

This story took place in Southwestern New Mexico, in the fall of 1878. It is told from the perspective of Kaywaykla, a Warm Springs Apache, who was about three or four years old, and called “Torres,” at the time. The text here has been adapted from the first three chapters of, *In the Days of Victorio*, by Eve Ball, (ISBN 0-8165-0401-6). All emphasis and footnotes have been supplied.

Kaywaykla’s Story

by Eve Ball

I was awakened by shots and I knew that it had come. Screams! More shots! Entangled in my blanket I struggled to my feet. Grandmother lifted me to her shoulders and ran from our brush arbor on the east slope of the mountain. Above us a wickiup burst into flames as she ran toward the spring.

People on foot raced past us. A horse almost ran us down. There were flashes of fire and the whine of bullets. Grandmother stumbled across a body but regained her footing.

“Tight, tight, Torres,” she muttered as *she stooped to fill partially her water jug*. Then she followed the soft thud of moccasins up the steep slope of the mesa. It seemed a long time before she reached the rim. Trembling with exhaustion she put me down and took my hand. We ran toward a clump of vegetation, and there *she stopped to fold and arrange the blankets*. She set out for another clump of mesquite, and from one to another we went.

As I trotted beside her I could see the faint glow of dawn before us. I tried hard to keep the pace. When I fell behind she lifted me again and did not stop until she reached the bank of a dry arroyo. She dropped me into the arroyo and we lay flat until we could breathe easily. Then she set out, crawling on hands and knees, up the watercourse. I followed, moving when she did, stopping when she stopped. *Creep and freeze! Creep and freeze! She’d taught me that game, and I’d played it with other children at Ojo Caliente*. My hands touched damp sand, and I knew that some of the water had been spilled from the jug.

The arroyo bent sharply to the east and Grandmother stopped to listen before rounding the turn. I heard the hoofs of horses —shod horses— coming close. Then came the jingle of metal and the sound of harsh voices —White Eye voices. I lay still and held my breath. A horse snorted —he had smelled us! There was a long silence. Then I heard them plunge into the arroyo and scramble up the east bank. The sounds gradually died away, but we lay still for a long time.

Day light was upon us before Grandmother resumed her crawling. She did not risk raising her head to look after the cavalry until we reached a place where the bank was well screened with cactus. The Blue Coats were still riding toward the Río Bravo. She let me drink from the jug, and she gave me a handful of dried venison from *the buckskin bag attached to her belt*.

I, too, had a food bag^a, a small one containing mesquite bean meal. For months no Apache child had been with out his emergency rations, nor had he slept without an admonition not to remove it, and not to abandon his blanket in case of attack. My food bag had never left me, day nor night.

“You’re a good boy; you kept your blanket.”

“Where’s Siki?^b I asked.

“She left the village before we did. I had given her instructions long ago as to where to stop so that we can find her. I hope she remembers. If she obeys, the soldiers will not capture her.”

“Why do they hunt us?”

“They have orders to kill every Apache, man, woman, or child, found off the reservation.”

“But this is our reservation.”

“It is no longer ours. The land Ussen^c created and gave to the Apache, is no longer ours. This, the land promised to Victorio^d by the Great Nantan^e in Washington, has been taken from us. He promised it to our Chief and our people forever. And only two summers ago! Perhaps the gold for which the White Eyes grovel in the earth has been found in our mountains. Because of that the word of the Great White Chief means nothing. He has ordered that we go to San Carlos, the worst place in all Apachería, the vast land of our people. I have been to that place when Victorio took his people there. So many died that we fled from it and returned to Warm Springs. You, too went, but you were too small to remember. Not many babies lived to return.

*“Victorio will die fighting before he will permit the Warm Springs Apaches to be forced back to San Carlos again. Instead we go to the Great River *where we meet those of us who escape*. Grandfather Nana^f will go to the three chiefs of the Mescaleros, our brothers, and ask for refuge on their reservation. He is to meet us at the river with horses and ammunition.”*

“Is it far to the river?”

“Not if we could stand and walk. Moving as we do it is perhaps three days.”

*I think it may have been mid-afternoon before we reached the head of the arroyo. We had a bare ridge to cross, one with little cover except occasional clumps of bear grass and scattered stones. *We lay flat and wriggled from one cover to another until well over the crest*. Several times Grandmother spied moving dots, and each time*

^aFood Bag —a tube shaped leather or cloth bag about 3 inches in diameter and 10 to 12 inches deep [adult size], tied shut at the mouth, with straps sewn to both the top and bottom so it could be tied around the waist and worn crossways in the small of the back, (somewhat like a modern “fanny pack”).

