Praise for Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*

"[A] grand quest that unstitches its own mythology with every line, the book had me spellbound, obsessed with the characters, who felt realer to me than my own self . . . I gasped and sobbed and clutched the book when it was over. I was so thankful for the reminder that reading can still be like this."
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"McMurtry's masterwork. There's but one word for this vast novel: wonderful."
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By Larry McMurtry

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Lonesome Dove

A novel by
Larry McMurtry

Foreword by Taylor Sheridan

Simon & Schuster Paperbacks
New York Amsterdam/Antwerp London
Toronto Sydney/Melbourne New Delhi

Simon & Schuster Paperbacks
An Imprint of Simon & Schuster, LLC
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

This Simon & Schuster paperback edition November 2025

Designed by Colin Joh

Manufactured in the United States of America

39 40

The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition as follows:
McMurtry, Larry.
Lonesome dove.
I. Title.
PS3563.A319 L6 1985
813'.54 85-2192

ISBN: 978-0-671-50420-5
ISBN: 978-1-4391-9526-0 (pbk)

For Maureen Orth,
and
In memory of
the nine McMurtry boys
(1878–1983)
"Once in the saddle they
Used to go dashing . . ."

Foreword

by Taylor Sheridan

I first read *Lonesome Dove* in the spring of 1989. To say it enthralled me, shocked me, and sparked my imagination before it shattered me is an understatement. In August of that year, the television adaptation of Larry McMurtry's transformative novel first aired.

It aired in four parts over four consecutive nights. Bill Wittliff's adaptation of McMurtry's novel was handled with the reverence of a monk transcribing the Bible, which is to say—it is arguably the most literal and faithful adaptation of a novel to the screen in cinematic history.

Upon watching the film, I reread the novel yet again (for the fourth or fifth time? Sixth, maybe?), comparing my imagination to the adaptation. This is easily the most formative event in my life. My plan to pursue the family businesses of law enforcement and cattle raising was destroyed. In its place was an unquenchable thirst for storytelling. And, as it were, an immediate career change. Criminal justice gave way to theater, which gave way to a complete evaporation in my desire to study anything at all—and begin my own Quixotic quest to become a man of letters. A storyteller.

I do not know how many times I have read *Lonesome Dove* to date: Thirty? Fifty? Often at night I will turn to a random chapter, read it, close the book, and imagine the rest of the story unfold in my mind.

Supposedly inspired by the deep friendship of Charles Goodnight and Ed Loving, *Lonesome Dove* is a West never before explored in literature. It is one that makes no attempt to apologize for, nor justify, Western Expansion. Likewise to the victims of a land completely absent the rule of law. McMurtry's West relied upon each character manifesting their own moral code, because none had yet been established in this place.

But more than anything, it was an examination of friendship between the unlikeliest of men—one a self-indulgent, antagonistic, binge-drinking seeker of mischief wherever mischief may hide (between bouts of philosophical ponderings and constant observation of that most peculiar of animals: humans). Augustus McCrae was desperate to live—by his rules, and his rules alone.

In the shadow of Gus's tireless quest for stimulation stood his opposite in every way—Woodrow Call. A stoic, tireless worker, completely incapable of expressing any emotion outside of anger, Woodrow was a callused, muscled vessel for toil and justice.

These two men should have hated each other, but together they traversed the imaginary landscape of the West with the simple goal of seeing it before man tamed it. Ruined it. Fenced it and paved it and dammed its rivers and removed virtually every reason man was drawn to the West in the first place.

Along this journey, every element of human character, both good and kind and insidious and evil, would play out before them. They would face countless obstacles without ever compromising their principles—even when those principles meant choosing to forsake life altogether.

Augustus McCrae and Woodrow Call are shining examples of who we should all aspire to be. Likewise, in both of them, are examples of behavior we should aggressively avoid.

Scholars far more eloquent than I will fare better at elucidating on the examples of literary genius dripping from each page: from his economical prose, which paints Russell-like images of the dusty world McMurtry's characters inhabit, to piercing dialogue that forces audible gasps and belly laughs from its reader.

In *Lonesome Dove*, McMurtry has achieved the Holy Grail of

storytellers—compel the reader to experience every shade on the color wheel of emotion: joy, regret, desire, fear, love, the catastrophe of loss and the catharsis of acceptance.

When my wife was pregnant, we labored—like all expecting couples—over a name. And how that name would influence our child's personality. We didn't labor long. I would read to my wife at night from the book that had altered the course of my life. Coming to the chapter where Gus informed Woodrow of his decision to never be a spectator of life, our decision became clear.

Augustus Sheridan was born September 23, 2010, twenty-one years after McMurtry shattered my family's expectation that the next generation of lawman was soon to take up the badge in McLennan County, Texas. In my son's mischievous glance I see his namesake. In his stoic determination, I see Woodrow. I often wonder which of the two will win him over. Perhaps he will find a way to embrace the best of them both.

Preface

Fictions—in my case, novels only, to the tune of about thirty—starts in tactile motion; pecking out a few sentences on a typewriter; sentences that might encourage me and perhaps a few potential readers to press on.

