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Monday morning, a Monday morning a long time ago at the old ranch, I cooked breakfast for a cowboy named Pete. He faced the wall on the far end of the bench at the long table. Stayed quiet and out of the way. The gas stove fluttered from a blue to a yellow flame, too erratic to heat the coffeepot, much less do a decent job on the eggs.

In a little bit, he said, "We shore had a good time Saturday night. Jake and I won two fights at the Robert Lee pits." Time passed, I asked, "Guess they cleaned you and Jake out of fighting roosters." He rallied and replied, "You don't understand nothing, Monte. Me and Jake won two fights, not the damn roosters."

Cooks talk to inanimate objects in animate terms. Like, "All right, you single-yolked, yellow-billed sapsucker, see who cares if you break falling from the shell," or "burn the biscuits, you six-bit simulated excuse for a gas stove. Oven controls and cowboys can go to hell far as I'm concerned. And I am not concerned about either one."

After a bit, Pete walked over into the light, holding his coffee cup in front of him the gentle way St. Francis must have held a bowl for the song birds to drink. For the first time I saw Pete's tear-flooded eye socket filling a purple lid. His other eye looked worse, but showed a bit of eyeball through an opening half the normal size. His top lip lacked a quarter of an inch touching his nose. He shook so

bad he steadied his cup on the stove to keep it still enough to pour coffee into.

He shuffled back to the far side of the table, sloshing coffee on the floor. "Weren't a fair fight, Monte."

"They hit you from behind?" I asked.

"Nah, you don't understand nothing about the finer points of cock fighting. If the judges ain't honest, the fight ain't honest. Instead of Jake and me whipping those bystanders, we ought to have whipped the judges." (I better add that Pete weighed 135 pounds over on the scales at the railroad barn wearing a pair of horsehide chaps and big rowel Mexico spurs. Note also that Jake was the one who owned the fighting cocks. Pete owned a second-hand saddle, a homemade bedroll, a harmonica, and a tin suitcase for his clothes.)

The coffee steadied Pete enough to eat breakfast. He stayed quiet until he lit a cigarette. (We all smoked in those days.) Took a bit of doing to smoke as his top lip flared his mouth open. "Jake and me swore off fighting chickens on the way home Saturday night. Wrong kind of folks participating now. Bunch of crooks. You know old Ira, don't-cha?"

Before I could answer, he said, "Damned if they didn't bar Ira from coming to fights forever just 'cause he kept standing up in the stand to sing, '*Mama Yo Quiero*' a little loud." (Ira was the cowboy the bouncers threw out of all the dances for singing his arrangement of "Milk Cow Blues.")

Right after I sent Pete to bring in the horses, Jake came in from the front. "Good morning, Monte. Did Pete tell you much fun we had at the chicken fights?" I was a bit tired of all this, but I was civil enough to answer, "Yes." Jake continued, "He may not remember enough to tell his side. He and old Ira sang a duet from a Mexican song up in the middle of the crowd. An Angelo chicken fighter took exception to the music and them spluttering spit on the back of his shirt. Ira took a swing at the guy, missed and hit Pete full face. Jim Bridges helped me collar those two clowns. Somehow or the other, Ira hit Pete in the face again full swing with an elbow and cut his lip. Shore cut down on that '*Mama Yo Quiero*' stuff."

By payday, they were raring to go to what we called "the bright lights." Jake never let on that he had told me about Pete and Ira's escapade. I sure didn't tell, as Pete and Jake were just some of the sick cowboys I fed breakfast to on a Monday morning a long time ago.