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# Peacemaker of the Pecos

*by* C. E. Edmonson

From his back, Will watched them trot off. He heard coyotes howling nearby, but he had no strength to move. Then he closed his eyes.

When he opened them, the sun was high in the sky. His skin felt on fire and was covered in dried blood. He sat up painfully and glanced around. There was no shade, no cloud, no shelter from the sun, anywhere that he could see. Nightfall would be a long time coming. As he struggled to stand, he decided to look for a cave or an outcrop; anywhere he could hide from the pitiless sun. He twisted and wiggled his wrists to increase circulation. His fingers were going numb again. He started to walk slowly and unsteadily through the desolation of sand and rock, in what he judged to be a northerly direction. The ground to his bare feet was like a bed of glowing coals. The heat was smothering him. Without shade or water, he did not think he would last out the day.

Hours passed. The flame of the sun gripped him like jaws of a vise. He staggered along across the parched plain, heat waves shimmering, up burnt hillocks and across dry gulches, stopping to rest

more and more frequently. Alone and exhausted, skin blistered and lips cracked, his tongue swollen from thirst, he felt reality slipping from him. He looked hopefully for any sign of the Comanches. He prayed that they would come soon and emancipate him from his mad march to nowhere, killing him quickly so he could finally sleep.

His thoughts and emotions fluctuated like the waves of heat beating on his broken body. He tried striking a bargain with God or with the devil, at this point he did not care which: *Lord or Lucifer*, he thought, *let me escape this curse of a desert and I'll do your work forever, good or evil. So I can hunt down Sam Granger and his gunmen and send them to you. Grant me this one thing and nothing else. Then take my soul or destroy it, I'll hand it over gladly.*

He staggered on until even his taste for vengeance could no longer support him. Overhead, he saw buzzards circling, dipping and rising, knowing he was dying. He thought of Beth and Billy again, and the last look of disappointment that his son gave him. And he thought of Noble. He longed to turn back time so this day had never happened. Finally he collapsed.

Will fell into a dream. From the vast darkness of the desert floor, he was being lifted by many hands. Water—cool, clear, life-giving water—flowed over his face and into his mouth, across his chest and arms. Was he seeing through God's eyes? Was he between earth and heaven?

The wasteland began to lighten with the soaring moon. Serene stars came out, and wheeled across the limitless sky. Then he was riding a tall horse with no saddle. But he could neither grip the reins nor sit the animal properly; he kept slumping over. On either side a horseman held him upright to keep him from falling.

Up ahead was a column of riders cantering single file on unshod hooves, occasionally becoming lost from view in the intervening darkness. He made out jagged outlines of cliff-rock. He heard soft voices all around speaking in a language he did not understand.