



BLACK HAT JACK and me had been riding at night, trying to take in the cooler weather, avoid the sunlight, but mostly avoid being seen. That was almost queered when Jack said he smelled Comanche. I had known Jack a while now, and I had learned that when he said he could smell a bear, a buffalo, a Comanche, or a ground hog fart, then he most likely could.

We got down off our horses, bit their ears and pulled at their necks and they lay down for us. It was a pretty bright night, and that fretted me some, I assure you. Them horses, some fairly tall grass, and tumble weed and some Texas dirt, was about all that was between us and them. I took off my hat and tossed it aside so as to get smaller.

They wasn't right on us, maybe twenty-five feet away, and we could see them good, crossing in the moonlight.

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Must have been twenty of them. More than enough to ride down on us and lose a few, but still take us and do what they like to do to them that cross their lands. Story was they ran the Apache pretty much out of Texas, and let me tell you, if there's someone that can run an Apache, you best take heed of them.

So there we was lying down behind them horses, our teeth clamped on a horse ear, which is not tasty at all, though horses themselves are pretty good to eat if you cook them right. The horse I had on the ground was a fellow I called Satan. He wasn't the original horse I called Satan, as I had to eat him, (which is what made me an expert on the eating of horse) but this one was pretty good, black as the one I had before, and about of the same spirit, though less mischievous. He would even come when I whistled. If he was in the mood.

I'm tempted to tell you a story or two about the original Satan, but I suppose what you want to hear about is the Comanche and what happened to us. Since I'm here telling you about it, and I'm not going to talk about Satan the First, I guess there's no use telling the old joke about the frontiersman who sat down with some tenderfoots and told them about the time he got out on the trail and was surrounded by twenty Indians at each of the four directions, mean and nasty and angry and well-armed. But I'm going to tell it anyway.

They was coming down on him in a rush, and all he had was a pistol with six shots in it. He'd tell the story like that, warming it up like he was tossing a log on the fire, saying what them Indians was wearing, talking about the scalps flapping from where they hung on their horses, or on spears or such, and then he'd say how he fired all six shots, and knew he wasn't going to have time to reload. He'd pause in his story then, stop and light his pipe, or scratch his balls, or some such, and wait for the inevitable question.

“What happened?” a tenderfoot would ask.

To which the frontiersman, leaning forward in earnest, stretching out the moment, would say, “Why I got kilt, of course.”

Only this night wasn't no joke. I was seeing if I could smell them Indians, but I couldn't. All I could smell was wet horse ear. I kept my teeth clamped on it without biting so hard the horse got angry and started tossing its head and trying to stand up, just firm like to suggest it might be a good idea if it laid still. Some people taught dogs to do that, jump up and grab a horse by the nose or the ear, and bring him down. That was quite a jump, but we wasn't dogs and this wasn't a joke. Them was real live Comanche braves.

We lay there quiet and watched them ride by, wrapped in buffalo robes, scalps dangling from their bridles. Those robes were a little heavy for the June

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weather during the day, but at night it could get a shade nippy. I had on my heavy coat for that matter, and so did Jack, though mine was woolen and his was buckskin lined with wool. Jack also had on a hat made of buffalo hide that had fold down ear flaps. It was black as the devil's shadow and he always wore it, snow or shine, and that's how he got his name. He had been a mountain man and was now a hunter and sometime scout for the army, but though he looked the part, with beaded moccasins and such, he was always good about his grooming. He got rid of lice and fleas promptly in both hair and beard, and would bathe and soap up, wearing his red flannel long handles as he did. He liked to keep those clean too.

After the Comanche had gone on, we still laid there and didn't move. It was like we had been planted in that ground and was just waiting for a rain so we, as seeds, could burst up out of the ground, mounted and ready to ride.

After a time, Black Hat Jack let go of his horse's ear, and that horse stood right up, and Jack swung into the saddle. I did the same. We started trotting slowly in the direction we had been going, which wasn't the direction them Comanches was heading.

"That was close," I said.

"Comanches riding in a group like that are out to raid, and this is a good night for it. I got no idea where

they're going, but they got plans, or hopes, or maybe they're just traveling like us. Sometimes a Comanche can seem to be doing one thing and he's doing another. In other words, I know some shit about Comanche, but I don't know all the shit there is to know about them. No one does. Not even the Comanche themselves."

I, of course, knew all this, as I wasn't exactly attending my first goat roping. I had been all about the business of Indians before, but it was good to have Jack with me. He was a man you'd want at your back you got in a fight. He even treated me good, and him a white man. Or at least whiter than me. My figure was he was some Indian, and probably some Irish or Swede, and a whole lot of horse's ass. He was a hulk, had somewhat dark skin and those hard, sharp features of an Indian. I don't even know what his last name was. I'd never asked. I always called him Jack, and some called him Black Hat Jack, and time has washed his name from history a bit, as I tell this, but there was a time when he was as well known as Liver Eat'n Johnson, Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, and Buffalo Bill. Well, maybe not as much as Buffalo Bill.

Wasn't nobody as well known as he was, except maybe Wild Bill Hickok. I had known Wild Bill some and could appreciate that he wasn't all legend and no sand. Actually, same could be said of all them I mentioned, though Buffalo Bill was the least shy among us