several hours. He passed numerous little groups of jacals built close together near water, each under its own leader. He spat at the mangy dogs that ran out to bark at him and derived a certain satisfaction at the sullen looks given him. He was the most feared and hated Indian on the reservation and he knew it.

Some time later he came deep into brushy country and struck a small stream. He followed it northward for a mile, cut up a ravine for a short distance, and dismounted in front of an abandoned jacal. Here the grass was green and the pine and fir threw out shade. Chingo went over to a big boulder nestling near the bole of a pine.

He pulled away a smaller rock, reached down into the hole, and brought forth a pint bottle of whiskey. The raw liquid gurgled down his throat, after which he stretched himself out on his back in contentment. Brawley and his brothers had said they would return about this time of the month, and he hoped their mission to the hidden camp had been a success. He wanted his share of the scalp money to buy more whiskey from the Brawleys.

Having traveled with Nana's band and under his leadership for most of his life, he had been certain, after the fight, just where the old chief was heading for. The place where the old ones were hidden and where Chingo had sent the four Brawleys. He wondered how many had been killed and how much money the Me-hi-canos had paid.

The thought gave Chingo much satisfaction. He had

sworn, when Nana drove him from the band with a threat of death, that he would one day wipe it out in blood; and he would keep his word, and would make much money besides.

He had no way of knowing that, on the way back from Mexico with the gold, the Brawleys had run into still more of Nana's people on their way back to the reservation. Had he known, the thought would have given him much elaired.

Chingo lay there on his back and drank the whiskey

The Brawleys didn't show up that day or the next. But Chingo was in no hurry. To return to the agency meant work with the other police and soldiers and, under the influence of the liquor, he cared little what they would say or think.

On the following day he awoke early. His black eyes were a little bloodshot, his head woozy. He was in a savage frame of mind and he wanted a woman. He drank moodily from a bottle and then chewed on the last of his supply of jerky beef. If the Brawleys didn't return today with his gold, he would go back to the agency.

But at noon Buck Brawley did return. Chingo heard the sound of a lone horse down among the trees, and presently a rider came into view at the mouth of the

ravine. He was bearded, tired looking, and alone.

He was in as savage a frame of mind as the sullen

Apache as he swung down heavily and stomped over.

"Gimme a drink of that. I need it," he said, and reached
for the bottle.

for the bottle.
"You two, three days late," Chingo said, scowling.

"You find Nana camp and get scalps?".

"Yeah, we got eight," Brawley grunted, and wiped at his bearded mouth with a sleeve. He sat down and removed his hat and ran his hands through greasy hair.

"Where your brothers?"

"Dead! All dead!"

"Who killum? Apaches? Me-hi-canos?"
"Apaches!" snarled the man. "One Apache. One lone little stinking Apache kid."

"Who?"

"How the hell do I know?" Brawley snarled again.
"They all look alike to me. We went into Mexico to the
place where you told us to go while Nana was away. We
got eight of the old ones before the others made their
getaway into the brush. We sold the scalps to the Mexica
soldiers in Santa Maria, the mining camp. But one of
them trailed us there. This stinking little Apache kid not
more'n sixteen or seventeen. He shot one of my brothers
through the open back door of a cantina at a distance of
two hundred yards, using a big Sharps rifle."

"Sharps. Same like soldiers?" Chingo's black eyes were glittering with interest. There were only two fighters in

Nana's band armed with big Sharps rifles.

"I guess so," grunted Brawley, pulling on the bottle again. He coughed and wiped at his mouth once more. "Anyhow, we came on back north again to give you yore share, and we run smack dab into another band on the way to the reservation. They were coming straight from the direction of that camp we raided. I know, because one of the two warriors was wounded. The only other one was that little Apache bastard with a big Sharps rifte."

"Matesa!" exclaimed the other.

"Huh? Who? I dunno," answered Brawley savagely.
"All I know is that he slipped up on us while we wus
camped and opened up with that rifle. We had to run
without saddles or rifles or grub or water. But we go
some more stuff and went back. When we attacked them,
he killed my other two brothers and I had to light a
shuck. I killed a squaw and got a necklace off her that's
worth plenty, But that don't do me no good, with all my

brothers dead. God, but I'd like to git my hands on him! I'd show you Apaches a few things about a man dying slow."

Chingo had listened with rising excitement, having understood most of what the other was saying. He was standing above Brawley now, his mind racing. It could be no other but Matesa. He was the only young fighter in Nama's small band and he owned a Sharus.

And as though to clinch it, he stared down at the gold chain attached to a brooch glittering with diamonds and emeralds that Matesa's father had brought out of a burned hacienda many years before. He reached over and grabbed it.

"You kill squaw, get this here?" and he indicated his

"Yeah, I shot her; then I saw the diamonds in that thing and grabbed it up when I had to run."

"This Matesa mother. She have it many grasses. I see many times. Matesa is warrior who kill your brothers."

"Whaaat!" shouted Buck Brawley, snatching it back. "You mean the woman I took this off of is the mother of

that little bastard who killed my brothers?"

At Chingo's excited nod, Brawley sighed. He said, almost softly, "Well, I'll be damned. That shore helps

to square up some. Not much but some."

He said, "Yep, him Matesa, Buck. Him I gonna kill when he get here with his band. Him I kill easy, because I Apache sergeant police. Then I get Berra." He sat down and drank. "What you do now?"

Brawley shook his head gloomily. "I don't know. I guess I'll rest up a bit and then start the long ride back

to where what's left of Jim and Hugo is scattered around and bury them. Then I'll probably head back for Santa Maria. Colonel Grajeda will pay me a lot of gold for this thing."

"You go." Chingo nodded. "If soldiers, Apache police catchum you here, you die quick. Apache police no take

you prisoner. They kill you quick."

104

He squatted down and began to talk, and presently Brawley nodded assent.

## CHAPTER II

THE PLACE where Cochise had chosen to live with his people was a wide ravine some two hundred yards across, with a small stream of clear, cold water trickling down through it. It ran north and south, and here, on each side of the trickle, were located the various jacals in whatever spot it had suited the fancy of the various families.

There was plenty of water for household uses, tall green grass further back among the hills where the youths still herded the horses, and it was close enough to the agency to transport the beef and other food doled out

by the agent.

Cochise occupied the largest of the jacals with his two wives, the aged one, she whom Mangas Coloradas had given to the Chiricahua in the move that welded three of the federation of tribes so solidly. He spent a good deal of his time these days, when not drinking with the officers, sitting around and brooding over the past and a very strange thing that now haunted him: the Mexican scalp buyer that Cochise had caught many years before and buried in the ground to his neck with his eyelids cut away to let in the burning sun. For hours the man had pleaded to be killed, but the blank-faced Chiricahua had merely sat there gazing at him and had paid no heed. Finally, when moaning and pleading had failed, the man roused himself and cried out in Spanish, which Cochise spoke: "I curse you! I curse you, Cochise. I curse vou!"

The words now drummed into his mind by day and in his tortured dreams by night, the first faint signs of the sickness that was to end in his death.

He sat in front of his jacal that morning, drinking from a bottle that one of the officers had slipped him, staring out over the broad lands that once had been free of soldiers and free of restricting movement. He had known for a long time that the day of the Apache, the old way of life, was done. Only Nana, the small one, was still fighting. Nana's attempt to steal away those of his warriors' families who wanted to go had ended in near failure.

And now today was the day in which he must go to the agency with his people to receive the meat from the White Eyes soldiers he once had outfought. He sat there while his two wives, Mangas Coloradas' sister, the old one, and the younger one worked silently over metates, grinding corn with stone pestles. They rarely spoke to him now, for they knew in their silent, impassive way what this new way of life and the white man's whiskey was doing to him.

There was a bustle of activity among the mounted warriors and the youths. They were wheeling and loping here and there, pulling mock fights, waiting for that lone figure sitting in front of the jacal with a whiskey bottle in one hand. Near him stood a boy holding the rope rein of the old man's horse

Presently Cochise flung the empty bottle aside and rose. He was still erect in stature as he strode to the animal and swung into the rawhide saddle. The others fell in behind and they gigged up out of the ravine and set off for the agency. There was a suppressed excitement among them, for this day of all days they were given an oppor-tunity to sip a taste of the old way of life.

They were allowed to drive back their cattle and then

run them down and kill them with bows and arrows issued by the storekeeper.

Some time later they came into view of the agency. Down there on the flat plain lay the buildings occupied by the agent and his staff, the soldiers' quarters just beyond, and the huge holding corrals just below. Scattered around on the plain were a hundred jacals near the fields the Apaches were learning to till and the newly constructed irrigation ditches.

But the focal point of interest to the warriors were the huge clouds of yellow dust boiling up inside the great holding corrals. Beeff Wild live beef from the ranch of Ed Adkins, he whom Nana had raided but recently and killed two of his men. Apparently the herd had just come in, for the cattle were milling furiously and a dozen Mexican and American cowpunchers dashed here and there to get the last of them enclosed.

Cochise gigged into a lope, and the others, whooping gleefully, followed.

They approached the scene of activity and Cochise pulled his pony to a trot, the others automatically following suit. The old man still had his dignity as he approached the place where Ed Adkins and his punchers, Major Hardin, Lieutenant Hepner, and the agent set talking, their mounts forming a circle.