^b Siki —Torres’ older female cousin

^c Ussen —the Apache word for “God”

^d Victorio —chief of the Warm Springs Apache

^e Nantan —the Apache word for “leader”

^f Nana —leader of one of the bands of the Warm Springs Apache; he is Torres’ great uncle, (the brother of “Grandmother”), Torres calls him “Grandfather,” a term of respect as much as relationship

we lay motionless until she felt sure that the soldiers were still riding toward the east. She knew that with field glasses they might see us.

We made our way southeast until we reached the head of another dry stream bed leading to Cuchillo Canyon. We slipped between its protecting banks and worked our way south. There was a Mexican village in the canyon but Grandmother knew we had little to fear from it. The arroyo gradually became deep enough that Grandmother could stand and walk without fear of being seen. Toward dark we reached an overhanging rock. The encircling walls formed a sort of cave, open only on one side. *She stopped and called softly.* In the darkness something moved. She called again—a quail whistle—and a shadow stole toward us.

“Siki”

“Yes, Grandmother, I waited as you told me.”

“Good! I was afraid you might not find the place.”

“I had no trouble. Grandmother, I’m hungry.”

“So am I. So is Torres, but he has not asked for food. You had a bag, where is it?”

“I took it from my belt to sleep.”

“Torres did not. He obeyed. To obey is to live. And your blanket?”

“I was frightened —”

“So was I. So was Torres; but he held on to his blanket.”

“I’m sorry Grandmother.”

“You’re sorry! You know it is everyone for himself.”

Siki crept from under the rock. “I’ll go, Grandmother.”

“You will not. Go back and sit down.”

She took a handful of dried venison from her bag and mesquite meal from mine. She handed it to Siki. Then she filled my hand and took a small portion for herself. We ate. She bade Siki lie next to the wall, and me beside her. She spread both blankets over us and crept under the edge of them with her face to the open side. Knife in hand she slept.

Before dawn she had us on our way across a gentle slope toward another arroyo. Once within its banks we walked until Grandmother stopped to examine a trail sign. It was a row of little stones with a slightly larger one at the south end.

“A woman and children—seven in all. Too many! They should have separated so that each group might have a chance to live.”

An hour or so later she found another message. Four had turned east; the rest kept on south.

“Good!”

“Why?”

“The older children have struck out east to the river.”

Until almost evening we moved cautiously. I was very thirsty but knew better than to ask for water. *The jug was empty but Grandmother continued to carry it, for it requires much time and labor to weave a wicker jug and coat it with piñon gum so it will not leak.*

We were nearing the Cuchillo. The arroyo was deep, with much vegetation along its banks, and we did not leave its shelter until dark. *We walked cautiously,*



drawing by Charleen Rogers

stopping often to listen and sniff the air. I think I caught the tantalizing odor of meat as soon as Grandmother. Burning wood, too! I was cold as well as hungry. And thirsty! Grandmother murmured an order, and Siki and I sank to the ground. She was gone some time before we heard the quail call. Siki touched me. We waited for a second call before answering. Grandmother came with water and we drank.

"A sheep herder's camp, not a Mexican, but a White Eye. He has gone to Cuchillo, but it is not far. He may be back soon. Come!"

Flames flickered before the queer square tepee. The meat was suspended above them instead of being laid on coals in the proper manner. I dropped near the welcome fire while Grandmother and Siki went into the tent. In a very short time they returned with bundles wrapped in white cloth. Siki had a blanket and a knife. They cut the meat and each carried a piece.

In the shelter of the next arroyo we ate the partially cooked food. Grandmother cut long strips of meat. Mine she cut into small chunks, but she and Siki placed the ends in their mouths and deftly severed the bits with their knives. I was so hungry that I crammed two at a time into my mouth and chewed greedily.

"Not so fast, Torres. You must eat like a chief, for you come from a long line of them. You can never be one unless you *practice self-control*. A chief must have good manners."

I know that Nana never acted as though he were hungry, though he must often have been. I ate more slowly, enjoying every morsel of the good food. Then I stretched out on the ground and must have slept almost instantly. I awoke when Grandmother touched me.

"We must walk. Before day we must cross the big trail of the White Eyes in their journeys up and down the river."

"Are we close to the river?"

"About halfway between it and Cuchillo."

"Why does Grandfather say that Cuchillo Negro is a good name?"

"It is the name of Black Knife, a chief and our relative. And a black knife is not easily seen; that is why we darken the handles with clay."

