

DANE COOLIDGE

THE TEXICAN

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Dane Coolidge The Texican

TO MY OLD FRIEND

DANE COOLIDGE

WHO HAS STAYED WITH ME THROUGH ALL MY TROUBLES

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED BY

THE AUTHOR

"Oh, out from old Missouri
I set me forth to roam
Indicted by a jury
For toling hawgs from home.

"With faithful Buck and Crowder
I crossed the Western plains
Then turned them loose in the Cow-Country
And waited for my gains.

"And now I'm called a Cattle King
With herds on many a stream —
And all from the natural increase
Of that faithful old ox-team."

The Song of Good-Eye.

CHAPTER I

VERDE CROSSING

THE languid quiet of midday lay upon the little road-house that stood guard by Verde Crossing. Old Crit and his wild Texas cowboys had left the corral at dawn, riding out mysteriously with their running irons in their chaps; the dogs had crawled under José Garcia's house and gone to sleep; to the north the Tonto trail stretched away vacant and only the brawling of the Verde as it rushed over the rocky ford suggested the savage struggle that was going on in the land. Within the adobe fort that served for both store and saloon Angevine Thorne, Old Crit's roustabout, sat tipped back in his chair breathing thoughtfully through a mouth-organ while a slender Mexican girl, lingering by the doorway, listened in childish adoration.

"Oyez, Babe," she pleaded, lisping in broken English, "sing 'Work iss Done' for me, *otra vez*, once more."

"Yore maw will be singin' a different tune if you don't hurry home with that lard," counselled Babe, but seeing that she was in no mood to depart he cleared his throat to sing. "You don't know how bad this makes me feel, Marcelina," he said, rubbing his hand over his bald spot and smoothing down his lank hair, "but I'll sing you the first verse – it ain't so bad." He stood up and turned his eyes to heaven; a seraphic smile came into his face, as if he saw the angels, and in a caressing tenor voice he began: —

"A jolly group of cowboys, discussing their plans one day
When one says, 'I will tell you something, boys, before I'm gone away.
I am a cowboy as you see, although I'm dressed in rags.
I used to be a wild one, a-taking on big jags.
I have a home, boys, a good one, you all know,
Although I have not seen it since long ago.
I am going back to Dixie, once for to see them all;
I am going back to Dixie to see my mother when work is done this Fall.

"After the round-ups are over, after the shipping is all done,
I am going to see my mother before my money is all gone.
My mother's heart is breaking, breaking for me, and that's all.
And with God's help I will see her when work is done this Fall."

A pause followed his last words and the singer limped in behind the counter. "Well, that's all, now," he said, waving her away, "go on home, child – can't you see it makes me feel powerful bad?"

The girl smiled with the sweet melancholy of her race. "I like to feel bad," she said. "Sing about the wind."

Angevine Thorne looked down upon her and shook his head sadly. "Ah, Marcelina," he said, "you are growing up to be a woman." Then he sighed and began again: —

"That very same night this poor cowboy went out to stand his guard.
The wind was blowing fiercely and the rain was falling hard.
The cattle they got frightened and ran in a mad stampede.
Poor boy, he tried to head them while riding at full speed.
Riding in the darkness so loudly he did shout,
A-trying to head the cattle, a-trying to turn them about,

When his saddled night-horse stumbled and upon him did fall.
Now the poor boy will not see his mother when work is done this Fall."

"And now the rest – how he died," breathed Marcelina, and once more the troubadour smiled.

"We picked him up so gently and laid him on his bed,
A-standing all around the poor cowboy, a-thinking he was dead,
When he opened wide his blue eyes, looked around and said:
'Boys, I think those are the last steers I shall ever head.
So Bill, you take my saddle, and Charley, you take my bed,
And George, you take my six-shooter and be sure that I am dead.
I am going to a new range, for I hear my Master's call,
And will not see my aged mother when work is done this Fall.

"After the round-ups were over, after the shipping was all done,
I was going to see my mother before my money was all gone.
My mother's heart is breaking, breaking for me and that's all,
And if God had spared my absence I would have seen her
When work was done this Fall."

A rapt silence, such as artists love, followed the last wailing cadence of the song; the stillness of the desert crept in upon them, broken only by the murmur of the river and an almost subterranean thud of hoofs; then with a jingle of spurs and the creaking of wet leather a horseman rode up and halted before the door. The water sloshed in his boots as he dismounted but he swung into the store with the grace of a cavalier – a young man, almost a boy, yet broad-shouldered and muscular, with features moulded to an expression of singular resolution and courage. A heavy pair of apron chaps – sure sign of Texas – cumbered his limbs and the wooden handle of a Colts forty-five showed above its holster in the right leg; for the rest, he wore a new jumper over his blue shirt, and a broad, high-crowned hat, without frills. As the stranger headed for the bar with business-like directness Angevine Thorne felt a sudden sense of awe, almost of fear, and he wondered for the instant if it was a hold-up; but the Texan simply dropped a quarter on the counter and motioned to a bottle.

"Two," he corrected, as Babe filled a single glass; and, shoving the second one towards his host, who eyed it with studied unconcern, the cowboy tossed off his own and looked around.

"What's the matter?" he inquired, as Babe moved thoughtfully away; "swore off? All right, you drink the chaser, then," and leaving the superfluous glass of water on the bar he drank the whiskey himself.

"Ughr! That's the real old tarantula-juice," he observed, as the fiery liquor made him shudder. "Since when did you swear off?"

"Six weeks," responded Babe, shortly. "How's Texas?"

"All right," replied the cowboy. "Did it git away with you?"

"Yep," returned the bar-keeper. "Don't like to talk about it – say, is they anybody left in Texas?"

The stranger gazed at him shrewdly for a moment, and a grim light came into his eye.

"Don't like to talk about it," he said, "but now you speak of it I know of one feller, for sure – and dam' badly left, too. May be around on crutches by now." He glanced out at his horse, which had just shaken itself under the saddle, and let his gaze wander to Marcelina.

"Pretty girls you have in this country," he remarked, turning a little sidewise to Babe, but watching her from beneath his hat. "Don't speak any English, I suppose?"

"Nope," replied Babe, sullenly, "her mother don't like cowboys. *Oyez, Marcelina, vaya se a su madre, chiquita!*" But though her mother was calling, the wilful Marcelina did not move. Like an

Aztec princess she stood silent and impassive, gazing out from beneath her dark lashes and waiting to catch some further word of praise from this dashing stranger. Undoubtedly, Marcelina was growing to be a woman.

"Name's Marcelina, eh?" soliloquized the cowboy, innocently. "Pity she can't savvy English – she's right pretty, for a Mex."

At that last unconscious word of derogation the regal beauty of Marcelina changed to a regal scorn and flashing her black eyes she strode towards the door like a tragic queen.

"*Gr-ringo!*" she hissed, turning upon him in the doorway, and seizing upon her pail of lard she scampered up the trail.

"Hell's fire!" exclaimed the *Tehanno*. "Did she understand what I said?"

"That's what," replied Babe, ungraciously, "you done queered yourself with her for life. She won't stand for nothin' against her people."

"Huh!" grumbled the newcomer, "that's what comes from drinkin' yore pisen whiskey. I begin to savvy now, Pardner, why you passed up that sheep-herder dope and took water."

He grinned sardonically, making a motion as of a pin-wheel twirling in his head, but the bar-keeper did not fall in with his jest. "Nothin' of the kind," he retorted. "W'y, boy, I could drink that whole bottle and walk a tight rope. I guess you don't know me – I'm Angevine Thorne, sometimes known as 'Babe'!" He threw out his chest, but the cowboy still looked puzzled.

"Did you come through Geronimo," inquired Babe, returning to the attack, "and never heard of me? Well then, Pardner, I'll have to put you wise – I'm Angevine Thorne, the Champion Booze-fighter of Arizona!" He dropped back to his pose and the cowboy contemplated him with grave curiosity.

"Mr. Thorne," he said, holding out his hand, "my name is Dalhart – Pecos Dalhart, from Texas – and I'm proud to make your acquaintance. Won't you have a drink on the strength of it?"

"Thank you just as much," replied Mr. Thorne, affably, "but I've sworn off. I've been the greatest booze-fighter of Arizona for twenty years, but I've sworn off. Never, never, will I let another drop of liquor pass my lips! I have been sentenced to the Geronimo jail for life for conspicuous drunkenness; I have passed my days in riotous living and my nights in the county jail, but the love of a good mother has followed me through it all and now I am going to quit! I'm saving up money to go home."

"Good for you," commented Pecos Dalhart, with the good-natured credulity which men confer upon drunkards, "stay with it! But say, not to change the subject at all, where can I git something to eat around here? I'm ganted down to a shadder."