Cochise saw the hawk-faced old man eyeing him with a citious hatred that lay all too plain in the piercing orbs. He saw him, but he showed his contemp thy not glancing his way. He was thinking, I raided your ranch many times and killed your offspring and drove away your cattle and horses and sheep for food for my people. And now your beef that I eat will taste less good because I did not raid it.

Old Ed Adkins sat there, the ever-present match toothpick roving from side to side in his hard mouth. He thought, I killed a lot of your warriors in my time, me and my men. You found us a tough nut to crack, didn't you? Nana found it out just the other day when we killed and scalped two of his outfit. And if I ever catch you over a gun sight with nobody around, I'll square up fer them two young you so of mine.

The Apaches followed Cochise on by, and the agent joined them. Adkins sat there, glaring savagely at Cochise's retreating figure. Major Hardin saw the look and

smiled.

He didn't like Adkins, because of the man's hatred for the soldiers, and because of the incident of the killing of the Apache child that had made the fierce old man notorious for cruelty.

"Friend of yours, Mr. Adkins?" he inquired pleasantly. Adkins removed the chewed matchstick, flung it away, and his lips thinned savagely from the venom boiling up inside him.

"Yeah!" he spat out. "We're old friends of many years. We seen quite a lot of each other. All these years I fit him an' his Cheery-Cows an' killed as many as I could to rid the country of the devils. Then, when you soldiers come along an' git 'em on the run instead of killin' every stink-in' one of them, what do ye do? Ye bring 'em in here and let 'em git fat on my beef!" He spat savagely and twisted his gaunt frame in the saddle.

Hardin was still smiling, though there was a glint in his brown eyes. He was a West Pointer who followed the rules, just as did Major Livingston, but he knew of the old man's hatted for all Apaches, he knew of the Brawley brothers' activities in scalps, and he knew that Adkins had recently fitted the brothers with new outfits, when the average white man want't welcome on the ranch.

He said, an edge to his voice, "Why don't you take some of the money paid for these cattle to feed Indians and pay it to the Brawley brothers to go get Nana's scalp. That would make it even all around. The Indians get their beef. You get the gold. You pay it out to have more Indians killed, specifically those who raided you recently."

Old Ed Adkins' long frame seemed to rise a bit higher in the saddle. His face changed color. His tough, hardfaced riders sat as though carved from leather-colored stone.

"What do ye mean by that?" snapped the cattleman. "Just this," Major Hardin said levelly and with ice in his voice. "You outfitted the Brawleys with some equipment recently. They're scalp hunters, the lowest form of American animal life. We have reason to believe that they killed and scalped at least one reservation Indian and perhaps others. If we ever obtain proof of it, we'll run them down and have them hanged. And if that time ever comes, and it is found out that any of those scalps were bought on the American side of the line, the man who bought them will hang."

He turned his horse and left Adkins standing there staring after him, speechless with rage. Lieutenant Hepner, a very tall and blond man, also from the Point, fell in beside his superior. He was chuckling gleefully in a most unofficerlike fashion.

"Young'uns grow up to be big'uns.' Major, I take off my hat and salute you. That was beautiful, lovely, exquisite, and downright wonderful. If you should find yourself without funds before the paymaster comes, I'll the state of the paymaster comes, I'll the paymaster comes, I'l

cheerfully loan you four dollars for poker or whiskey."
Hardin said grimly, "I think I would have said it in front of the Colonel, Ted. And I still think there might be a number of scalps buried around the old devil's place, including those of the two Apache warriors that were killed when they raided Adkins. Gad, what a bloody, callous thing to do."

"There's Cochise and his boys. Let's go over and take

him in and slip him a drink. Maybe we can talk him into sending for Nana to come on in and therefore save the cavalry from many calluses on certain parts of its anatomy."

He was jocular about it, but the remark brought a thoughtful look to Major Hardin's face. "That's a thought, Ted. Since Livingston and his men got back most of those Nana stole from the reservation, right under our noses, some of Nana's warriors just might want to do it."

They rode over toward the agent's office where Cochise apparently was waiting for the man to come from the corrals. Cochise was talking animatedly with another Apache—a Coyotero. The officers pulled up and waited by the porch, and presently the agent loped up. Cochise finished talking with the Coyotero, and turned

Cochise finished talking with the Coyotero, and turned to Major Hardin. "How are you, Major?" he asked in Spanish.

Spanish.

"Very well, Cochise," replied the Major in the same language.

"Good. I wish for you to speak a message to the agent in your language. This warrior says that in his jacal are fifteen of my people from Nana's band. They have come to live near Cochise."

The two officers shot each other quick looks. Could this be it? Was this the beginning of the crack in Nana's determination to fight on. Had the capture of most of his women and children weakened him?

Hardin quickly interpreted the message in English. The agent, a slender, middle-aged man, nodded. "That's wonderful, I'm glad to hear it."

"Tell him," Cochise added, "that they are old and sick and have some young ones and a widow with child. I wish food and blankets and horses so that some of my warriors can go to them now. The others will drive the beef to the place where we live."

Again the agent nodded assent. "Of course we'll do it immediately. This may be the end for Nana, And then-" hopefully.

"And then," cut in Hardin wryly, "all we have to do is just wait until one of the mean ones like Geronimo breaks off to start raiding and the whole thing begins all over again." He turned to Cochise. "How did they come? Alone?"

"One young warrior bring them far away. Matesa. Seventeen grasses. He and Nana fight with soldiers."

"Just a kid, eh?" mused Hepner, and chuckled. He quoted again, "'Young'uns grow up to be big'uns.' Well, he's one more we won't have to fight, anyhow. And," he added, winking at his superior in violation of the rule books, "I just wonder if he'll run into old man Adkins?" He chuckled again.

## CHAPTER 12

SOME TIME LATER Cochise left the officers' quarters and mounted his horse. Tucked inside his deerskin robe was a pint of whiskey that Lieutenant Hepner had slipped him. Hepner certainly didn't believe that an Indian should drink—most certainly not, because a part of his own job was to ferret out the hidden tiswin vats in the maze of canyons in the surrounding country that now was home to approximately four thousand Apaches. Liquor caused the average Apache to turn mean, to want to let off steam; and he usually did it by trying to carve up another Indian. But Major Hardin, his friend and superior, was an understanding man.

And with Cochise it was different. He commanded the respect of them all, because he had never in his life broken his word, he had been called by General Howard one of the greatest military geniuses that ever lived. And he was a sick man in heart and mind. For that reason, liquor didn't affect him as it did the others. He drank

quietly and moodily.

As Hepner had once remarked to the Major, "What the hell, Bill? He knows more about tacties than both of us. If we'd had him and about fifteen hundred of his Apaches as scouts against the Johnny Rebs, the war would have been over much sooner and saved a lot of lives. Rules be damned! The old fellow can't live much longer, anyhow." Cochise said, "Thank you," two of the dozen or so words of English he knew, and trotted away toward his jacal, leaving his men to bring in the allotted number of cattle. Others of the group already had departed with the Coyotero to bring in those Matesa had brought on the long trek from Mexico.

Cochise dismounted in front of the jacal and the younger of his two wives took the horse. She unsaddled it, led it down to water, then across the stream to the opposite ridge and turned it loose. It would head straight for the horse herd.

Cochise opened the bottle and sat down in his favorite place beside the door of the jacal. He drank, and the younger woman soon came back. She looked at him in her silent way and he beckoned. She came and stood before him.

He said, "Fifteen of the very old and very young from Nana's people are at the place where the Coyoteros live. Some of the warriors have gone for them with blankets and food and horses. The old ones will need jacals when the weather becomes cold. The young will return to their families or, if they have no families, they will live with others. Have many of the squaws who now wait for the cattle to come to build two new jacals. This thing I say."

She turned without a word and walked away, her dress of dark calico swishing at the grass. She stopped first at the jacal of Berra and her mother. They picked up axes and knives and disappeared into the brush on the ridge above. Others soon followed, and presently the sound of axes against brush rang out. Others of the squaws and older girls began to spade up an area of several square feet and pour water over it. Cochise sat there and watched them hurry down from above with arms filled with brush and larger limbs.

Cochise was still sitting there watching the brush framework take shape, later to be plastered over with mud,

when Chingo and another mean-looking Apache policeman rode up. It seemed that Chingo had been coming by pretty much of late.

The old man looked up at them, the hatred for Chingo plain in his eyes. "What do you want?" he demanded.

"We came to visit our great leader and see if he is well."

Chingo grinned.

"You speak with a forked tongue, as you spoke when you were once an Apache instead of a dog of the police. Nana should have killed you long before he drove you from his band, as I drove Geronimo and his broncos."

"It is too late now," Chingo said carelessly,

"It's not too late for me to take one of the bows the warriors are bringing with the cattle and drive an arrow deep into your belly."

"I'm a sergeant of police. I work for the White Eyes soldiers. If you kill me, they will hang even you."

"A dog like you thinks I fear the ride to the abode? I should have killed you long ago for molesting the young maidens. And now I shall do a thing I should have done long ago. If you molest Berra again, I shall kill you."