Apaches do not like to travel at night, but Grandmother had no choice in the matter. When I became too weary to keep up she or Siki carried me. I did not know when they reached the river. I awoke in a mesquite thicket where a little group of our people was huddled. Siki rolled up in her blanket and slept, but Grandmother went among them to check for the missing.

The next time I awoke Grandfather sat beside me. ... When I looked into his shrewd old eyes he smiled and drew me into the embrace that is the greeting between men of our tribe. Then strong hand lifted me and I was enfolded in the arms of my father. My mother next embraced me.

Riders with many horses were entering the thicket. ... From the stores brought in by the warriors, people hastily filled their individual food bags. They divided ammunition, rolled blankets, and tied them to saddles. My grandmother mounted a cavalry horse and Nana lifted me to a seat behind her. He took a buckskin thong and tied my belt firmly to hers. He saw that the blankets were secure and turned the horses to the water's edge. Siki astride another, followed.

The long line of horses faced the current. ... Grandmother called to Siki to follow as cold water splashed into my face. ... The horse swam steadily across the broad stream until he found footing. His forelegs lifted and he scrambled onto a hidden ledge and waded ashore. ... When Lozen⁹ joined us, people had dismounted and begun to wring the water out of clothing and blankets.

Lozen came straight to Grandmother.

“You take charge now. I must return to the warriors. Head for the Sacred Mountain in the San Andres, and permit only short stops until you reach it. Camp near the spring and wait there until Nana comes. We can spare no men, but the young boys will obey your orders. Nana has told them that you are in charge. Get the people mounted and start. I go to join my brother.”

Grandmother told the half-grown lads that theirs was the most dangerous of all positions, that of rear guard.

Then she lead the way, with the long line following.

Grandmother headed for the Mountain and pushed steadily forward, stopping only briefly at infrequent intervals. Improvident ones had failed to fill their jugs and had to be supplied with water. Weary ones begged for rest, timid ones urged another destination, but she ignored their murmurings. ...

It was a weary and thirsty band that dismounted at the spring near the foot of the Mountain. Apaches can go long without food, but no creature can go without water. Grandmother sent two young boys to reconnoiter before going near the spring. Then she permitted a few at a time to dismount and drink. *She selected a camping place some distance from the water, and not visible from it. At its back was a cliff, at its front a mesquite thicket. Through it ran an arroyo deep enough to conceal fires and afford exits in case of attack. Only at midday did she permit fires to be lighted, and then only of very dry wood.* Unlike White Eyes we never camped at the water's edge, and we never built big fires to frighten the game or betray our presence to the enemy. Ussen had given water not only to man but to all creatures. Except in extremity we did not kill animals at the drinking pool. We carried our water to a camp where there was grass, wood, and concealment.

Grandmother kept two young boys on the cliff as *lookouts*. They rubbed clay into their breech clouts, tied bunches of grass or feathers on their heads, and took their places on the ledges above us. Their bodies blended so nicely with the rock that unless one moved it was almost impossible to locate him. Each understood the importance of his vigilance, and was proud of his trust. I longed for the day when I could share such responsibility.

The women set about cutting brush and building arbors. Each of these faced the rising sun, as do all Apache dwellings. Our tepees, before they were destroyed by the cavalry, had done so. I could not remember having slept in a tepee covered with skins, though all our people had made them so before the Blue Coats came. Since then we lacked enough hides even for clothing. To make breech clouts and shirts our people had traded for muslin with the store at Monticello. Muslin was used also—that and

⁹ Lozen –the sister of chief Victorio; a highly honored woman warrior

calico— for the women's dresses. But we had not learned to use any foot covering other than moccasins, and these had to be renewed or mended often.

The tanning of a hide is a slow and difficult process. Much buckskin is required for one pair of moccasins. The footgear was long and could be drawn up for warmth; or it could be folded below the knee for protection against thorns and rock. In those folds we carried our valuable possessions, *valuable primarily in the sense of usefulness*. Sometimes these included extra cowhide soles, for soles wore out quickly and had to be replaced. We carried the end thorns of a mesal plant with fiber attached for sewing the soles to the uppers. The soles were tanned with the hair left on, and they projected beyond the toes and terminated in a circular flap with a metal button sewed to the center. This piece turned back over the toes for additional protection. Because we frequently had to abandon our horses to scale cliffs, *the moccasin was our most important article of dress*.

One morning I was awaked by the sound of Grandfather's voice. He sat in the opening of our brush arbor, facing the rising sun, and singing the Morning Song.

[Later] ...the warriors met at Nana's fire for a council. [At the council, Nana was sent to ask permission for them to go to the Mescalero reservation.]

In December, 1878, Nana took his Warm Springs band to the headquarters of the Mescalero Apache reservation.