"You're talkin' to the right man, son," returned Babe, hustling out from behind the bar. "I'm one of the best round-up cooks that ever mixed the sour-dough – in fact, I'm supposed to be cookin' for Crit's outfit right now and he just saws this bar-keep job off on me between times, so's to tempt me and git my money – when I git drunk, you savvy. He's a great feller, Old Crit – one of the boys up the river has got a penny Crit passed off on him in the dark for a dime and he swears to God that pore Injun's head is mashed flat, jest from bein' pinched so hard. Pinch? W'y, he's like a pet eagle I had one time – every time he lit on my arm he'd throw the hooks into me – couldn't help it – feet built that way. An' holler! He'd yell *Cree* so you c'd hear him a mile if anybody tried to steal his meat. Same way with Crit. Old Man Upton over here on the Tonto happened to brand one of his calves once and he's been hollerin' about that maverick ever since. You've heard of this war goin' on up here, hain't you? Well that's just Old Crit tryin' to git his revenge. If he's burnt one U calf he's burnt a thousand and they ain't cowboys enough in Texas to hold up his end, if it ever comes to fightin'. This here is the cow-camp – throw yore horse in the corral over there and I'll cook up a little chuck – jest about to eat, myse'f."

CHAPTER II

GOOD EYE, THE MAVERICK KING

ANGEVINE THORNE was still talking mean about his boss when the cowboys came stringing back from their day's riding, hungry as wolves. At the first dust sign in the northern pass the round-up cook had piled wood on the fire to make coals and as the iron-faced punchers rode up he hammered on a tin plate and yelled: —

"Grub pile! Come a-runnin'!"

They came, with the dirt of the branding still on their faces and beards and their hands smeared with blood. Each in turn glanced furtively at Pecos Dalhart, who sat off at one side contemplating the landscape, grabbed a plate and coffee cup and fell to without a word. Last of all came Isaac Crittenden, the Boss, tall, gaunt, and stooping, his head canted back to make up for the crook in his back and his one good eye roving about restlessly. As he rode in, Pecos glanced up and nodded and then continued his industry of drawing brands in the dust. The Boss, on his part, was no more cordial; but after the meal was finished he took another look at the newcomer, spoke a few words with the cook, and strolled over for a talk.

"Howdy, stranger," he began, with a quick glance at the brands in the sand; "travellin' far?"

"Nope," responded Pecos, "jest up the trail a piece."

A shadow crossed the Boss's face — Upton's was "up the trail a piece" — but he did not follow that lead.

"Know any of them irons?" he inquired, pointing to the sand-drawings, which represented half the big brands between the Panhandle and the Gila.

"Sure thing," replied the cowboy, "I've run 'em."

"And burnt 'em, too, eh?" put in Crittenden, shrewdly; but Pecos Dalhart was not as young as he looked.

"Not on your life," he countered, warily, "that don't go where I come from."

"Of course not, of course not," assented the cowman, instantly affecting a bluff honesty, "and it don't go here, neither, if any one should inquire. A man's brand is his property and he's got a right to it under the law. I've got a few cows here myself — brand IC on the ribs — and I'd like to see the blankety-blank that would burn it. I'd throw 'em in the pen, if it was the last act. Where you travellin'?"

He jerked this out as a sort of challenge, and the cowboy rose to his feet.

"Upton's," he said briefly.

"Upton's!" repeated Crittenden, "and what do you figure on doin' up there?"

"Well, I heard he was a good feller to work for — thought I'd take on for a cow hand."

Pecos stated the proposition judicially, but as he spoke he met the glowering glance of Crittenden with a cold and calculating eye. The cattle-stealing war between John Upton of Tonto Basin and Old Crit of Verde Crossing was no secret in Arizona, though the bloody Tewkesbury-Graham feud to the north took away from its spectacular interest and reduced it to the sordid level of commercialism. It was, in fact, a contest as to which could hire the nerviest cowboys and run off the most cattle, and Pecos Dalhart knew this as well as Isaac Crittenden. They stood and glared at each other for a minute, therefore, and then Old Crit broke loose.

"Whoever told you that John Upton is a good feller is a liar!" he stormed, bringing his fist down into his hand. "He's jest a common, low-down cow-thief, as I've told him to his face; and a man that will steal from his friends will do anything. Now, young man, before we go any farther I want to tell you what kind of a reptile John Upton is. Him and me run our cattle over in Tonto Basin for years, and if we'd ever have any question about a calf or a *orehanna* I'd always say, 'Well, take 'im, John,' jest like that, because I didn't want to have no racket with a friend. But they's some people, the more

you give in to 'em the more they run it over you, and they come a day when I had to put my foot down and say, 'No, that calf is mine,' and I put my iron on 'im right there. Now that calf was mine, you understand, and I branded him IC on the ribs, in the corral and before witnesses, accordin' to law, but about a week afterward when I come across that critter, John Upton had run a big U after my brand, makin' it ICU. Well, you may laugh, but that's no kind of a joke to play on a friend and I jest hopped down off'n my horse and run a figger 2 after it, making it ICU2; and about the time John Upton gits his funny ICU brand in the book I goes down and registers ICU2, goin' him one better. Now that's carryin' a joke pretty far, and I admit it, but Upton wasn't funnin'; that crooked-nose dastard had set out to steal my cows from the start and, seein' I'd euchered him on the ICU racket he went ahead and slapped a big J in front of my IC iron, and began branding my cows into what he called his Jay-Eye-See brand. Well, that settled it. I'm an honest man, but when a man steals cows from me I don't know any way to break even in this country but to steal back, and while he was putting his J's on my IC critters I jumped in and put IC2's on his U's until he was ready to quit. He's *afraid* to burn my brand now – he dassent do it – and so he's beginnin' to squeal because I've got 'im in the door; but say – " he beckoned with his head – "come over here by the corral, I want to talk to you."

Throughout this long tale of woe Pecos Dalhart had shown but scant interest, having heard it already, with variations, from Babe. According to that faithless individual Old Crit would steal fleas from a pet monkey and skin them for the hide and tallow; his favorite pastime, outside of cattle-rustling, being to take on cowboys and then hold out their pay, a rumor which caused Pecos Dalhart to regard him warily.

"Now say," began the Boss of Verde Crossing, as soon as they were out of hearing, "you don't need to go to that hoss-thief Upton in order to git a job. I'm always lookin' for the right kind of man, myself. Have you had any experience at this kind of thing?" He went through the dexterous pantomime of burning a brand through a blanket, but the cowboy only turned away scornfully.

"If I had I'd never be dam' fool enough to talk about it," he said.

"Oho!" observed Crit, rubbing the side of his nose slyly, "you're travelling for your health, are you?"

"No!" snarled the Texan. "The only people that are lookin' for me are tryin' to keep away from me, so you don't need to work that auger any deeper. Now, Mr. Crittenden, I'm a man of few words – what can I do for you?"

"We-ell," began the cowman, and once more he paused to meditate.

"Since you inquire," continued the cowboy, "I don't mind tellin' you that I'm travellin' for excitement – and to grab some money. If you've got any proposition that might appeal to me, spit it out – if not, they's no harm done."

"Well, wait a minute!" cried Old Crit, peevishly.

"My time's valuable," observed Pecos, sententiously. "You can trust me as good as I can trust you – mebbly better. I don't hear nobody accuse you of being sure pay, but if I take your job I want you to remember that I draw my money at the end of every month or else I collect and quit. Now if you can jar that proposition out of your system, I'll listen to it."

"I guess you'll do," said the cowman, as if quieting his own misgivings. "I've got a little special work that I want done on the quiet, markin' over some cows and calves. The man that does it will have to hide out up in that rough country and I'll pay him – forty dollars."

"Eighty," said the Texan.

"W'y, I'm only payin' my round-up hands thirty," protested Crittenden, weakly; "I'll give you fifty, though."

"Eighty, cash," said the cowboy. "You'll make that on the first ten calves."

"Sixty!" pleaded Crit.

"I want my money in my hand at the end of every month," added Pecos, and then there was a silence.

"All right," grumbled the cowman, at last, "but you understand I expect something to show for all that money. Now I want you to go around the corner thar like you was mad, 'n' saddle up and ride on, like you was goin' to Upton's. Then when it comes night I want you to ride back and camp out there by that big ironwood over against the mesa. As soon as me and the boys are out of sight in the mornin' my Mexican, Joe Garcia, will come out to you with some grub and take you over to Carrizo Springs, and I want you to *stay* there as long as I keep driftin' U cows in over the Peaks. Now look – here's your job – I want you to burn every one of them Upton cows over into a Wine-glass" – he made the figure in the sand – "and run it on the calves. Savvy? Well, git, then, and remember what I said about lookin' mad – I don't want my punchers to git onto this!"