In 1975, at home in my house in Texas, I peated out this:

> When Augustus came out on the porch the blue pigs were eating a rattlesnake—not a very big one.

Once the blue pigs and the remnants of the rattlesnake had been sashed away I devote a few sentences to Augustus's partner, Captain Woodrow Call, who is in a nearby corral, trying to break an unruly young mare called the Hell Bitch, who catches him slightly off guard and takes a bite out of his shoulder.

Captain Call, a Stoic, says nothing about this mishap but Augustus, an Epicurean, makes several comments, none of them welcomed by Captain Call. Thus, casually, begins *Lonesome Dove,* by far my most popular novel, and one that allows me to join the small company of "respectable" writers whose fiction deals with the American West: Cormac McCarthy, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, Tom Lee and a handful of others, below whom comes the vast desert of the pulpers, the sons and daughters of Max Brand (Frederick Faust), Louis L'Amour and many hundreds of others.

But I was not considering literary ranking or even literary merit when I wrote that first sentence about Augustus McCrae, the blue pigs and the quickly consumed snake. I was just doodling at the typewriter, hoping to find a subject or a character that might hold my interest.

For quite a few years, there was, however, no sign of the *Lonesome Dove.* Two other books shoved ahead of it (*Cadillac Jack* and *The Desert Rose*) and my impulse to write about these two ex–Texas Rangers was feeble at first. I didn't even have a title, until, by a miracle, I got one. There

was an old church bus sitting in seeming abandonment beside a Texas road I was driving along. The sign on the bus said LONESOME DOVE BAPTIST CHURCH. I knew, at once, that I had had a piece of luck; I drove straight home and wrote the novel. A good title can save a book, and the sign on the old fading bus saved mine; tragic though it is it has added some happiness to the world.

In the novel, Lonesome Dove is the small town in the Texas brush country from which Gus and Call, both ex-Rangers, and their crew, the Hat Creek Outfit, set out on their epic cattle drive to then sparsely inhabited Montana.

But, if one cuts more deeply, the lonesome dove is Newt, a lonely teenager who is the unacknowledged son of Captain Call and a kindly whore named Maggie, who is now dead. So the central theme of the novel is not the stocking of Montana but unacknowledged paternity. All of the Hat Creek Outfit, including particularly Augustus McCrae, want Call to accept the boy as his son.

Indeed, as I wrote on through a rather long book, I myself expected Woodrow Call to do the decent thing. I thought he would finally admit or acknowledge that Newt was his son. I kept expecting the redeeming scene to rise out of my typewriter some day.

But it never did! The closest Call would bring himself to making the admission was to give the boy his horse, the famous Hell Bitch.

And, in a later episode, the horse kills the boy, putting Newt beyond acknowledgement and making *Lonesome Dove* the tragic story it is.

Many moviegoers who know horses were bothered by the fact that the Hell Bitch was in fact a gelding in the film. I taxed the director, Simon Wincer—himself a horseman—about this and he said the wranglers wouldn't allow a mare in their remuda.

And the blue pigs walked all the way to Montana just to be eaten. Life ain't for sissies, as Augustus might have said.

—Larry McMurtry, 2010

All America lies at the end of the wilderness road, and our past is not a dead past, but still lives in us. Our forefathers had civilization inside themselves, the wild outside. We live in the civilization they created, but within us the wilderness still lingers. What they dreamed, we live, and what they lived, we dream.

—T. K. Whipple, *Study Out the Land*

Part I

1.

WHEN AUGUSTUS CAME OUT on the porch the blue pigs were eating a rattlesnake—not a very big one. It had probably just been crawling around looking for shade when it ran into the pigs. They were having a fine tug-of-war with it, and its rattling days were over. The sow had it by the neck, and the shoat had the tail.

"You pigs git," Augustus said, kicking the shoat. "Head on down to the creek if you want to eat that snake." It was the porch he begrudged them, not the snake. Pigs on the porch just made things hotter, and things were already hot enough. He stepped down into the dusty yard and walked around to the springhouse to get his jug. The sun was still high, sulled in the sky like a mule, but Augustus had a keen eye for sun, and to his eye the long light from the west had taken on an encouraging slant.

Evening took a long time getting to Lonesome Dove, but when it came it was a comfort. For most of the hours of the day—and most of the months of the year—the sun had the town trapped deep in dust, far out in the chaparral flats, a heaven for snakes and horned toads, roadrunners and stinging lizards, but a hell for pigs and Tennesseans. There was not even a respectable shade tree within twenty or thirty miles; in fact, the actual location of the nearest decent shade was a matter of vigorous debate in the offices—if you wanted to call a roofless barn and a couple of patched-up corrals offices—of the Hat Creek Cattle Company, half of which Augustus owned.

His stubborn partner, Captain W. F. Call, maintained that there was excellent shade as close as Pickles Gap, only twelve miles away, but Augustus wouldn't allow it. Pickles Gap was if anything a more worthless community than Lonesome Dove. It had only sprung up because a fool from north Georgia named Wesley Pickles had gotten himself and his family lost in the mesquites for about ten days. When he finally found a clearing, he wouldn't leave it, and Pickles Gap came into being, mainly attracting travelers like its founder, which is to say people too weak-willed to be able to negotiate a few hundred miles of mesquite thicket without losing their nerve.