"You are no longer my leader. You are a sick old man who sucks the white man's bottle like a child at its mother's breast. I shall take Berra. Matesa comes with some of the old and young from Nana's band. I shall kill him, because I am a sergeant of police. Then I shall take her. As a sergeant of police, I knew of his coming-and these things you did not know."

Cochise grunted and said, "I have already sent warriors with food and blankets to bring them in. The women are

building the jacals now."

Cochise sat there with burning black eyes that showed neither anger nor contempt. They were merely bright. But he knew the stunned surprise felt by this hated former warrior of the Apaches. The thought would be running through Chingo's mind that Matesa was somewhere on the loose, and still a free Apache. That if he, Matesa, saw Chingo, he would kill him on sight.

"Go," said Cochise. "You smell like a dog and have the mind of a child,"

He saw them disappear down past the scurrying women working on the two new jacals, and again the regret went through him that if Nana hadn't cut Chingo's throat, then Cochise should have blown off his head with a shotgun. And now it was too late. They were no longer free.

Yes, thought Cochise suddenly, his eyes brightening, some of them are free. He is. He over there on that pony topping the ridge beyond the creek. Look how lean he is. Lean and wild and wary. He's not fat and careless. And he's fearless.

He put away the whiskey bottle as though a bit ashamed that one of the free ones should see him, slipping it from sight back under the deerskin. Matesa rode down, let his mount drink, then crossed the creek and came on toward the jacal. He swung down and handed the reins of his horse to one of the boys who were beginning to converge. Matesa carried no rifle, no bow and arrows. Only the razor-bladed throwing ax and a knife in his belt.

He stood in silence before the famous old leader, straight and lithe-legged, vaiting in respectful silence for Cochise to speak first. Others were converging excitedly, and again, as on the last visit here to get the women and children, Matesa noted that they looked different now. With no long hard rides, no long periods without food, they were becoming soft and fat. They had lost that animal-like grace engendered by the wild, hard-riding life they once had lived.

But his eyes had gone to a near-by jacal whence Berra had emerged, and some kind of a strange tingling went through him. His heart, however, sank when he saw Chingo and another of the scouts some distance farther down the ravine. They mounted and disappeared, and relief swept through him. He had not counted on Chingo's presence when he slipped in.

Cochise finally spoke. "You have come from Nana."
"Yes, I brought some of the aged, some children, and

a widow to you for food and blankets."

Under Cochise's questions, Matesa told him in detail of what had occurred since the flight across the line, and the old man's black eyes grew brighter. He must send word to Major Hardin and have soldiers bury the dead where the Brawleys had made their ambush.

"Do you return to Nana or remain here?" Cochise asked.

"I would go back to Nana in the land of the Me-hicanos. But my horses have been before the jacal of Berra and I would take her back with me."

There was a loud laugh among the closely packed crowd-and then he saw her. She looked at him with that shy smile of hers and dropped her head, and it made his heart sing. She would never have smiled at him were she the wife of Chingo. She would have remained out of sight.

"Do as you wish," Cochise said, and began to cough a bit. He had been coughing much of late. "The soldiers will chase you and they will send out messages on the magic wires to other soldiers to try to run you down. I think that you should remain here among us. You can never get through."

And that, coming from once the greatest warrior of them all, told of what sickness and brooding and liquor had done to even Cochise.

"I will go back," Matesa said simply.

"You will stay here," Chingo grunted, and split the crowd as he and the other Apache scout stepped close. "I shall take you to the agency jail, and if you try to escape, I shall kill you with this rifle."

They grabbed him each by an arm, the other scout twisting it back of him cruelly. Many of them had been but mediocre warriors in the days before the Apaches had come in and made peace, and now as police, responsible only to the agent and soldiers, many of them, such as these two, took full advantage of their newly vested authority over their former superiors.

Matesa braced himself rigidly and said, "I have come in peace and unarmed with some of the old ones to get them food and blankets."

"You have come armed with a throwing ax and will go with me to jail."

Matesa saw his eyes on Berra, and in a flash it came to him just what was in Chingo's mind. Chingo had wanted her, but she had remained loyal. And now Chingo would take him away toward the agency and shoot him down and say that he had tried to escape. It lay plain in the squat scout's murderous black eyes. This hatred between them had been a thing of too long a time.

Matesa said to Cochise, "This dog has an evil mind and will not take me to jail, because he wants Berra. Ride with us."

Cochise got up at once and flung his deerskin over a shoulder. Chingo had let go of Matesa's arm and now blocked the older man's path. His eyes were flaming.

blocked the older man's path. His eyes were flaming.
"You will stay here. I can kill even you, and the soldiers will do nothing, because I am a sergeant of police.

The crowd split as the three started through. Matesa took the mouth rope of the pony from the boy and swung up into his rawhide saddle, knowing that it was perhaps for the last time. But he smiled faintly when he looked down at Berta.

"You will be here when I return?"

Now go!"

She nodded her small dark head but did not speak.

The others were strangely silent. Most of them, too, guessed what was in Chingo's mind.

118

Matesa turned the pony. With Chingo and the other Apache walking beside him, Matesa walked his horse for some distance until they came to the place where the two police had ridden their mounts and then slipped back on foot. Chingo was grinning now; a thin, slitted grin that Matesa had seen before. He had seen it when Chingo had slipped away with one of the more willing maidens when Nana was absent. The two mounted and rode directly behind him. They jogged into the brush and began climbing a ridge.

"So you thought you could slip in and get Berra and I would not see you, eh?" jeered Chingo's voice from behind, "Berra is mine and there will be the wedding rites after I finish with you. I will tell the White Eyes soldiers that you tried to escape and were armed-"

It was then that Matesa acted. He spun in the saddle in a flash, the razor-bladed throwing ax in his right hand. He jerked his horse around, and Chingo, riding with the Army .45-70 single-shooter cocked and ready, let out a yell and tried to lift the gun. It went off accidentally, the booming roar rocketing off down among the ravines and across the ridges through the clear air. He let out another yell, one of pure fright, as the ax went back.

It flashed like a streak of light toward the other policeman, who was trying to free his rifle from the scabbard. It struck with deadly accuracy and power, and the man gave a kind of slobbering grunt as he slid from the saddle, his face split open, a horrible, bloody looking thing to see. Matesa spurred at the horse and jerked at the rifle and freed it. Chingo was spurring madly away with an empty rifle and yelling in pure fright, trying desperately to get over the top of that ridge and out of rifle range, Matesa followed him, his mount making short buck jumps up the slope, but the scout was already down among the trees, fleeing toward the agency.

Matesa quickly recovered his ax and then loped back toward the encampment. Every Indian in the ravine was out and staring as he came to a halt before Cochise, who was on his feet and looking.

"Where are the police?" he demanded.

"I killed one with my ax. Chingo got away. Let the soldiers chase me and I will try to run. But I will not be hanged like a dog." He looked down at Berra. "I return to Nana."

Without a word, she went to the other horse and placed a small moccasined foot into the stirrup and swung up. Without a glance back, she followed him at a run. He stopped long enough to get the dead man's belt of cartridges. Then they were on their way southward on a three-hundred-mile run to sanctuary in the Sierra Madre,

And while they drove southward toward the lower boundary of the reservation, Chingo, the sergeant of police whose murder plot had failed, sent his laboring horse in a lathering run toward the agency. He came down the street at a run, flung himself from the horse in front of Major Hardin's office, leaped beneath the ramada, and was inside.

Hardin was in conference with Lieutenant Hepner, A sergeant worked at another desk near the telegraph key that was clicking idly, carrying routine messages between the various forts and now and then to the office of the commanding general of the district at Winslow.

Hardin looked up with a frown of annoyance. Like the agent, he liked neither Chingo's drinking nor his arrogance. Granted that the man had done yeoman service with Major Livingston in locating Nana near the Mexican border and helping to bring him to bay, there still were limits to be observed.

"What do you mean by bursting in here like this, Chingo?" he snapped at him. "Take off that hat in this office! Stop scratching your damned lice! Now, what do you want?"

"Come fast from Cochise. Much trouble."

"Cochise making trouble?" Hardin glanced at Hepner, and both thought of the bottle.

"No. Him old, sick, drunk all time. Young warrior Matesa come from Nana with old ones. Him plenty armed. I 'rest him for come jail 'long One Ear. Him kill One Ear, shoot at me. Him gone Nana fast goddam!"

Hardin rose to his feet. He looked at his junior officer. "That sounds like the young fellow Cochise was talking about this morning who brought in the old ones." And to the scout: "Do you know where Nana is? Where?"

"Down in mountains in Mexico. Three days' ride in Sierra Madre. Big spring one place, creek 'nother place ten mile away. Nana gottum six warriors with bullets."

"Six wounded in that fight, eh? But that's been more than six weeks now. Anyway, that's too far south for us, Ted. It's in Colonel Grajeda's district at Santa Maria. But this Matesa thing is quite different. We'll have to make a try at running him down, or the old man in Prescott will split a saddle girth. Ted, get your troop ready to go. Take Chingo with you." He broke off and grinned suddenly. "Lordy, I wouldn't want to be around Fort Thomas when Livvie gets orders to go out again, after that licking Nana gave him. And for one kid!" He and Hepner went off into gales of laughter.