CHAPTER III

THE DOUBLE CROSS

A MONTH passed, drearily; and while Ike Crittenden and his punchers gathered U cows on one side of the Four Peaks and shoved them over the summit Pecos Dalhart roped them as they came in to Carrizo Springs for water and doctored over their brands. The boys were following in the wake of Upton's round-up and the brands on the calves were freshly made and therefore easy to change, but it called for all of Pecos's professional skill to alter the cow brands to match. In order not to cause adverse comment it is necessary that the cow and calf shall show the same mark and since the mother's brand was always old and peeled Pecos called into requisition a square of wet gunny-sack or blanket to help give the antique effect. Spreading this over the old U he retraced the letter through it with a red-hot iron and then extended the brand downward until it formed a neat Wine-glass (), scalded rather than seared into the hair. Such a brand would never look fresh or peel, though it might grow dim with years, and after working the ear-marks over on cow and calf the transformation was complete. But while the results of his labor was a fine little bunch of Wine-glass cows hanging around Carrizo Springs, to Pecos himself, tying a knot in a buckskin string to count off each weary day, the month seemed interminable.

There was a sound of music in the store as he rode into Verde Crossing and he spurred forward, eager for the sight of a human face and a chance to sit down and talk. But at the thud of hoofs and the chink of spurs Angevine Thorne brought his song to an untimely close and, as Pecos dismounted, Marcelina Garcia slipped out through the door and started towards home, favoring him in passing with a haughty stare.

"Good-morning, Mex!" he exclaimed, bowing and touching his heart in an excess of gallantry, "fine large day, ain't it?"

"*Gringo!*" shrilled Marcelina, flaunting her dark hair, "*Pendejo Texano!* Ahhr!" She shuddered and thrust out her tongue defiantly, but as the "fool Texan" only laughed and clattered into the store she paused and edged back towards the door for further observations.

"W'y, hello, Angy!" cried Pecos, racking jovially up to the bar, "how's the champeen? Sober as a judge, hey? Well, gimme another shot of that snake-pisen and if it don't kill me I may swear off too, jest to be sociable! Say, what does 'pendayho' mean?" He glanced roguishly back towards the door, where he knew Marcelina was listening, and laughed when he got the translation.

"Dam' fool, hey? Well, I thought it was something like that – kinder p'lite and lady-like, you know. Marcelina hung that on me as I come in, but I called her a Mex and I'll stand by it. Where's Old Crit?"

Angevine Thorne drew himself up and regarded the cowboy with grave displeasure.

"Mr. Crittenden is out riding," he said, "and I'll thank you not to refer to the nativity of my friend, Miss Garcia."

"Certainly not – to be sure!" protested Pecos Dalhart. "If you will jest kindly give me an introduction to the young lady I'll –"

"See you in hell first," broke in Angy, with asperity. "Where you been all the time?"

"Ramblin' around, ramblin' around," answered Pecos, waving his hand vaguely. "What's the chances for a little music and song to while the time away? I'm lonely as a dog."

"Joe Garcia tells me he's been packin' grub out to you at Carrizo – what you been doin' in that God-forsaken hole?"

"Yore friend Joe talks too much," observed Pecos, briefly, "and I reckon *you* tell everything you know, don't you? Well and good, then, I'll keep you out of trouble with the Boss by listenin' to what you know already. Can you sing the 'Ranger,' or 'California Joe'? No? Can't even sing 'Kansas,'

can you? Well, it's too bad about you, but I'm going to show you that they's another canary bird on the Verde, and he can sure sing." With this declaration Pecos leaned back against the bar, squared his shoulders, and in a voice which had many a time carolled to a thousand head of cattle burst into a boastful song.

"Ooh, I can take the wildest bronco
Of the wild and woolly West;
I can back him, I can ride him,
Let him do his level best.
I can handle any creature
Ever wore a coat of hair,
And I had a lively tussle
With a tarnal grizzly bear."

He glanced slyly towards the door, threw out his chest, and essayed once more to attract the attention of his girl, if she was anywhere within a mile.

"Ooh, I can rope and tie a long-horn,
Of the wildest Texas brand,
And in any disagreement,
I can play a leading hand.
I – "

A dark mass of hair shading a pair of eyes as black and inquisitive as a chipmunk's appeared suddenly in the vacant square of the doorway and instantly the bold cowboy stopped his song.

"Good-morning, Miss Garcia," he said, bowing low, "won't you come in – now, Angy, do your duty or I'll beat you to death!" At this hasty aside Angevine Thorne did the honors, though with a bad grace.

"Marcelina, this is Mr. Dalhart – you better go home now, your mother's callin' you."

"I will not shake hands with a *Texano*!" pronounced Marcelina, stepping into the open and folding her arms disdainfully.

"Come on in then and hear the music," suggested Pecos, peaceably.

"Pah! The *Tehannos* sing like coyotes!" cried Marcelina, twisting up her lips in derision. "They are bad, bad men — *mi madre* say so. No, I go home – and when you are gone Babe will sing *sweet* moosic for me." She bowed, with a little smile for Babe, and glided through the doorway; and though he lingered about until Old Crit came in, Pecos Dalhart failed to catch another glimpse of this new queen of his heart.

It was dusk when Crittenden rode into camp, and at sight of Pecos Dalhart sitting by the fire the cowman's drawn face, pinched by hunger and hard riding, puckered up into a knot.

"What you doin' down here?" he demanded, when he had beckoned him to one side.

"Come down for my pay," responded the cowboy, briefly.

"Your pay," fumed Crittenden, "your pay! What do you need with money up at Carrizo? Say, have you been gittin' many?" he whispered, eagerly. "Have they been comin' in on you?"

"Sure thing. Branded forty-two cows, thirty calves, and sixteen twos. But how about it – do I draw?"

"Only thirty calves! W'y, what in the world have you been doin'? I could pick up that many mavericks on the open range. You must've been layin' down under a tree!"

"That's right," agreed Pecos, "and talkin' to myse'f, I was that lonely. But if you'll kindly fork over that eighty that's comin' to me we'll call it square, all the same – I only branded about a thousand dollars' worth of cows for you."

"Eighty dollars!" cried Old Crit. "W'y, I never agreed to nothin' like that – I said I'd give you sixty. But I'll tell you what I'll do," he added, quickly, "I'll make it eighty if you'll go up there for another month."

"After I git my first month's pay they will be time to discuss that," replied Pecos Dalhart, and after a thousand protestations the cowman finally went down into his overalls and produced the money.

"Now what about next month?" he demanded, sharply.

"Nope," said Pecos, pocketing his eighty dollars, "too lonely – too much trouble collectin' my pay – don't like the job."

"Give you eighty dollars," urged Crit, "that's a heap o' money for one month."

"Nope, this'll last me a while – so long." He started toward the corral but Crittenden caught him by the arm instantly.

"Here, wait a minute," he rasped, "what's the matter with you anyhow? I'm ridin' early and late on my round-up and dependin' on you to finish this job up! You ain't goin' to quit me right in the middle of it, are you?"

"That's what," returned Pecos. "I ain't so particular about brandin' a maverick once in a while – every cowman does that – but this idee of stealin' from a man you never saw goes agin' me. I git to thinkin' about it, an' it ain't right!"

"Aw, sho, sho, boy," protested Crittenden, "you don't want to mind a little thing like that – I thought you was a man with nerve. Now here, I can't stop to go out there now and I want to git that work finished up – I'll give you *eight-y-five dol-lars* to stay another month! This man Upton is the biggest cow-thief in the country," he went on, as Pecos shook his head, "it ain't stealin' to rob a thief, is it?"

"Oh, ain't it?" inquired the cow-puncher, gravely, and he smiled grimly to himself as Crittenden endeavored to set his mind at rest. "All right then," he said, cutting short the cowman's labored justification of cattle-rustling, "I'll go you – for a hundred."

"A hundred!" repeated Crittenden, aghast. "Well, for – all right, all right," he cried, as Pecos moved impatiently away. "Now you pull out of here the way you did before and I'll have Joe pack you over some more grub. A hundred dollars," he murmured, shaking his head at the thought, "that boy will ruin me."

Early the next morning Pecos Dalhart rode slowly up the trail that led to Carrizo Springs and the deserted country beyond, a land where as yet the cowmen had not extended their sway. To his left rose the sharp granite spires of the Four Peaks, to the right gleamed the silvery thread of the Salagua, that mighty river that flowed in from the east; and all the country between was a jumble of cliffs and buttes and ridges and black cañons, leading from the mountains to the river.

"So it ain't no crime to rob a thief, hey?" he muttered, when, topping the last ridge, he gazed down at Carrizo Springs and across at the white-worn trail which led into the wilderness beyond. "Well, if that's the case I might as well search out that country over there and git busy on Old Crit. A man's a dam' fool to steal a thousand dollars' worth of cattle and only git eighty dollars for it."

Three days later, riding by a trail that led ever to the east, Pecos came upon a narrow valley filled with cottonwoods and wild walnuts and echoing to the music of running water. A fine brook, flowing down from the brushy heights of the Peaks, leaped and tumbled over the boulders and disappeared through a narrow cleft below, where the two black walls drew together until they seemed almost to block the cañon. As Pecos rode cautiously down the creek-bed he jumped a bunch of cattle from the shade of the alders and, spurring after them as they shambled off, he saw that they bore the familiar U, even to the young calves. Undoubtedly they belonged to the same bunch that he had been working on

over at Carrizo Springs – the fresh-branded calves and U cows that Crittenden was shoving over the Peaks. Riding farther down the gulch Pecos came upon a cave at the base of the overhanging cliff. In time past the Indians had camped there, but the ashes of their fires were bedded and only their crude pictures on the smoke-grimed rocks remained to tell the tale. It was the cave of Lost Dog Cañon.

On their trip over the simple-minded José had spoken of a lost cañon somewhere over in the mountains but Pecos had never dreamed of finding a paradise like this. According to José the Cañon of Perro Perdido was haunted by a spirit which was *muy malo*, throwing down great rocks from the sides of the cañon and howling like a lost dog at night, but in the broad light of noonday Pecos was undaunted and he rode on into the tunnel-like box cañon until it pinched down to a mere cleft. It was an eerie place, but there never was a ghost yet that threw a track like a cow and, led on by their familiar foot-prints among the rocks, Pecos forged ahead until he stepped out suddenly into a new world. Behind him the pent and overhanging walls shut out the light of day but here the sun was shining into a deep valley where in exquisite miniature lay parks and grassy meadows, while cathedral spires of limestone, rising from the cañon floor, joined their mighty flanks to the rim-rock which shut the whole space in. The glittering waters of the Salagua, far below, marked a natural barrier to the south and as Pecos Dalhart looked at the narrow trail which had brought him in he began instinctively to figure on a drift fence, to close the entrance to the pocket, and make the hidden valley a mile-wide pasture and corral. All nature seemed conspiring to make him a cattle-rustler and this hidden pasture, with its grass and water and the gate opening at his very door, cast the die. Two days later he moved his camp to Lost Dog Cañon and flew at the fence with feverish energy. Within a week he had the box cañon barricaded from wall to wall and then, as the U cows came down to the creek to drink, he roped them, worked over their brands, and threw them into his new pasture. By this time, with his tongue in his cheek, he attached a circle instead of a bar to the U and named his new brand the Monkey-wrench (). If he had any qualms as to the morality of this last act Pecos did not let them interfere with his industry in any way. The ethics of the cattle business will not stand too stern a scrutiny, even at this late date, and the joke on Old Crit was so primordial in its duplicity that it obscured the finer moral issues. Like many another cowman of those early days Pecos Dalhart had made his start with the running iron and with luck and judgment he might yet be a cattle king.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHOW-DOWN

IT is a great sensation to feel that you are a prospective cattle king, but somehow when Pecos Dalhart rode back to Verde Crossing his accustomed gaiety had fled. There were no bows and smiles for Marcelina, no wordy exchanges with the garrulous Babe – there is a difference, after all, between stealing cows for eighty dollars a month and stealing for yourself, and while a moralist might fail to see the distinction it showed in its effect on Pecos's spirits.

"I'm goin' down to Geronimo," he grumbled, after an uneasy hour at the store, during which he had tried in vain the cheering power of whiskey; "you can tell Crit I'll be back to-morrow night for my time," and without volunteering any further information he rode down to the river, plunged across the rocky ford and was swallowed up in the desert. Two days later he returned, red-eyed and taciturn, and to all Babe's inquiries he observed that the Geronimo saloons were the worst deadfalls west of the Rio Grande, for a certainty. His mood did not improve by waiting, and when Crittenden finally rode in after his long day's work he demanded his money so brusquely that even that old-timer was startled.

"Well, sho, sho, boy," he soothed, "don't git excited over nothin'! To be sure I'll pay you your money." He went down into his overalls with commendable promptitude, but Pecos only watched him in surly silence. Something in his pose seemed to impress the shifty cowman; he drew forth a roll of bills and began to count them out, reluctantly. "Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, a hundred – there it is – now what's all this racket about?"

"Nothin'," responded Pecos, stowing away the greenbacks, "but you can git somebody else to finish up that job."

"Well, here," snapped the cowman, warming up a little as Dalhart cooled down, "don't I git no accountin' for this month's work? How many did you brand and what you quittin' for?"

"I branded sixty-seven cows, fifty-five calves, and thirty two-year-olds," replied the cowboy, boldly, and Crittenden, not knowing in what iron they were branded, chuckled gleefully.

"Umm," he murmured, "wall, say now, that ain't so bad. Old Upton will make a buck-jump at the moon when he finds this out. But lookee here, boy, I'm goin' to be driftin' cows into that country for another month yet, and that'll be as long as we can brand and ear-mark on account of the flies in June. Now I want to make a dicker with you for jest one more month and I'll be generous with you – how about a hundred and ten – that's pretty nigh four months' wages for a cow-punch!"

"No, I've done quit!" protested Pecos, vigorously. "Steal your own cattle! When I want to go into the rustlin' business I'll rustle for myse'f!"

"Jest one more month," insisted Old Crit, "I'll give you a hundred and twenty!"

The cowboy looked at him a minute and smiled sneeringly. "Well, bein' as yore money seems to be burnin' a hole in yore pocket," he said, "I guess I'll have to take it away from you, but I'll tell you right now I don't approve of this cow-stealin' – it's likely to git a man into trouble!"

"All right, all right," said Crittenden, making haste to clinch the bargain, "a hundred and twenty, then; and they hain't nobody ever been convicted in Geronimo County yet for stealin' cows, so you don't need to worry none. Pull your freight, now, and I'll be over later on to see what you've done."

As Pecos Dalhart and José Garcia rode up the Carrizo trail the next morning driving their pack animals before them, the conversation was chiefly between José and his mules. Pecos did not approve of Mexicans and José did not approve of Pecos – he had been making love to his girl, Marcelina. But about a mile out of Verde Crossing they came across an object that was worthy of comment – an old cow and her calf, both so curiously marked that no cowboy could pass them unnoticed. The cow was covered from shoulder to flank with minute red and white spots and, plastered generously across her face, was a variegated blotch of the creamy dun color peculiar to Chihuahua stock. The

calf was like its mother, even to the dun face and spotted neck and ears, but she, on account of her brand and ear-marks, held the entire attention of the Texan.

"What brand you call that, Joe?" he inquired, as the old cow contemplated them from the hillside.

"*Mi fiero!*" exclaimed the Mexican, proudly tapping himself on the chest.

"Oh, it's yourn, is it?" commented Pecos. "Looks like an Injun arrer struck by lightnin', don't it? Well, these Mexican irons are too many for me – I see you got winders in her ears!"

"You bet," assented Joe, "that my mark, un *ventano*, un slash, un *anzuelo!*"

"A window, a slash, and an underbit, hey – you don't figure on anybody stealin' *her*, unless they cut 'er ears off, do you? How many cows you got?"

"Oh, six – eight," answered José, pride of possession loosening up his tongue, "this good milk cow."

"Milk cow, eh?" repeated Pecos, and then he stopped and pondered a while. Only the day before he had recorded his Monkey-wrench brand at Geronimo, although he did not have an honestly acquired cow in the world – here was a chance to cover his hand. "How much you take for cow, Joe?" he asked. "I like milk, my camp."

"You take calf too?" inquired the Mexican, shrewdly.

"Sure," said Pecos, "give you twenty dollars for the cow and ten for the calf!" He drew a roll of bills from his pocket and began to peel them off temptingly.

"You geev twenty-five for cow," suggested Joe, his slow wits beginning to move at the sight of real money.

"All right," said Pecos, briskly, "I'll give you twenty-five for the cow and five for the calf – but you have to give me bill of sale."

"*Stawano*," assented the Mexican, "and I vent her when we geet to camp, too. Dam' Ol' Crit," he observed, as he pocketed the money, "I work for heem long time – he make me take trade een store – all time in debt!"

He threw the spotted cow and calf in with the pack animals and when they had arrived at Carrizo Springs he roped her and, true to his promise, ran his Indian arrow brand on her shoulder, thus making her a living document and memorandum of sale. In the cow country that "vent" on the shoulder is the only bill of sale required, but Pecos drew up a formal paper giving the ear-marks and brand, and after Joe had signed it and gone he roped Old Funny-face again and ran a Monkey-wrench on her ribs beneath the original mark, all of which is strictly according to law. After that he herded her close, letting the little Monkey-wrench calf have all the milk, while he waited expectantly for Old Crit to drop in.

At the beginning of his long month of waiting Pecos Dalhart was watchful and conservative. He branded up all the cattle that had drifted into Lost Dog Cañon, drove them down into his hidden pasture and closed the breach in his drift fence – then he moved back to Carrizo and went soberly about his work. Old Funny-face and her spotted calf were the only Monkey-wrench cows at Carrizo Springs and though he held a bill of sale for them Pecos was finally compelled to drive them over the trail to his Lost Dog pasture in order to keep them from sneaking back home to Verde Crossing and tipping his hand prematurely to Isaac Crittenden. He was a hard man, Old Crit, especially when his pocket-book was touched, and Pecos looked for a gunplay when the Boss finally found him out; but if Crittenden got wind of his duplicity in advance he might come over with all his Texas cowboys and wipe Mr. Pecos Dalhart off the map. So at the start he was careful, running nothing but Wine-glasses on the U cows that still came drifting in over the mountains, but as the days went by and his courage mounted up against the time when he was to face Old Crit a spirit of bravado crept in on him and made him over-bold. All he wanted now was a show-down, and he wanted it quick – one Monkey-wrench brand would tell the story. With a sardonic grin Pecos put his rope on a likely young maverick and burned a Monkey-wrench on his ribs; then, in order that there should be no mistake, he

worked over the brand on a U cow and put his iron on the calf. As the last days of the month dragged by and the fighting spirit within him clamored for action he threw caution to the winds, running a Monkey-wrench on every cow-brute he caught.