Then he sobered and became brisk. "Stay on his trail all the way to the Mexican border if necessary, Lieuten-

ant. But get him!"

Hepner rose to his feet and stepped outside to where a bugler was on duty beneath the ramada. The clear notes floated up and down the street, and just forty minutes later Troop B, Eighth Cavalry, was ready to go. Five minutes later, upon official orders from Major Hardin, they were on their way.

With Chingo leading the way on a fresh horse, they cut down through gullies and ravines and over ridges, hitting a steady, distance-eating pace, with the packers whipping at the supply mules and cursing those that lost no opportunity to bump into a tree or rock in order to jar or pull loose the pack. Chingo was leading them uner-ringly; straight toward the jacals where lived the three Coyotero families. He knew that Matesa had hidden his rifles before coming to Cochise, and Chingo guessed shrewdly that he had left them where he left his little party of old ones and the children.

There they could pick up the trail.

It was just before sundown of a long summer day when the troop under Lieutenant Hepner rode down a long ravine, past the many jacals located there. The dogs ran out to bark and snap at them, and the naked little children ran out to hoot and throw stones, while the men and women stared in silent, sullen bitterness. One of the men sneered and spat as Chingo rode by. The Coyoteros hated him because, as a Chiricahua, he had singled them out to make his tiswin raids and then had paid them back by helping the Brawleys kill, scalp, and hide four of them.

The troop covered another mile down the wide ravine, and then turned off to the right and entered a smaller one. Up there a quarter of a mile away lay three jacals. Chingo rode ahead of the troop, his eyes on the ground. They were gleaming with satisfaction as the troopers pulled up.

Hepner reined in beside the squat scout. "Any sign?"
Chingo nodded and pointed to the ground. "They come here this place pretty damn' soon back."

Hepner looked about him. He saw the silent children with their drawn faces, the aged ones still lying on their deerskins; skinny, weak, their eyes dulled with apathy.

They had been too weak for Cochise's warriors to move.

And Hepner, looking at the scene before him, thought, Why, in God's name, did we have to come out here and gobble up these people's lands like voracious animals? Why couldn't we have let them alone, let them live their own ways? Why did we have to bring misery and suffering to the sick and old like these?

The pity was still strong within him as he looked at Chingo. The scout was talking to the warrior who had hidden, and then returned, Matesa's Sharps.

"Who made these two new tracks?" he demanded arrogantly.

"Two Coyoteros going to hunt deer."

Chingo sneered and swung from his horse. He bent over the tracks, studied those of one horse-One Ear'sfor a few moments. Then he went over and struck the warrior in the face and knocked him to the ground.

"Here, here!" called Lieutenant Hepner sharply, gigging his horse forward. "None of that! Get back on your

horse, Chingo. At once!"

The scout obeyed with a sullen grunt and sat there, his eyes burning venomously down into the hate-filled ones of the Covotero. He straightened in the saddle and looked at the officer.

"Him say two ponies Coyotero deer hunters. Him tell a big lie. Matesa come here on pony, bring girl riding One Ear horse. I know One Ear horse tracks."

Hepner stared at him, "A girl?"

"Him steal my girl, Berra. She ride One Ear horse." Oh ho! thought Lieutenant Hepner in sudden comprehension, having heard mention of the girl's trouble with the big Indian. Now the cat's out of the bag! You

arrested him on account of your girl and were going to kill him, eh? Instead of that, he put up a fight, killed One Ear, and sent you running with your shirttail flying. And you come running to the cavalry to help you get her back, you sly, potbellied son of a dog. Two thousand troopers burning up the seat of their pants in a hot desert because of you and a girl who wouldn't have you. The old man at Prescott would love this. And the hell of it is we've got to run him down, because you forced him to kill a policeman. Got to run him down and bring him back and hang him. We'll hang him for you and you'll get your girl back and then go around sneering at the soldiers again. The same troopers now burning up the desert, you crooked, arrogant bastard! He said briskly, "Follow the tracks. We have little day-

light left. He'll probably travel all night. Forrrrrwarrrrd!"

With Chingo impatiently following the trial of the fleeing couple, the troop drove on until nearly nine that night, when the long summer day had faded into pitch darkness. Hepner called a halt and ordered supper prepared. While the troopers ate hungrily of bacon and hardtack and coffee, Lieutenant Hepner went over to where Chingo sat cross-legged on the ground, gulping his food noisily.

"Where do you think he'll head for, Chingo?" he

asked the scout.

Chingo gulped, wiped his mouth, belched, and looked up, then wiped his greasy mouth again. "Maybe Ad-kins' ranch. Get horses. Then him go Nana."

The Lieutenant thought swiftly. He remembered the hunch that Major Livingston had played a few weeks before and how this thing sitting there on the ground scratching himself had led them straight to the fugitives. If he did it once, he might be able to do it again.

"We'll drive on, Sergeant Slade," the officer said to a

slim, capable-looking trooper with three yellow chevrons on his arms.

They drove on through the night, aided a little by a quarter moon high in the sky. At one in the morning they made a dry camp, rested four hours, and were soon in the saddle to meet the dawn. They were now somewhere east and a bit south of Fort Thomas, close to the headwaters of the San Simon. They followed it, and at ten that morning, tired and dusty, they pulled in among the sprawling corrals and buildings of the great ranch.

Old Ed Adkins was on the porch, a match in his mouth. toward the corral where two Apache horses, worn out and

His face was aflame with anger. "Look at them!" he roared, pointing an angry finger

with heads drooping, stood by the poles. He didn't mind the loss of two horses. He owned two hundred head. It was the fact that they had been stolen by a couple of Apaches. "Which way did they go, Mr. Adkins?" Hepner in-

quired politely. He didn't receive much politeness in return. Added to

the fact that the old man hated the cavalry almost as much as he did the Apaches was the further fact that this same upstart Lieutenant had been present the morning before when Major Hardin had laid down the law about scalp buyers and scalp hunters.

Punctuating his words with oaths, Adkins pointed toward the east. "Where in hell else would they go?" he bellowed. "Where did they go last time? East! And then cut back and made fools outa the cavalry, as always."

Hepner sat there and let him rant and finally cool down. He said finally, "I'm sure you'd want to see us catch the fugitives and recover your stolen horses, sir," with thinly veiled politeness. "Can you spare sixty-five mounts, plus some pack animals. Ours are about done in."

Adkins proved unexpectedly co-operative, and in rec-ord time the troop was freshly mounted and under way. Chingo pulled up once beside the officer before taking up the trail ahead again.

"We catchum. We catchum plenty." He grinned.

Sure, we'll catchum plenty, you pig-eyed, whiskeydrinking skunk. The army is slow in many ways, but it usually gets there at the finish. We'll bring that kid back and hang him, and I'll get a commendation from the General. And then Lieutenant Hepner, of Troop B, United States Eighth Cavalry, is going to buy two quarts of whiskey and take them to his elaborately furnished quarters of adobe walls and a grass roof and stay drunk for two days and try to figure out why in the hell he ever volunteered for frontier service in the first place.

They didn't catch them that day, though they stuck doggedly to the easily followed trail. At sundown, dusty and worn out, they rode into another big ranch and were greeted by a big genial-looking man and a pack of yelp-

ing dogs.

"Water? Why, of course, Lieutenant," Alf Swenson said. "Right over there at that long trough. I'll get the Mexicans to work on that counter-balanced pole. We haul up our water here from the well in big bull-hide sacks. Apaches? Nope, ain't seen any. But somebody did some hoss tradin' down in the lower pasture either last night or sometime today. Tell old Ed he can come git 'em anytime he's down this way."

He pointed. Hepner sighed as he saw the two tired, stiff, worn-out Adkins horses.

That little devil, he thought. That wiry, tough little devil and that young girl. I wonder what friend Chingo thinks now.

He looked at the scout. Chingo's heavy face was beginning to take on a look of glumness. He said with a grunt, "We get more horses. Ride more in night. We catchum."

They got the horses, ate and rested two hours, and when they got under way again, Chingo once more led them unerringly through the darkness.

## CHAPTER 13

There was nothern for Lieutenant Hepner to do but go on doggedly mile after mile while he inwardly cursed the flies, the heat, the dust, the darkness, and Chingo in particular. He looked at the broad back of the scout and thought, with a kind of sardonic pleasure, how he'd like to put a -45-70 caliber slug squarely through the middle of it. It would be a favor to both the army and the Apaches.

As for Chingo riding ahead, the scout was beginning to harbor the uneasy feeling that Matesa's voits and escape might have some rather unhealthful repercussions. He had told Cochise of the ambush, and Cochise would go to the agency and report and ask for a burial party. And if they ever connected Chingo with the four notorious brothers, he would hang.

The one thought that did give him immense satisfaction was that, otherwise, his plans were working perfectly. He had sworn to even the score with Nana and he

was using Brawley to that end.

After the ambush, Brawley had ridden his horse down to the reservation to meet Chingo, arriving there several days ahead of Matesa's party of old ones who could travel at a snail's pace. Knowing that if Brawley was caught on the reservation, he would hang and might implicate Chingo, the scout had advised him to hit straight south to Colonel Grajeda, again and lead him

108 to the place where the old ones had been killed. Chingo

hated the Mexicans as much as he hated Nana-and what joy would be his if the two parties came to a clash and many men on both sides were killed! And if Brawley were among the dead, so much the better. His usefulness to Chingo was now finished.

They were deep down in the upper Sulphur Springs Valley, taking a southeasterly course toward John Slaughter's great ranch on the border that day when Chingo caught the distant flash of a heliograph, and pointed.

Lieutenant Hepner pulled his dusty troop to a halt and unlimbered his glasses. The flashes were coming

from a distance of about four miles away. "Sergeant Slade!" he called. "Bring up the heliograph."

Slade called back a sharp order and one of the packers came trotting out leading a mule that bore a light pack. The sergeant uncovered it, opened a box, and presently, standing beside the mule, his gloved hand began working the shutter lever in an answering signal. Chingo sat beside Hepner as the latter stood high in the stirrups, glasses glued to his eyes. This was another of the White Eyes magic that awed the Apaches.

The shutters went on clicking back and forth for several minutes, after which Hepner lowered himself to his seat in the McClelland and put away the glasses.

"It's Major Livingston from Fort Thomas," he said. "They're following the tracks of two horses that were traveling fast. Looks like we've been four miles off."

"That them, all right." Chingo grinned. "I know pretty soon I catchum tracks."

Hepner let that one go by without comment and got the troop under way. An hour later his troop merged with that of the bearded man who sat waiting. Lieutenant Hepner rode up close and saluted.

"How are you, sir?" he greeted. "Looks like we both

had the same thought in mind."

"Looks that way, Lieutenant Hepner. My scouts say they're still some distance ahead. We were delayed by a burying detail."

"Might I ask who, sir?"

"Some hostiles that were ambushed on the way to the reservation. Right after you left, Major Hardin wired Fort Thomas that Cochise had come in and reported that that young fellow we're chasing was ambushed by three white men. We cut over to the spot and buried the remains of nine old men and women, several children, one warrior, and one woman in her thrities. Unpleasant job."

Hepner murmured, "I would think so, sir. Did you

find anything else?"

Livingston reached into his tunic and brought out a plug of tobacco before replying. He bit off hard, returned the plug to his pocket, and rolled the hard wad into his cheek.

"Quite a bit, Lieutenant. We found two fresh graves a short distance away covered with stones. Nor much left of the remains but enough to identify Hugo and Jim Brawley. Of much more interest, however, were some saddles hidden in the brush a quatter of a mile away, identified as the property of old Ed Adkins, the Apache hater."

Hepner twisted in the saddle, shifting his weight to the other leg, and looked at the big bearded man. "That fits in with what Major Hardin told Adkins at the agency the day the cattle were delivered. He as much as accused him of collusion. It would appear that this would cinch the case."

Livingston said dryly, "The matter will be taken care of upon my return. I don't believe that the cavalry or the hostiles will have any more trouble with Mr. Adkins. As for the other Brawley brothers"—unaware that the Apache they now were trying to overhaul had already killed another—"they will be arrested on sight, and held

for murder charges to be filed. By the way, where were you headed?"

"To the Joe Slaughter ranch, sir. Chingo believes that this youngster would not follow the same route that Nana took when you-er ambushed him. He thinks he'll cut farther to the east to get horses at the Slaughter ranch and then cut due south into the Sierra Madre where old Nana is supposed to be holed up."

"Good deduction. So now we arrive at the Slaughter ranch, find old John waiting for us, two played-out

horses in the corral-"

He broke off and stared, as the other officer let out a shout of laughter and rocked in the saddle. Then Hepner suddenly sobered at the look on the Major's face.

"I beg your pardon, Major," he said, and grinned. "But I couldn't help it. You see that's exactly what happened to us at the Adkins and Swenson ranches! Both men waiting for us, two played-out horses in the corral."

"I see. But we're wasting valuable time. There's no reason for both troops to continue to the same destination. It's not according to the book, but I'll toss you to see who gets the easy ride back."

"If you have no objections, Major, I wish to make a suggestion. There are only two of them, traveling light and fast, and being Apaches, they can get more mileage out of a horse than any of a dozen troopers. That girl doesn't weigh an ounce over ninety pounds and that seventeen-year-old-his name is Matesa-won't go much over a hundred ten or so. With no equipment to load them down, it's been a breeze for their horses. And they can ride fast at night when we can't trail them, catch a few hours of sleep, and be on their way again."

"What's on your mind, Lieutenant? If you've a better

solution, let's hear it."

The Lieutenant cleared his throat, and Livingston thought, They're all alike, these youngsters fresh out of the Point. Hell-bent for action and promotion. Kelton was like that, and he got himself killed by this same kid we're chasing, according to Chingo.

Hepner said, "Thank you, Major. It simply sums up to this: Those two kids are smoking up this desert on a hard run to get back to Nana's camp and warn him. At the rate we're traveling, they might get there in plenty of time for him to get out of there with the rest of his women and children and old ones. With twelve men—"

Major Livingston shifted his own weight in the saddle and splashed a black stream into the sandy soil. His eyes had taken on a peculiar glint, His voice was a trifle

icy when he spoke.

"Lieutenant Hepner," he said, speaking distinctly and deliberately, "crossing the Mexican border, even in pursuit of hostiles, is technically an armed invasion of a friendly country, although there have been periods during these frontier wars when it was permitted by both Governments. As a superior officer, I can order you to retrain from any such military action."

Hepner's young face fell a few notches. Livingston went on a little more easily: "But, instead, I merely wish to remind you that I had some contact with Nana a few weeks ago, as you have reason to remember. I need not tell you that with a superior force of trained men I ambushed Nana, or at least laid one. My forces were cut to pieces—the only intident in military history that I know of where the ambusher, with concealment and surprise in his favor, got the hell whipped out of him by the ambusher. I shudder to think what would happen to you and twelve troopers if you attempted anything so foolish."

Hepner said lamely, "I was just considering the possibility that Nana would be out on a raid and that, with Chingo as scout, we might be able to slip in and round up the rest of his people and get back to the border with

132

them. We could hold them at Slaughter's ranch until sufficient troops arrived to escort them back to the reservation"

Livingston thought, Kelton was one and now here's another. Maybe they'll learn in a few years. If they live long enough. He said, "Pick your men and continue pursuit, Lieutenant. And you are under strict orders from me not, under any circumstances, to follow the two hostiles across the Mexican border."

"Yes, sir," mumbled the Lieutenant.

Ten minutes later, followed by Sergeant Slade and eleven other troopers, and with Chingo out in front, Lieutenant Hepner again bored into the shimmering heat waves dancing over the wide expanse of the Sulphur Springs Valley.

It was now a case of sparing no horseflesh. Hepner had been to the Slaughter ranch before, as had many of the other officers, for the place was famed throughout the Southwest for its hospitality. Any man-friend, stranger, outlaw on the dodge, soldier or lawman-who passed by was expected to stop and eat, without being asked. It was toward this fabulous ranch that the thirteen troopers and Chingo headed without a letup in the grueling pace, except to blow the horses now and then and not overheat them. Lather was not long in appearing around the withers and flanks of the laboring animals, and flecks of foam began dropping away from around the bits. And the blouses of the troopers' blue uniforms turned wet beneath the armpits.

All that afternoon they worked their way eastward and south, while Chingo followed the trail of the two horses ahead. They came to a shallow arroyo and found the ashes of a campfire and bits of jack-rabbit skin and fur. Imprints in the sand showed where the two fleeing ones had slept for a few hours. Chingo pointed, and his dark, ugly face lit up.

"Tracks fresher now, Loot. They sleep maybe three, four hours."

Hepner thought, Well, that helps quite a bit. Perhaps

we still have a chance. The sweaty horses were blown for a few minutes with girths loosened and then the grueling race began again. About four that afternoon they reached their destination and rode into a small village of great corrals, sheds, cabins, and the great ranch house litself, whose dining-room table seated twenty-four.

They pulled up their exhausted horses, and then, at a walk, rode over to where John Slaughter, on his favorite saddle horse, was watching a group of his Mexican and American cowpunchers brand some yearlings. Hepner and his men pulled up at the fence, and he and the ranch owner spoke their greetings over the top rail; one in dusty, sweat-stained blue, the other a small but deadly man who had driven one of the first great herds into Arizona shortly after the Gvili War.

Slaughter's keen eyes were on the troop, the condition of their horses telling the story. He said, "O' course I remember you, Lieutenant. Glad to see you again. Looks like you might be in a hurry."

"Very much, sir," was the reply. "We're trailing a couple of young Apaches, a boy and a girl. The boy is a member of Nana's band. He killed an Indian policeman on the reservation above Fort Thomas, and we trailed them to within a mile east of here but haven't been able to overhaul them, despite a very short start. They stole fresh horses from the Adkins ranch and then left them at Mr. Swenson's and picked up two more, So I-"

Slaughter's laughter cut through the sound of one of the horses slobbering the dust from its nostrils. He pulled his pony over and rested an arm on the top rail. "Old Ed, hey? I'd like to have been there when he found it out," and he went off into chuckles. "Well, when you get back past Alf Swenson's place you tell him I've got two of his worn-out hosses here that was took sometime today from the west pasture. It looks like you're too late, officer. My Mexican hoss herder found 'em when he went back to the pasture about three hours ago. Don't know how long they'd been there, but the sweat wasn't quite dry."