For weeks Pecos had watched the brow of the hill where the Verde trail came in, and he wore his six-shooter constantly, even at his branding, but when at last Crittenden finally rode in on him he was so intent about his work that he almost overlooked him. Only the fidgeting of his horse, which was holding the rope taut on a big U cow that he had strung out, saved him from being surprised at his task and taken at a disadvantage. One glance was enough – it was Crit, and he was alone. Pecos stood up and looked at him as he came slowly down the hill – then, as the cow struggled to get up, he seized his running iron from the fire, spread a wet sack over her brand, and burned a big Monkey-wrench through the steaming cloth.

"Hello!" hailed the cowman, spurring eagerly in on him. "Are you catchin' many?"

"Oodles of 'em!" answered Pecos, loosening his tie-down strings and swinging up on his horse. "Git up there, cow, and show yourse'f off to the Boss!" He slackened the taut reata that was fastened around her hind feet and as the old cow sprang up, shaking off the sack, the smoking Monkey-wrench on her ribs stood out like hand-writing on the wall.

"Wh-what's that?" gasped Crit, staring at the mark. "I thought I told you to run a Wine-glass!"

"That's right," assented Pecos, dropping his hand to his hip, "but I got tired of runnin' your old brand, so I studied out a little improvement!"

He laughed hectoringly as he spoke and the realization of the fraud that had been perpetrated upon him made Crittenden reel in the saddle.

"Hev – hev you recorded that brand?" he demanded, tensely.

"I certainly have," responded Pecos, "and I didn't see no Wine-glass registered before me, neither. If I'd been real foxy, like some people I know, I would've put that in the book too and euchered you out of the whole bunch. But I'm good-natured, Mr. Crittenden, and bein' as I was takin' your money I branded most of these U cows in the Wine-glass. I hope you'll be able to take this reasonable."

"Reasonable!" screamed Crittenden, "reasonable! W'y, if I wasn't the most reasonable man on earth I'd shoot you so full of lead it'd take a wagon to haul you to the graveyard. But you don't know who you're up against, boy, if you think you can fool me like this – the man don't live that can give Ike Crittenden the double cross. I been in the business too long. Now I give you jest five minutes to make me out a bill of sale for your entire brand, whatever you call it. Ef you *don't*– "

He rose up threateningly in his stirrups and his one good eye glared balefully, but Pecos had been expecting something like this for a month or more and he did not weaken.

"Go ahead," he said, "my brand is the Monkey-wrench; I come by it as honest as you come by the Wine-glass, and I'll fight for it. If you crowd me too hard, I'll shoot; and if you try to run me out of the country I'll give the whole snap away to Upton."

"W'y, you son of a – " began the cowman malignantly, but he did not specify. Pecos's ever-ready pistol was out and balanced in his hand.

"That'll do, Mr. Crittenden," he said, edging his horse in closer. "I never took that off o' nobody yet, and 'tain't likely I'll begin with you. If you're lookin' for trouble you'll find I can accommodate you, any time – but listen to reason, now. This ain't the first time a cowman has got himse'f into trouble by hirin' somebody else to do his stealin' for him – I've been around some, and I know. But they ain't no use of us fightin' each other – we're both in the same line of business. You leave me alone and I'll keep shut about this – is it a go?"

The fires of inextinguishable hate were burning in Old Crit's eye and his jaw trembled as he tried to talk.

"Young man," he began, wagging a warning finger at his enemy, "young man – " He paused and cursed to himself fervently. "How much will you take for your brand?" he cried, trying to curb his wrath, "and agree to quit the country?"

"I ain't that kind of a hold-up," replied Pecos, promptly. "I like this country and I'm goin' to live here. They's two or three hundred head of cattle running in here that I branded for you for a hundred and eighty dollars. They're worth two or three thousand. I've got a little bunch myself that I picked up on the side, when I wasn't stealin' for you. Now all I ask is to be left alone, and I'll do the same by you. Is it a go?"

The cold light of reason came into Crittenden's fiery orb and glittered like the hard finish of an agate.

"Well," he said, grudgingly, "well – oh hell, yes!" He urged his horse sullenly up the hill. "Another one of them smart Texicans," he muttered, "but I'll cure him of suckin' eggs before I'm through with 'im."

CHAPTER V

LOST DOG CAÑON

THE silence of absolute loneliness lay upon Lost Dog Cañon like a pall and to Pecos Dalhart, sprawling in the door of his cave, it seemed as if mysterious voices were murmuring to each other behind the hollow gurgling of the creek. From far down the cañon the bawling of cows, chafing against the drift fence, echoed with dreary persistence among the cliffs, and the deep subterranean rumbling which gave the place its bad name broke in upon his meditations like the stirring of some uneasy devil confined below. On the rim of the black cañon wall that rose against him a flock of buzzards sat in a tawdry row, preening their rusty feathers or hopping awkwardly about in petty, ineffectual quarrels – as shabby a set of loafers as ever basked in the sun. For a week Pecos had idled about his cave, now building pole houses to protect his provisions from the rats, now going out to the point to watch the Verde trail, until the emptiness of it had maddened him. At first he had looked for trouble – the veiled treachery of some gun-man, happening in on him accidentally, or an armed attack from Old Crit's cowboys – but now he would welcome the appearance of Crit himself. In action Pecos could trust his nerves absolutely, but he chafed at delay like a spirited horse that frets constantly at the bit. If it was to be a game of waiting Crittenden had won already. Pecos threw away his cigarette impatiently and hurried down the cañon to catch his horse.

"Where's Old Crit?" he demanded when, after a long ride, he stalked defiantly into the store at Verde Crossing.

"Damfino," replied Babe, looking up from a newspaper he was reading, "gone down to Geronimo, I guess."

"Is he lookin' for me?" inquired Pecos, guardedly.

"W'y, not so's you notice it," answered the bar-keeper, easily. "It'd be the first case on record, I reckon, bein' as he owes you money. In fact, until you collect your last month's pay the chances are good that you'll be lookin' for him. Did you see the new sign over the door?"

"No," said Pecos, "what is it?"

"Post Office!" replied Babe, proudly. "Yes, sir, Old Good Eye has certainly knocked the persimmon this time and put Verde Crossing on the map. They's lots of ranchers up and down the river – and you, of course, over there at Carrizo – and Crit figured it out some time ago that if he could git 'em to come here for their mail he'd catch their trade in whiskey; so what does he do but apply to the Post Office Department for a mail route from here to Geronimo and bid in the contract himself! Has to send Joe down about once a week, anyhow, you understand, and he might as well git the Government to pay for it. So you can write home to your folks now to send your mail to Verde Crossing – tell your girl too, because if we don't git ten letters a week we lose our route."

Pecos twisted uneasily on his chair. Like many another good Texan he was not writing home.

"Ain't got no girl," he protested, blushing beneath his tan.

"No?" said Angy, "well that's good news for Marcelina – she was inquirin' about you the other day. But say, here's some advertisements in this paper that might interest you. Umm – lemme see, now – 'Genuine Diamonds, rings, earrings, and brooches, dollar forty-eight a piece, to introduce our new line.' That's pretty cheap, ain't it! 'Always acceptable to a lady,' it says. Yes, if you don't want 'em yourself you can give 'em away, see? You know, I'm tryin' to git the fellers around here interested, so's they'll write more letters."

He threw this out for a feeler and Pecos responded nobly. "Well, go ahead and order me them rings and earrings," he said, "I'm no cheap sport. What else you got that's good?"

Angevine Thorne dropped his paper and reached stealthily for a large mail-order catalogue on the counter. "Aprons, bath-tubs, curtains, dishes," he read, running his finger down the index.

"Here's some silk handkerchiefs that might suit you; 'green, red, blue, and yaller, sixty cents each; with embroidered initials, twenty cents extra."

"I'll go you!" cried the cowboy, looking over his shoulder. "Gimme half a dozen of them red ones – no squaw colors for me – and say, lemme look at them aprons."

"Aprons!" yelled Angy. "Well – what – the –"

"Aw, shut up!" snarled Pecos, blushing furiously. "Can't you take a joke? Here, gimme that catalogue – you ain't the only man on the Verde that can read and write – I've had some schoolin' myself!"

He retired to a dark corner with the "poor man's enemy" and pored over it laboriously, scrawling from time to time upon an order blank which Angy had thoughtfully provided. At last the deed was done, all but adding up the total, and after an abortive try or two the cowboy slipped in a twenty-dollar bill and wrote: "Giv me the rest in blue hankerchefs branded M." Then he sealed and directed the letter and called on Babe for a drink.