Hepner removed his campaign hat and wiped at his forehead with the sleeve of his dusty tunic. He put the hat on again and tugged at the kerchief sagging at his threat.

"How far from here to the Mexican line?" he asked, knowing the question was futile, that the army had lost out in a hard run covering a good one hundred and ninety miles.

"Couple of miles. I'll ride out and take a look with you, if you want me to."

"I'd appreciate it very much, sir," Hepner replied. Slaughter rode over to the other side of the corral and one of the men working with the milling yearlings opened it for him. He came loping around the circular enclosure and joined the tired little patrol. His horse dropped in alongside the officer.

"Where's this feller headin', d'you think?" he asked.

"For Nana's hideout down in the Sierra Madre. It's about one hundred and some odd miles below the line, I believe. It's in the district of Colonel Grajeda, at Santa Maria"

"This is his district up here, too," snorted the diminutive ranch owner, reining his horse out around a bush. He came in close again. "But he don't get up this way too often. Not much reason to, at that, I reckon. He's got a garrison at San José, sixty miles west of here, and another at Estacion Pequeño—Small Station—forty miles east of here at the mine. They gen'ty do the border patrols for him. He only comes up now and then on inspection trips." "Yes, I know. But if this information about Nana's hideout is correct, it should be somewhere in the vicinity of Santa Maria. Why doesn't the Colonel go in and try to flush him out?"

They were riding down a long lane a half mile in length now, heading south, the fence on the right one of the few barbed-wire ones in the Territory. Dust rose up from around the horses' trotting hoofs, and again one of them slobbered. The troopers rode blank-faced and stolid, their bodies rocking up and down in the McClelland saddles. Some were professional soldiers, a couple were hard-faced ex-Confederate prisoners who, refusing to swear loyalty to the new flag, had been given the choice of more prison or service on the frontier, and one was an ex-outlaw. But they were soldiers, hard and tough, and Hepner knew their records both before and now. As fighters, they were the best in his troop.

Slaughter said, "Grajeda go after Nana? Huhl Thet Spaniard aint no damn' fool. He knows thet if he took a hundred Mexican troopers into the Madre after Nana, and got forty miles in, not a one of 'em would get out alive. I guess I don't blame him none, L'eutenant Hepner. He knows you soldier boys up here have whipped the ar outer all the others, and he knows that sooner or later Nana will cross the line into the Territory onct too often and that you'll get him. All he has to do is sit tight. Nope, I don't blame him a-tall. Guess I'd do the same thine."

"I suppose you're right, sir," replied the officer. "But suppose that one of his two garrisons down here had the help of an Apache scout! Would they go that far, without orders from him, if they knew where the old devil is located?"

"Not a chance, Lieutenant. Them Mexican troopers will fight in the open, but not where the 'Paches can get at 'em from cover."

They had reached the end of the lane and the corner of the horse pasture. They turned west and followed the line of the fence for three hundred yards. Here, the wire was down at one of the posts, the two strands cut in two. Tracks of two horses led away. To the south.

Hepner leaned from the saddle and looked at the post. He straightened and turned the head of his horse away. Chingo was already a hundred yards in the lead and fol-

lowing the tracks.

"He cut it with his throwing ax," he explained to Slaughter. "That's the same ax he killed that Apache policeman with. And, I might add, sir, it's the same ax that killed Lieutenant Kelton in the fight with Nana a few weeks ago."

They were trotting southward again in the wake of Chingo. Slaughter had lit his pipe, the fragrant aroma of the tobacco causing the troopers behind to wrinkle their noses and lick their sun-cracked lips. No smoking while in ranks.

"Heard about that"-puff, puff-"fight," Slaughter said. "Same kid, eh? Them black devils sure breed 'em young and tough. It's lucky for me they won't fool with cattle or I'd be cleaned out in no time. But the 'Paches won't touch a cow when they raid. Too wild and hard to handle. They go for horses, mules, and sheep."

They rode on for another hour while the sun, though a bit low now, was still uncomfortably hot. Slaughter was in the midst of details of the great drive he had made when suddenly Hepner heard Chingo's shrill yell of warning. They looked up to see the scout spurring back at a hard gallop. A mile away a moving cloud of dust rose slowly and then hung motionless in the still air in the wake of a long line of jogging horsemen. Hepner pulled his glasses from their case on the pommel as Chingo came pounding back and raised them to his eyes. At that distance he could make out the huge Chihuahua sombreros with the curled brims and needle-pointed crowns.

"Mexican troopers," he announced, and replaced the

glasses. "About one hundred of them."

"Well, by gad!" said Slaughter, knocking his pipe against the horn of his saddle. "I never seen that many down this way before in one bunch. There's only about sixty at San José and maybe the same at the mine. Let's

go down and see what's going on."

Chingo, the barrel of his tired mount heaving, swung around and pulled up beside them. He pointed, as though they already had not seen. But the distant column now had changed course and was coming to meet them. At a slow trot the parties jogged toward each other, and then Hepner felt himself stiffen in the saddle as the distance closed to one hundred yards.

The familiar figure of Buck Brawley rode beside the

figure of none other than Colonel Grajeda himself!

Lieutenant Hepner halted his small command and then, with Slaughter and Chingo, rode forward to meet the two leaders of the now motionless column. Hepner felt cold ice in his tired, sweaty body as he stared into the bearded face of the murderous scalp hunter.

"Howdy, Colonel," Slaughter greeted him, and reached over to shake hands. "Been long time since I seen you down this way. What brings you so far from Santa

Maria?"

"Apaches, Señor Slaughter," replied the big man with the long mustachios. "That devil Nana has done it again. He struck a hacienda two weeks ago and drove off some sheep and mules. We picked up his trail north, but lost it last night about forty miles from here."

Hepner rode closer. "I'm Lieutenant Hepner, sir, Eighth Cavalry," he said, and raised his gauntleted hand in a salute. "Where do you think he's heading?" He ig-

nored Brawley, who sat his horse beside the Colonel.

"I wish that I knew, Lieutenant. We raided his hidden camp up in the Sierra Madre twenty-five miles from Santa Maria. But the place was deserted."

Hepner shot a look at Chingo. He spoke sharply. "That camp was supposed to be permanent. Why did he leave

it? Where did he take them?"

Chingo shifted his heavy body in the saddle. "Him got other camp on creek. Ten mile that way." And he pointed to the east. "But him no live there many year. Stay at

camp with big spring."

"You mean to say," demanded Colonel Grajeda half angrily, "that we were within ten miles of his women and children when we found that other deserted place? And now we've ridden all the way here on a wild-goose chase?" He pulled angrily at one end of the mustache and jerked savagely at the bit when his horse shifted.

Lieutenant Hepner said coldly to Brawley, "And may

I ask, sir, what you're doing with this troop?"

Brawley sneered at him, his eyes venomous above the dirty beard. "You can ask and be damned to you!" he

sneered again and spat.

"I must inform you that the bodies of the Apaches that you and your brothers murdered were found and have been buried. The bodies of your two brothers that you buried also were identified, along with the equipment belonging to Mr. Adkins that you hid in the brush. You may consider yourself under military arrest, subject to a charge of murder, and I warn you that anything you say may be used against you."

"Haw-haw!" laughed the outlaw, rocking in the saddle. He threw Colonel Grajeda a look of amusement.

"Sergeant Slade!" called the Lieutenant. "Have two of your men take charge of the prisoner."

"Yes, sir."

"One moment, my friend," broke in the hard voice of the Colonel. "Let me remind you that you are on Mexican soil and that I am in command here." Hepner turned to Slaughter, a question in his eyes.

Hepner turned to Slaughter, a question in his eyes. Slaughter nodded. "That's right, Lieutenant," he said mildly. "The line is about three hundred yards back.

You see, half of my ranch is in Mexico."

"Anyhow." the Colonel went on in a more amiable tone of voice, "what difference does it make? Suppose he did kill a few Apaches? That's what you're always doing. You go out and kill them, and yet you arrest him because he does the same thing. You Americans never fail to amaze me by the impractical ways you sometimes think and act. At any rate, I'm grateful to your scout for the information. With Nana down here somewhere, we now know where his women and children are located. We shall return immediately to the Sierra Madre and take the captives."

Lieutenant Hepner, the pit of his stomach sinking, thought, If you do, it will be the first time you ever took

any Apaches as captives.

He knew Colonel Grajeda's reputation all too well. There would be no captives among the young and the old. It would be a bloody massacre, a cold and deliberate slaughter of those unable to flee or defend themselves. And there wasn't a single thing on God's green earth that he could do about it.

He looked over at the rancher, the sinking feeling still there. He said, "In that case, I guess there is nothing left for us to do but return," and felt the helplessness, the

resignation, the failure in his words.

I'm tired, he thought. I'll feel better in the morning. And, somehow, I'm glad those kids got away.

Slaughter said, "Stay over at the ranch tonight and rest up. Colonel, why don't you camp your men down by the big waterhole and kill a couple of steers? It's kinda late in the day to start that long ride up into the high country. Stay with us tonight."