"How long before I'll git them things?" he inquired, his mind still heated with visions of aprons, jewelry, and blue handkerchiefs, branded M, – "two or three weeks? Well, I'll be down before then – they might come sooner. Where's all the punchers?"

"Oh, they're down in Geronimo, gettin' drunk. Round-up's over, now, and Crit laid 'em off. Gittin' kinder lonely around here."

"Lonely!" echoed Pecos. "Well, if you call this lonely you ought to be out in Lost Dog Cañon, where I am. They's nothin' stirrin' there but the turkey-buzzards – I'm gittin' the willies already, jest from listenin' to myself think. Say, come on out and see me sometime, can't you?"

"Nope," said Babe, "if you knew all the things that Crit expects me to do in a day you'd wonder how I git time to shave. But say, what you doin' out there, if it's a fair question?"

"Who – me? Oh, I've made me a little camp over in that cave and I'm catchin' them wild cattle that ooze along the creek." He tried to make it as matter-of-fact as possible, but Angevine Thorne knew better.

"Yes, I've heard of them wild cows," he drawled, slowly closing one eye, "the boys've been driftin' 'em over the Peaks for two months. Funny how they was all born with a U on the ribs, ain't it?"

"Sure, but they's always some things you can't explain in a cow country," observed Pecos, philosophically. "Did Crit tell you anything about his new iron? No? Called the Wine-glass – in the brand book by this time, I reckon."

"Aha! I see – I see!" nodded Angy. "Well, Old Good Eye wants to go easy on this moonlightin' – we've got a new sheriff down here in Geronimo now – Boone Morgan – and he was elected to put the fear of God into the hearts of these cowmen and make 'em respect the law. W'y, Crit won't even pay his taxes, he's that ornery. When the Geronimo tax-collector shows up he says his cows all run over in Tonto County; and when the Tonto man finally made a long trip down here Crit told *him* his cows all ran in Geronimo County, all but a hundred head or so, and John Upton had stole them. The tax-collectors have practically give up tryin' to do anything up here in the mountains – the mileage of the assessor and collector eats up all the profits to the county, and it's easier to turn these cowmen loose than it is to follow 'em up. This here Geronimo man jumped all over Crit last time he was up here, but Crit just laughed at him. 'Well,' he says, 'if you don't like the figgers I give, you better go out on the range and count them cows yourself, you're so smart.' And what could the poor man do? It'd cost more to round up Old Crit's cattle than the taxes would come to in a lifetime. But you want to look out, boy," continued Angy earnestly, "how you monkey around with them U cattle – Boone Morgan is an old-timer in these parts and he's likely to come over the hill some day and catch you in the act."

"Old Crit says they never was a man sent up in this county yet for stealin' cattle," ventured Pecos, lamely.

"Sure not," assented Angevine Thorne, "but they's been a whole lot of 'em killed for it! I don't suppose he mentioned that. Have you heard about this Tewkesbury-Graham war that's goin' on

up in Pleasant Valley? That all started over rustlin' cattle, and they's over sixty men killed already and everybody hidin' out like thieves. A couple of Crit's bad punchers came down through there from the Hash-knife and they said it was too crude for them – everybody fightin' from ambush and killin' men, women, and children. I tell you, it's got the country stirred up turrible – that's how come Boone Morgan was elected sheriff. The people down in Geronimo figured out if they didn't stop this stealin' and rustlin' and alterin' brands pretty soon, Old Crit and Upton would lock horns – or some of these other cowmen up here in the mountains – and the county would go bankrupt like Tonto is, with sheriff's fees and murder trials. No, sir, they ain't been enough law up here on the Verde to intimidate a jackrabbit so far – it's all down there in Geronimo, where they give me that life sentence for conspicuous drunkenness – but you want to keep your ear to the ground, boy, because you're goin' to hear something drap!"

"What d'ye think's goin' to happen, Babe?" asked the cowboy, uneasily. "Old Crit can't be scared very bad – he's laid off all his punchers."

"Huh! you don't know Crit as well as I do," commented Babe. "Don't you know those punchers would've quit anyhow, as soon as they got their pay? He does that every year – lays 'em off and then goes down to Geronimo about the time they're broke, and half of 'em in jail, mebbby, and bails 'em out. He'll have four or five of 'em around here all summer, workin' for nothin' until the fall round-up comes off. I tell you, that man'll skin a flea anytime for the hide and taller. You want to keep out of debt to him or he'll make you into a Mexican peon, like Joe Garcia over here. Joe's been his corral boss and teamster for four years now and I guess they's a hundred dollars against him on the books, right now. Will drink a little whiskey once in a while, you know, like all the rest of us, and the Señora keeps sendin' over for sugar and coffee and grub, and somehow or other, Joe is always payin' for a dead horse. Wouldn't be a Mexican, though," observed Babe, philosophically, "if he wasn't in debt to the store. A Mexican ain't happy until he's in the hole a hundred or so – then he can lay back and sojer on his job and the boss is afraid to fire 'im. There's no use of his havin' anything, anyhow – his relatives would eat 'im out of house and home in a minute. There was a Mexican down the river here won the grand prize in a lottery and his relatives come overland from as far as Sonora to help him spend the money. Inside of a month he was drivin' a wood-wagon again in order to git up a little grub. He was a big man while it lasted – open house day and night, *fiestas* and *bailles* and a string band to accompany him wherever he went – but when it was all over old Juan couldn't buy a pint of whiskey on credit if he was snake-bit. They're a great people, for sure."

"That's right," assented Pecos, absently, "but say, I reckon I'll be goin'." The social qualities of the Spanish-Americans did not interest him just then – he was thinking about Boone Morgan. "Gimme a dollar's worth of smoking tobacco and a box of forty-fives and I'll hit the road."

"There's one thing more you forgot," suggested Angevine Thorne, as he wrapped up the purchases.

"What – Marcelina?" ventured Pecos, faintly.

"Naw – your *mail*!" cried Angy, scornfully, and dipping down into a cracker box he brought out a paper on the yellow wrapper of which was printed "Pecos Dalhart, Verde Crossing, Ariz."

"I never subscribed for no paper!" protested Pecos, turning it over suspiciously. "Here – I don't want it."

"Ump-umm," grunted Angy, smiling mysteriously, "take it along. All the boys git one. You can read it out in camp. Well, if you're goin' to be bull-headed about it I'll tell you. Crit subscribed for it for every man in Verde – only cost two-bits a year. Got to build up this mail route somehow, you know. It's called the *Voice of Reason* and it's against the capitalistic classes."

"The which?" inquired Pecos, patiently.

"Aw, against rich fellers – these sharks like Old Crit that's crushin' the life out of the common people. That's the paper I was showin' you – where they was advertisin' diamonds for a dollar forty-eight a piece."

"Oh," said Pecos, thrusting it into his chaps, "why didn't you say so before? Sure, I'll read it!"

CHAPTER VI

"THE VOICE OF REASON"

THE fierce heat of summer fell suddenly upon Lost Dog Cañon and all the Verde country – the prolonged heat which hatches flies by the million and puts an end to ear-marking and branding. Until the cool weather of October laid them and made it possible to heal a wound there was nothing for Pecos to do but doctor a few sore ears and read the *Voice of Reason*. Although he had spent most of his life in the saddle the school-teacher back on the Pecos had managed to corral him long enough to beat the three R's into him and, being still young, he had not yet had time to forget them. Only twenty summers had passed over his head, so far, and he was a man only in stature and the hard experience of his craft. He was a good Texan – born a Democrat and taught to love whiskey and hate Mexicans – but so far his mind was guiltless of social theory. That there was something in the world that kept a poor man down he knew, vaguely; but never, until the *Voice of Reason* brought it to his attention, had he heard of the conspiracy of wealth or the crime of government. Not until, sprawling at the door of his cave, he mumbled over the full-mouthed invective of that periodical had he realized what a poor, puny creature a wage-slave really was, and when he read of the legalized robbery which went on under the name of law his young blood boiled in revolt. The suppression of strikes by Pinkertons, the calling out of the State Militia to shoot down citizens, the blacklisting of miners, and the general oppression of workingmen was all far away and academic to him – the thing that gripped and held him was an article on the fee system, under which officers of the law arrest all transient citizens who are unfortunate enough to be poor, and judges condemn them in order to gain a fee.

"*Think, Slave, Think!*" it began. "You may be the next innocent man to be thrown into some vile and vermin-infested county-jail to swell the income of the bloated minions who fatten upon the misery of the poor!"

Pecos had no difficulty in thinking. Like many another man of wandering habits he had already tasted the bitterness of "ten dollars or ten days." The hyenas of the law had gathered him in while he was innocently walking down the railroad track and a low-browed justice of the peace without asking any useless questions had sentenced him to jail for vagrancy. Ten days of brooding and hard fare had not sweetened his disposition any and he had stepped free with the firm determination to wreak a notable revenge, but as the sheriff thoughtfully kept his six-shooter Pecos had been compelled to postpone that exposition of popular justice. Nevertheless the details of his wrongs were still fresh in his mind, and when he learned from the *Voice of Reason* that the constable and judge had made him all that trouble for an aggregate fee of six dollars Pecos was ready to oppose all law, in whatsoever form it might appear, with summary violence. And as for the capitalistic classes – well, Pecos determined to collect his last month's pay from Old Crit if he had to take it out of his hide.

When next he rode into Verde Crossing the hang-dog look which had possessed Pecos Dalhart since he turned rustler was displaced by a purposeful frown. He rolled truculently in the saddle as he came down the middle of the road, and wasted no time with preliminaries.

"Where's that blankety-blank Old Crit?" he demanded, racking into the store with his hand on his hip.

"Gone down to Geronimo to git the mail," replied Babe, promptly.

"Well, you tell him I want my pay!" thundered Pecos, pacing up and down.

"He'll be back to-night, better stay and tell him yourself," suggested Babe, mildly.

"I'll do that," responded Pecos, nodding ominously. "And more'n that – I'll collect it. What's doin'?"

"Oh, nothin'," replied Babe. "There was a deputy assessor up here the other day and he left this blank for you to fill out. It gives the number of your cattle."

"Well, you tell that deputy to go to hell, will you?"

"Nope," said Babe, "he might take me with him. It happens he's a deputy sheriff, too!"

"Deputy, —*huh!*" grumbled Pecos, morosely. "They all look the same to me. Did Crit fill out his blank?"

"Sure did. Reported a hundred head of Wine-glasses. Now what d'ye think of that?"

Pecos paused and meditated on the matter for an instant. It was doubtful if Crittenden could gather more than a hundred head of Wine-glasses, all told. Some of them had drifted back to their old range and the rest were scattered in a rough country. "Looks like that deputy threw a scare into him," he observed, dubiously. "What did he say about my cattle?"

"Well, he said you'd registered a new brand and now it was up to you to show that you had some cattle. If you've got 'em you ought to pay taxes on 'em and if you haven't got any you got no business with an iron that will burn over Upton's U."

"Oh, that's the racket, is it? Well, you tell that deputy that I've got cattle in that brand and I've got a bill of sale for 'em, all regular, but I've yet to see the deputy sheriff that can collect taxes off of me. D'ye think I'm goin' to chip in to help pay the salary of a man that makes a business of rollin' drunks and throwin' honest workingmen into the hoosegatho when he's in town? Ump-um – guess again!"

He motioned for a drink and Babe regarded him curiously as he set out the bottle.

"You been readin' the *Voice*, I reckon," he said, absent-mindedly pouring out a drink for himself. "Well, say, did you read that article on the fee system? It's all true, Pardner, every word of it, and more! I'm a man of good family and education – I was brought up right and my folks are respectable people – and yet every time I go to Geronimo they throw me into jail. Two-twenty-five, that's what they do it for – and there I have to lay, half the time with some yegg or lousy gang of hobos, until they git ready to turn me loose. And they call that justice! Pecos, I'm going back to Geronimo – I'm going to stand on the corner, just the way I used to when I was drunk, and tell the people it's all *wrong!* You're a good man, Pecos – Cumrad – will you go with me?"

Pecos stood and looked at him, wondering. "Comrade" sounded good to him; it was the word they used in the *Voice of Reason*— "Comrade Jones has just sent us in four more subscriptions. That's what throws a crook into the tail of monopoly. Bully for you, Comrade!" But with all his fervor he did not fail to notice the droop to Angy's eyes, the flush on his cheeks, and the slack tremulousness of his lips – in spite of his solemn resolutions Angy had undoubtedly given way to the Demon Drink.

"Nope," he said, "I like you, Angy, but they'd throw us both in. You'd better stay up here and watch me put it on Crit. 'Don't rope a bigger bull than you can throw,' is my motto, and Old Crit is jest my size. I'm goin' to comb his hair with a six-shooter or I'll have my money – and then if that dog-robber of a deputy sheriff shows up I'll – well, he'd better not crowd me, that's all. Here's to the revolution – will you drink it, old Red-eye?"

Angy drank it, and another to keep it company.

"Pecos," he said, his voice tremulous with emotion, "when I think how my life has been ruined by these hirelings of the law, when I think of the precious days I have wasted in the confinement of the Geronimo jail, I could rise up and *destroy* them, these fiends in human form and their accursed jails; I could wreck every prison in the land and proclaim liberty from the street-corners – whoop!" He waved one hand above his head, laughed, and leapt to a seat upon the bar. "But don't you imagine f'r a moment, my friend," he continued, with the impressive gravity of an orator, "that they have escaped unscathed. It was not until I had read that wonderful champion of the common people, the *Voice of Reason*, that I realized the enormity of this conspiracy which has reduced me to my present condition, but from my first incarceration in the Geronimo jail I have been a Thorne in their side, as the Geronimo *Blade* well said. I remember as if it were yesterday the time when they erected their first prison, over twenty years ago, on account of losing some hoss-thieves. It was a new structure, strongly built of adobe bricks, and in a spirit of jest the town marshal arrested me and locked me up to see if it was tight. That night when all was still I wrenched one of the iron bars loose and dug my

way to freedom! But what is freedom to revenge? After I had escaped I packed wood in through the same hole, piled it up against the door, and set the dam' hell-hole afire!"

He paused and gazed upon Pecos with drunken triumph. "That's the kind of an *hombre* I am," he said. "But what is one determined man against a thousand? When the citizens of Geronimo beheld their new calaboose ruined and in flames they went over the country with a fine-tooth comb and never let up until they had brought me back and shackled me to the old Cottonwood log down by the canal – the one they had always used before they lost the hoss-thieves. That was the only jail they had left, now that the calaboose was burned. In vain I pleaded with them for just one drink – they were inexorable, the cowardly curs, and there they left me, chained like a beast, while they went up town and swilled whiskey until far into the night. As the first faint light of morning shot across the desert I awoke with a terrible thirst. My suffering was awful. I filled my mouth with the vile ditch-water and spat it out again, unsatisfied – I shook my chains and howled for mercy. But what mercy could one expect from such a pack of curs? I tested every link in my chain, and the bolt that passed through the log – then, with the strength of desperation I laid hold upon that enormous tree-trunk and rolled it into the water! Yes, sir, I rolled the old jail-log into the canal and jumped straddle of it like a conqueror, and whatever happened after that I knew I had the laugh on old Hickey, the Town Marshal, unless some one saw me sailing by. But luck was with me, boy; I floated that big log clean through town and down to Old Manuel's road-house – a Mexican deadfall out on the edge of the desert – and swapped it for two drinks of mescal that would simply make you scream! By Joe, that liquor tasted good – have one with me now!"

They drank once more, still pledging the revolution, and then Angy went ahead on his talking jag. "Maybe you've heard of this Baron Mun-chawson, the German character that was such a dam' liar and jail-breaker the king made a prison to order and walled him in? Well, sir, Mun-chawson worked seven years with a single nail on that prison and dug out in spite of hell. But human nature's the same, wherever you go – always stern and pitiless. When those Geronimo citizens found out that old Angy had stole their cottonwood log and traded it to a wood-chopper for the drinks, they went ahead and built a double-decked, steel-celled county jail and sentenced me to it for life! Conspicuous drunkenness was the charge – and grand larceny of a jail – but answer me, my friend, is this a free country or is the spirit that animated our forefathers dead? Is the spirit of Patrick Henry when he cried, 'Give me liberty or give me death,' buried in the oblivion of the past? Tell me that, now!"

"Don't know," responded Pecos, lightly, "too deep a question for me – but say, gimme one more drink and then I'm goin' down the road to collect my pay from Crit. I'm a man of action – that's where I shine – I refer all such matters to Judge Colt." He slapped his gun affectionately and clanked resolutely out of the door. Half a mile down the river he sighted his quarry and rode in on him warily. Old Crit was alone, driving a discouraged team of Mexican horses, and as the bouquet of Pecos's breath drifted in to him over the front wheel the Boss of Verde Crossing regretted for once the fiery quality of his whiskey.

"I come down to collect my pay," observed Pecos, plucking nervously at his gun.

"Well, you don't collect a cent off of me," replied Crit, defiantly, "a man that will steal the way you did! Whenever you git ready to leave this country I might give you a hundred or so for your brand, but you better hurry up. There was a deputy sheriff up here the other day, lookin' for you!"

"Yes, I heard about it," sneered Pecos. "I reckon he was lookin' for evidence about this here Wine-glass iron."

A smothered curse escaped the lips of Isaac Crittenden, but, being old at the game, he understood. There was nothing for it but to pay up – and wait.

"Well, what guarantee do I git that you don't give the whole snap away anyhow?" he demanded, fiercely. "What's the use of me payin' you anything – I might as well keep it to hire a lawyer."