"I accept with pleasure," answered Grajeda, and made

a low how from the saddle

They rode back northward as the long column of Mexican troopers began to circle to the big cattle watering place, Chingo trotting along off to one side. They unsaddled and washed up and trooped into the big house to eat the first good meal they had had in many days.

All except Chingo. As soon as it was dark, he saddled

a fresh horse and disappeared.

#### CHAPTER 14

Some FIFTEEN MILES south of the ranch that same evening, two long-legged bay horses topped a rise, paused briefly, and then began a slow descent down the rocky declivity to a waterhole a short distance below. The many rains that had pelted Mateas's little band on that terrible journey northward to the reservation had filled the undersround streams and springs.

The girl was swaying in the saddle, holding her seat through sheer instinct, though she had made no complaint. Her calico dress was ragged and torn around the hem where the greasewood and mesquite had clawed their way through and left streamers of once bright cloth. She gripped the horn with both hands now, her eyes half-

closed.

She could go no farther, though she refused to say so. It wasn't the Apache way. Matesa must do it for her.

They pulled up and Matesa swung down. He carried a large chunk of beel in one hand, still warm and dripping, one less yearling from John Slaughter's vast herds. He placed it on a rock and went to her horse and looked up into her tired face, at the once-bright eyes now dulled from sheer exhaustion. He lifted his arms and she fell into them and lay there while he carried her and the sheepskin saddle pad to a sandy spot and laid her down.

"We are too close to the soldiers and that long cloud of dust that is in the land. But you can go no farther. You will rest while I become a woman and cook the meat."

He watered the horses but did not unsaddle them. They were fresh and well-grazed. He tied them to a nearby bush and then built a fire. While it blazed, he cut the meat into strips, and then, from habitual cautiousness, he went to the pool and filled his water bag and replaced it at his belt. While the girl lay motionless, he roasted the meat; then he aroused her, and they ate hungrily.

"I will sleep until the sun is low," he said, "and then I must watch. Three more days and we will be back

among Nana's people."

She caught the significance in his words, the thing she most wanted to hear, and it brought a smile that came from some hidden feeling deep inside, for she was already asleep. He tied the rest of the roasted strips of beef on his saddle, picked up the sheepskin saddle pad, and moved up the incline to where he could look down upon the country below. With rifle and throwing ax beside him, he was asleep almost at once.

The two horses dozed with hips slumped and tails switching lazily, eyes closed. The tiny figure in the torn calico dress lay curled up on her side like a child, and a child of fifteen she was, by any other standards. Matesa lay on his stomach, dark head turned sideways, his hair over his eyes. The hair was not long. It was trimmed straight across the back and when he walked it hung to just above the shoulders.

The sun swung lower and lower, and at seven o'clock, when it was still a half hour or more in the sullen yellow sky, Matesa's sleek body stirred. He opened his eyes, not slowly or sleepily, but he snapped them wide and raised up, his dark gaze sweeping the terrain below. Nothing moved except a few cattle. His keen black eyes saw the buzzards circling far below where he had shot the yearling. The waters of the pool lay smooth and pellucid.

He rose to his feet and picked up rifle and ax and sheepskin, the low position of the sun telling him that they had slept four hours. For him, his body hardened by the rigors of other such rides, it was sufficient, but not for Berra. Let her sleep many more hours while he backtracked, sniffing like a wolf on a scent, to investigate that long column of dust they had seen. These things Nana must know about.

He mounted and began his usual tactics of cutting a long swinging circle, keeping below the skyline and yet close enough that the land lay clear before him. A coyote loped off through the mesquities, head turned back and long bushy tail floating behind, smooth, flowing power in every movement of its yellow body. He heard the song of the desert quail as they filed along on tiny red feet, leaving a scent that a skunk or a bobcat could follow hours later. Darkness came down as he finished his long swinging circle, and now he made straight for where he had last seen the dust so many miles away.

Two hours after darkness he came to within a half mile and sat there astride the horse and watched the fires that dotted the plain as the Mexican troopers ate from the two butchered steers that John Slaughter had given them. He heard the faint murmur of voices, carried far on the clear air, and now and then shouts of laughter. He moved in closer until he could make out the dark mass that was the horses under guard as they grazed.

Finally he turned the horse's head and rode away at a trot to return and awaken Berra. He must get back to Nana and tell him of this thing.

A half moon was in the sky now, yellow like a pumpkin slashed in half, and he let the pomy jog in and out among the mesquites, past the dark forms of the beddeddown cattle. He passed the place where the yearling had gone down under his bullet and saw the moving outlines of a score of coyotes, circling and snarling and paying him no heed. The big dogs were whipping off the bitches and half-grown whelps and the old ones until they first had eaten their fill. Matesa rode by them, content at their proximity, for the coyote was the hero of their humorous stories and so clever a fellow that the Apaches used his voice to signal in the night.

He made good time back to the waterhole and climbed the ridge again, saying hOO-hOO-hOO to the horse as he gigged it up the climb. Its clattering hoofs on the rocks ceased as he pulled up and looked down to where moonlight shimmered on the placid waters of the hole.

Berra's horse was gone! There was no outline of her

sleeping form on the ground.

Matesa acted instinctively. He flung himself from the saddle and rolled out of sight beyond the ridge. He crouched there like some wild thing, like the wild thing that he was, every nerve aquiver, every sense alert for the ambush that might be anywhere among the rocks. He began a crawling, slithering course among the rocks, cutting that circle around the waterhole, a thing so concealing that few human eyes could have seen it. It took him fitteen minutes to circle the waterhole, and then he knew that there was no ambusher waiting.

She had been taken

She nad been taken. He strode boldly down to the waterhole, eyes scanning the ground as he bent low. And it was in the wet sand near the water's edge that he saw the marks drawn with a stick. An arrow pointing north toward the ranch, a bird in flight, a hangman's noose. And, to one side, the familiar mark of Chinco.

Freely translated, the message in the sand read:

I have taken her in flight. Come and get her so that you may be caught and hanged like a dog.

Matesa mounted his horse again and rode it hard. He almost foundered the animal in that fifteen-mile run

back to John Slaughter's ranch. He knew that where Chingo was there also were soldiers, and it took no great stretch of the imagination to understand that they had been hard on the trail of Berra and himself. He came at last to the ranch and to the horse pasture and pulled up close by the barbed wire. The break had been repaired but he quickly cut the wires in the same place again with his throwing ax and rode through.

There were no night guards out tonight, due to the proximity of the Mexican troopers camped two miles below and the presence of American troopers in the house. It was an easy matter to catch a fresh horse and turn toose the one he had almost foundered. He approached the corrals at a walk and tied the fresh animal in a brush clump a short distance below them. A couple of dogs, in complete idiocy, bayed foolishly at the distant coyotes yapping happily at the moon. Now and then one of the tired horses, resting with full bellies in the corrals, slobered or stomped the ground. None of them, not even the dogs, saw the dark figure writhing along on the ground like a night-moving gila monster.

It took him hours to complete a hunt for Chingo's saddle, to find the horse that Berra had ridden, and the early morning was not far from dawn when he realized that she was not there. The moon had disappeared and the night was a black wall as he found his horse and turned it down the lane, southward toward the place where the Mexican troopers slept soundly.

There was nothing to do now but take cover and wait until dawn and watch for those White Eyes soldiers whose saddless he had discovered at the ranch. Wait and watch for Chingo to go with them and take Berra. He couldn't fight all of them, but there was one thing he could do. He could stalk them to a place where he could lie in ambush and where Chingo would make a perfect target.

They could take her back and put a tag around her neck to be counted for food rations, but Chingo would not be there. Whatever the consequences, he was going to kill Chingo.

He reached the end of the lane and rode on. The stars told him that it was early morning and that in another hour it would be dawn. The coyotes were still-yapping and the great lobos that came in to hamstring and then kill a cow for a meal were sending out their heavier, hoarse-throated tries.

He was a half mile from the camp where the Mexican troopers lay in slumber when suddenly he jerked his horse to a halt. He cocked his ears and waited, listening, his body now rigid in the saddle. A coyote yapped in the distance. An answering call came from another point far away. It was almost dawn.

Nana!

Nana was out there with his band and was going to attack at dawn!

Matesa lifted himself in the saddle, and from his throat there issued the particular cry of the coyote with one added note that distinguished it from the cry of the latrans. He waited a moment and then sent it out again, a sound that to the ears of anyone but an Apache would have been just another of the night-roving canines.

From a point three hundred yards away came an answering call, repeated. Matesa turned his horse's head and began moving toward the place at a walk. He sent out the call twice more and presently a dark form rose up in the darkness squarely in front of his horse. Matesa slipped to the ground and stood before the warriors.

"Matesa," grunted the other in surprise. "You have been gone long."

"Much, Where is Nana?"

The warrior turned and pointed toward the south.

"He is down there in a small gully close by the place where the Mc-hi-cano soldiers sleep. We have them almost surrounded in a circle here and on the south and on the east. We're waiting for the peaceful ones on the ghost ponies to return to the abode. Then we will attack. We have many guns and much ammunition."

Matesa lifted the mouth rope and led the horse away in the pitch-black darkness just before dawn, for the half moon long since had gone on its way below the horizon. He sent out a call, asking where Nana was, and received an answer from a point not more than two hundred yards west of where the encamped Mexican troopers lay in deep shunder.