"As long as you pay me what you owe me," said Pecos, slowly, "and treat me square," he added, "I keep my mouth shut. But the minute you git foxy or try some ranikaboo play like sayin' the deputy

was after me – look out! Now they was a matter of a hundred and twenty dollars between us – do I git it or don't I?"

"You git it," grumbled Crittenden, reluctantly. "But say, I want you to keep away from Verde Crossing. Some of them Wine-glass cows have drifted back onto the upper range and John Upton has made a roar. More than that, Boone Morgan has undertook to collect our taxes up here and if that deputy of his ever gits hold of you he's goin' to ask some mighty p'inted questions. So you better stay away, see?"

He counted out the money and held it in his hand, waiting for consent, but Pecos only laughed.

"Life's too short to be hidin' out from a deputy," he answered, shortly. "So gimme that money and I'll be on my way." He leaned over and plucked the bills from Crit's hand; then, spurring back toward the Crossing he left Old Crit, speechless with rage, to follow in his dust.

A loud war-whoop from the store and the high-voiced ranting of Babe made it plain to Crit that there was no use going there – Angy was launched on one of his periodicals and Pecos was keeping him company – which being the case there was nothing for it but to let them take the town. The grizzled Boss of Verde stood by the corral for a minute, listening to the riot and studying on where to put in his time; then a slow smile crept over his hardened visage and he fixed his sinister eye on the adobe of Joe Garcia. All was fair, with him, in love or war, and Marcelina was growing up to be a woman.

"Joe," he said, turning upon his corral boss, "you tell your wife I'll be over there in a minute for supper – and say, I want you to stay in the store to-night; them crazy fools will set the house afire."

"*Stawano*," mumbled José, but as he turned away there was an angry glint in his downcast eye and he cursed with every breath. It is not always pleasant, even to a Mexican, to be in debt to the Boss.

CHAPTER VII

THE REVOLUTION

THE coyotes who from their seven hills along the Verde were accustomed to make Rome howl found themselves outclassed and left to a thinking part on the night that Pecos Dalhart and Angevine Thorne celebrated the dawn of Reason. The French Revolution being on a larger scale, and, above all, successful, has come down in history as a great social movement; all that can be said of the revolution at Verde Crossing is packed away in those sad words: it failed. It started, like most revolutions, with a careless word, hot from the vitriolic pen of some space-writer gone mad, and ended in that amiable disorder which, for lack of a better word, we call anarchy. Whiskey was at the bottom of it, of course, and it meant no more than a tale told by an idiot, "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." At the same time, it managed by degrees to engross the entire attention of Verde Crossing and after the fall of the Bastille, as symbolized by the cracking of a bottle, it left Pecos and Babe more convinced than ever that the world was arrayed against them.

In the early part of the evening, according to orders, José Garcia watched them furtively through the open door, returning at intervals, however, to peer through the window of his own home. At each visit it seemed to him that Angy was getting drunker and the Boss more shameless in his attentions to Marcelina. At last, when he could stand the strain no longer, he threw in with the merry roisterers, leaving it to the Señora to protect the dignity of their home. A drink or two mellowed him to their propaganda – at the mention of Crit he burst into a torrent of curses and as the night wore on he declared for the revolution, looking for his immediate revenge in drinking up all the Boss's whiskey. In the end their revelry rose to such a height that Crittenden was drawn away from his rough wooing and finally, under the pretence of delivering the United States mail, he walked boldly in upon them, determined to protect his property at any risk. The penalty for interfering with the United States mail, as everybody who has ever read the card on a drop-box knows, is a fine of \$1,000, or imprisonment, or both. In defence of that precious packet Crittenden could have killed all three of them and stood justified before the law, but although he had a reputation as a bad man to crowd into a corner, Old Crit was not of a sanguinary disposition. No man could hold down a bunch of gun-men of the kind that he employed in his predatory round-ups and not have a little iron in his blood, but the Boss of Verde Crossing had seen all too well in his variegated career the evils which cluster like flies about an act of violence, and he was always for peace – peace and his price.

"Here; here, here," he expostulated, as he found Angy in the act of drinking half a pint of whiskey by measure, "you boys are hittin' it pretty high, ain't ye?"

"The roof's the limit," replied Babe, facetiously. "As the Champeen Booze-fighter of Arizona I am engaged in demonstratin' to all beholders my claim to that illustrious title. Half a pint of whiskey – enough to kill an Injun or pickle a Gila-monster – and all tossed off at a single bout, like the nectar of the gods. Here's to the revolution, and to hell with the oppressors of the poor!"

"That's right," chimed in Pecos, elevating his glass and peering savagely over its rim at the Boss, "we done declared a feud against the capitulistic classes and the monneypullistic tendencies of the times. Your game's played out, Old Man; the common people have riz in their might and took the town! Now you go away back in the corner, d'ye understand, and sit down – and don't let me hear a word out of you or I'll beat the fear o' God into you with *this*!" He hauled out his heavy six-shooter and made the sinister motions of striking a man over the head with it, but Crit chose to ignore the threat.

"All right," he said, feigning an indulgent smile, "you boys seem to be enjoyin' yourselves, so I'll jest deliver this United States mail as the law requires and leave you to yourselves." He stepped in behind the bar, chucked a couple of demijohns of whiskey into the corner where they might be overlooked, and threw the mail pouch on the counter.

"Better come up and git your mail, boys," he observed, dumping the contents out for a lure. "Hey, here's a package for you, Mr. Dalhart – something pretty choice, I 'spect. Nothin' for you, Joe," he scowled, as his faithless retainer lurched up to claim his share. "Here's your paper, Babe. Letter for you, Mr. Dalhart," he continued, flipping a large, official envelope across the bar, "you're developin' quite a correspondence!" He ducked down behind the counter, grinning at his stratagem, and while Pecos and Babe were examining their mail he managed to jerk the money drawer open and slip the loose change into his pockets.

"Well, we'll be goin' home now, Joe," he said, taking the corral boss briskly by the arm. "Come on, *hombre*, you ain't got no mail!" Under ordinary circumstances José would have followed peaceably, thus reducing the revolutionary forces to a minimum, but the covert insult to his daughter, magnified by drink, had fired his Latin blood.

"No, Señor," he replied, fixing his glittering eyes upon the hateful boss. "*Yo no go! Carramba, que malo hombre!* You dam' coward, Creet – you scare my wife – you scare – "

"Shut up!" hissed Crit, hastily cuffing him over the head. "Shut your mouth or I'll – "

"*Diablo!*" shrieked the Mexican, striking back blindly. "I keel you! You have to leave *mi niña* alone!"

"What's that?" yelled Angevine Thorne, leaping with drunken impetuosity into the fray, "hev you been – "

"Leave him to me!" shouted Pecos, wading recklessly into the scrimmage. "I'll fix the blankety-blank, whatever he's gone and done! Throw him loose, boys; I'll take the *one-eyed—hump-backed—dog-robbin'—dastard*" – he accompanied each epithet with a blow – "and tie 'im into a bow knot!" He grabbed Old Crit out of the *mêlée* and held him against the wall with a hand of iron. "What do you mean by slappin' my friend and cumrad?" he thundered, making as if to annihilate him with a blow. "I want you to understand, Old Cock Eye, that Mr. Garcia is my friend – he comes from a fine old Spanish family, away down in Sonory, and his rights must be respected! Ain't that so, Angy?"

"From the pure, Castilian blood," declaimed Angy, waving his hand largely, "a gentleman to whom I take off my hat – his estimable wife and family – "

"Now here, boys," broke in Crittenden, taking his cue instantly, "this joke has gone far enough. Mr. Garcia's wife asked me to bring him home – you see what his condition is – and I was tryin' to do my best. Now jest take your hand off of me, Mr. Dalhart – yes, thanks – and Angy, you see if you can't git 'im to go home. A man of family, you know," he went on, craftily enlisting their sympathies, "ought to – "

"Sure thing!" responded Angevine Thorne, lovingly twining his arm around his Spanish-American comrade. "Grab a root there, Pecos, and we'll take 'im home in style!"

"Wait till I git my package!" cried Pecos, suddenly breaking his hold, and he turned around just in time to see Crit skipping out the back door.

"Well, run then, you dastard!" he apostrophized, waving one hand as he tenderly gathered up his mail-order dry goods. "I can't stop to take after ye now. This here package is f'r my little Señorita, Marcelina, and I'm goin' to present it like a gentleman and ast her for a kiss. Hey, Angy," he called, as he re-engaged himself with José, "how do you say 'kiss' in Spanish? Aw, shut up, I don't believe ye! Stan' up here, Joe – well, it don't sound good, that's all – I'm goin' to ast her in U. S., and take a chance!"

The procession lurched drunkenly up the road and like most such was not received with the cordiality which had been anticipated. The Señora Garcia was already furious at Old Crit and when Pecos Dalhart, after delivering her recreant husband, undertook to present the dainty aprons and the blue handkerchiefs, marked M, which he had ordered specially for her daughter, she burst into a torrent of Spanish and hurled them at his head. "*Muy malo*

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