Presently he worked his way down a shallow wash cut by rains and came to a small group of Apache ponies. There were five warriors with Nana. Matesa went over and squatted down beside the diminutive figure. He waited in respectful silence for the old man to speak first.

"You have been away a long time," Nana said. "Tell me, and talk fast, because the ghosts of the peaceful ones

will soon be gone and it will be time to fight."

Matesa began at the beginning, squatting there beside the one leader of them all who had retixed to surrender. He told of the long trek across the desert, of the death of the old one; he told of the attack by the three Brawleys and how he had killed two of them in the fight in which his mother was lost. He related his meeting with Cochise, his arrest by Chingo, his escape with Berra and the long, hard run of two hundred n.iles across the desert to the waterhole, and that Berra was now gone, taken by Chingo. He had been hunting her when he heard the coyote calls of the Apaches slipping into position for the attack.

calls of the Apaches slipping into position for the attack.

\*He heard the little hissing intake of breath that the
Apaches gave off when they were excited. The first faint
light was showing in the east when he finished.

Nana spoke four words, "You have done well,"

"Why do you attack the Me-hi-cano soldiers?" Matesa

"The man who bought the scalps of the old ones from bearded White Eyes is leading them. He's been trailing us for days. He stopped at one place and got more soldiers. Now they must know what it means to buy scalps of the old ones."

of the old ones."

He rose to his feet and Matesa rose with him. It was grey dawn, one that was destined to be turned into red. Out there two hundred yards away a few of the soldiers had stirred and were sitting up sleepily. Beyond them the night herders had bunched up the horses, unware that they had but a few minutes of life left in their lean bodies. Matesa shifted the cartridge belt into better position over his shoulder and looked at the repeater he had taken from the dead Apache. One Ear. It was a .56 caliber Spencer carrying seven cartridges in a tube in the stock, very effective up to two hundred yards but no more than that.

that.
"It is time to fight," Nana said simply, his burning black eyes on the distant mass of black comprising one hundred men asleep on the ground,

He let out a screeching yell, and when it rent the air all hell broke loose on the lower part of John Slaughter's

great ranch.

In a long semicircle on the west and south and east of
the encampment big repeating rifles began to crash, the
heavy roars audible for miles in the clear morning air.
That dark mass on the ground came alive like a mass of
dark, wild bumblebees suddenly disturbed. From out of
the mesquires shot two hard-running ponies as the two
night herders fell from their saddles. Straight toward
one hundred and twenty mounts and pack animals those
two yelling riders drove, hunched low in the rawhide
saddles. The horses broke in mass and the ground began

to rumble as they thundered northward toward the ranch two miles away. Some of the Mexicans began firing wildly. Others, in

Some of the Mexicans began firing wildly. Others, in complete panic, began to run. They streamed out across that flat terrain surrounding the big waterhole, ducking and dodging among the mesquites. Others began to fall steadily, some to lie still, others writhing on the ground. It was more than a surprise attack. It was plain slaughter.

Matesa had placed seven cartridges on the bank back of which he rouched. He put down the smoking rifle and jerked the tube from the stock of the Spencer and hurriedly refilled it. Wisps of grey smoke began to float up. The smoke rose a few feet and hung motionless in the still air as the acrid smell of burned black powder permeated the area. From somewhere out in that mass of confusion, Matesa suddenly saw two figures emerge. Chingo and the bearded White Eyes whose three brothes he had killed. He saw, and something not understandable put a spring into his lithe legs.

He leaped up over the bank and began to run. He heard the yells of one hundred men and twenty-five attacking Apaches. He saw Chingo make a run for his horse tethered to a near-by mesquite and he shot the horse stone dead as the paunchy scout was grabbing for the mouth rope. He fired three times at Chingo while he ran and then felt the hammer click on an empty chamber. He saw Buck Brawley, the bearded one, firing at him wildly, but he felt nothing. His eyes were on Chingo, on the bound figure of Berra near by.

"Matesal Matesal" he heard her call in all that noise and confusion—and yet he didn't hear her. Because he was face to face with Chingo, whose horse had fallen on its right side and pinned the scout's rifle sheath beneath it. He saw nothing now, heard nothing but Chingo, coming at him with a knife.

There were many things he could have said, many things he would have liked to say had the two of them been alone and cautiously circling each other. But the fury in him was burning savagely as he swung the barrel of the rifle. Chingo threw up a protecting arm and the crash of steel against it snapped it at the elbow. He lunged with the knife and Matesa twisted aside, a long slash in his loin cloth. With his own knife in his left hand, he thrust hard into Chingo's fat belly and twisted it upward.

And Chingo went down, down on his back. To lie there on the ground with his hands clasped over his rent stomach, to lie there hours before he died under the

eyes of the helpless soldiers and those from the big ranch. The thrust at his belly had been deliberate. Matesa had settled his score.

He wheeled as Chingo went down-and saw Brawley, whom he knew only as the bearded one, running awkwardly in his high-heeled boots, trying hard to get the loading gate of his pistol open and extract shells from his bobbing cartridge belt.

Matesa's moccasined feet drove him forward with a speed that easily overtook the running man. Brawley heard the *pad-pad-pad*, and turned, terror-stricken, his beard quivering, and drew back his arm to throw the empty gun. He saw a dark young face and burning black eves, he saw an arm jerk a throwing ax from a white muslin loin cloth, and as he threw his gun as wildly as he had fired, he saw the arm go back.

It was the last thing he saw as he tried to duck the oncesmooth blade of the throwing ax, now jagged from cutting barbed wire. It struck him squarely in the face.

Matesa wheeled and began a sprint back to where Berra lay bound. Around him, he still heard the booming of guns, the screeching yell of old Nana above them telling

them to run and grab all the guns and ammunition they could find. He went back and bent over Berra.

There was something in her eyes that he would always remember as she looked up at him. She spoke no word, made no sound, but in her dark, expressive eyes he saw everything that was in them, inside of her. He cut her bonds and lifted her to her feet. She fell and lay there, and he picked her up. He looked about him at the sprawled bodies, at the figures in the distance, still running.

"He tied me hard," she said. "My hands and feet, I

cannot use them."

"Why did he bring you here, instead of taking you to the ranch of the White Eyes where the soldiers are?" he asked.

She was rubbing at her wrists where the thongs had cut deeply.

"He said that at the ranch of the White Eves he must not be in the big jacal or in the small jacals of the Me-hicanos, but must stay outside, and that he knew you must come for me. I was asleep when he came to the waterhole and grabbed me. When I called for you, he beat me and said that if I called again he would use a knife on my throat."

He was walking with her as she talked. There was a thing in his mind that had been there since the evening when the three bearded ones had attacked the camp in the arroyo. It was there now as he carried her.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked. "It is away from Nana and the others who are collecting the guns."

"There is a thing that I must do," he said.

They came to the place where Buck Brawley lay sprawled on his back, and here Matesa placed her on her feet. She could stand now. He bent and ripped the buttons from Brawley's shirt as he tore it open. And the thing that he wanted most was there, hung by a thong around Brawley's neck. Even in the early morning light, the white stones gave off glittering streaks of blue fire as he lifted and placed the trinket that had belonged to his mother into place on her breast. Then the two of them walked back . . .

Lieutenant Hepner sat there astride his heaving, trembling horse after that hard run from the ranch. With him were John Slaughter and his hands-and Colonel Grajeda. Around them lay a scene of carnage, for there had been only fifty-five survivors of that terrible, slashing attack. Hepner looked down at the writhing body of Chingo, at that grotesque thing that once had been Buck Brawley. He saw a group of mounted figures in the distance, and he sat there watching them before he questioned Chingo.

Four thousand of them on the reservation, he thought. Four thousand whipped into submission and forced to give up their lands and their way of life.

All except one little band out there a mile away, heading for the wild fastnesses of the Sierra Madre, the Mother Mountain. Fading . . . fading . . . fading . . .

The last of the Apaches.

This Bantam Book contains the complete text of the original edition. Not one word has been changed or omitted. The lowpriced Bantam edition is made possible by the large sale and effective promotion of the original edition, published by Bouregy & Curl, Inc.

## **GAPTOWN LAW**

### by Louis Trimble



The murder of his father had brought a cold violent anger to Matt that time had turned to ice but had not diminished.

Eyes slanted sideways, the clerk said to Matt, "Some say Jake Dill done it. Some say Cole Pitman." "People talk too much," Matt

said. "It's up to the law to handle it."

The clerk gave Matt a sour
grin, "Law? Who's the law in Gap-

town?"

Matt stepped back, his eyes ice-cold "I am" he said "I am now."

am," he said. "I am now."



Watch for

#### GAPTOWN LAW

wherever BANTAM BOOKS are sold







# THE ODDS WERE STEEP!

3,000 Cavalry troops, untold numbers of Mexicans, Indians, renegades and scalp hunters. Against them, Nama ahd left a small band of fifty-five women and children and thirty-five warriors. The last of the Apaches—but free.

This is the story of Nana, and Matesa—the eighteen-year-old warrior—and the men they fought for their freedom.



BANTAM

This low-priced Bantam book, complete and unabridged, is made possible by the large sale and effective promotion of the original edition, published by Bourgy & Curl, Inc.