The springhouse was a little lumpy adobe building, so cool on the inside that Augustus would have been tempted to live in it had it not been for its popularity with black widows, yellow jackets and centipedes.

When he opened the door he didn't immediately see any centipedes but he did immediately hear the nervous buzz of a rattlesnake that was evidently smarter than the one the pigs were eating. Augustus could just make out the snake, coiled in a corner, but decided not to shoot it; on a quiet spring evening in Lonesome Dove, a shot could cause complications. Everybody in town would hear it and conclude either that the Comanches were down from the plains or the Mexicans up from the river. If any of the customers of the Dry Bean, the town's one saloon, happened to be drunk or unhappy—which was very likely—they would probably run out into the street and shoot a Mexican or two, just to be on the safe side.

At the very least, Call would come stomping up from the lots, only to be annoyed to discover it had just been a snake. Call had no respect whatsoever for snakes, or for anyone who stood aside for snakes. He treated rattlers like gnats, disposing of them with one stroke of whatever tool he had in hand. "A man that slows down for snakes might as well walk," he often said, a statement that made about as much sense to an educated man as most of the things Call said.

Augustus held to a more leisurely philosophy. He believed in giving creatures a little time to think, so he stood in the sun a few minutes until the rattler calmed down and crawled out a hole. Then he reached in and lifted his jug out of the mud. It had been a dry year, even by the standards of Lonesome Dove, and the spring was just springing enough to make a nice mud puddle. The pigs spent half their time rooting around the springhouse, hoping to get into the mud, but so far none of the holes in the adobe was big enough to admit a pig.

The damp burlap the jug was wrapped in naturally appealed to the centipedes, so Augustus made sure none had sneaked under the wrapping before he uncorked the jug and took a modest swig. The one white barber in Lonesome Dove, a fellow Tennessean named Dillard Brawley, had to do his barbering on one leg because he had not been cautious enough about centipedes. Two of the vicious red-legged variety had crawled into his pants one night and Dillard had got up in a hurry and had neglected to shake out the pants. The leg hadn't totally rotted off, but it had rotted sufficiently that the family got nervous about blood poisoning and persuaded he and Call to saw it off.

For a year or two Lonesome Dove had had a real doctor, but the young man had lacked good sense. A *vaquero* with a loose manner that every-

body was getting ready to hang at the first excuse anyway passed out from drink one night and let a blister bug crawl in his ear. The bug couldn't find its way out, but it could move around enough to upset the *vaquero,* who persuaded the young doctor to try and flush it. The young man was doing his best with some warm salt water, but the *vaquero* lost his temper and shot him. It was a fatal mistake on the *vaquero*'s part: someone blasted his horse out from under him as he was racing away, and the incensed citizenry, most of whom were nearby at the Dry Bean, passing the time, hung him immediately.

Unfortunately no medical man had taken an interest in the town since, and Augustus and Call, both of whom had coped with their share of wounds, got called on to do such surgery as was deemed essential. Dillard Brawley's leg had presented no problem, except that Dillard screeched so loudly that he injured his vocal cords. He got around good on one leg, but the vocal cords had never fully recovered, which ultimately hurt his business. Dillard had always talked too much, but after the trouble with the centipedes, what he did was whisper too much. Customers couldn't relax under their hot towels for trying to make out Dillard's whispers. He hadn't really been worth listening to, even when he had two legs, and in time many of his customers drifted off to the Mexican barber. Call even used the Mexican, and Call didn't trust Mexicans *or* barbers.

Augustus took the jug back to the porch and placed his rope-bottomed chair so as to utilize the smidgin of shade he had to work with. As the sun sank, the shade would gradually extend itself across the porch, the wagon yard, Hat Creek, Lonesome Dove and, eventually, the Rio Grande. By the time the shade had reached the river, Augustus would have mellowed with the evening and be ready for some intelligent conversation, which usually involved talking to himself. Call would work until slap dark if he could find anything to do, and if he couldn't find anything he would make up something—and Pea Eye was too much of a corporal to quit before the Captain quit, even if Call would have let him.

The two pigs had quietly disregarded Augustus's orders to go to the creek, and were under one of the wagons, eating the snake. That made good sense, for the creek was just as dry as the wagon yard, and farther off. Fifty weeks out of the year Hat Creek was nothing but a sandy ditch, and the fact that the two pigs didn't regard it as a fit wallow was a credit to their intelligence. Augustus often praised the pigs' intelligence in a

running argument he had been having with Call for the last few years. Augustus maintained that pigs were smarter than all horses and most people, a claim that galled Call severely.

"No slop-eating pig is as smart as a horse," Call said, before going on to say worse things.

As was his custom, Augustus drank a fair amount of whiskey as he sat and watched the sun ease out of the day. If he wasn't tilting the rope-bottomed chair, he was tilting the jug. The days in Lonesome Dove were a blur of heat and as dry as chalk, but mash whiskey took some of the dry away and made Augustus feel nicely misty inside—foggy and cool as a morning in the Tennessee hills. He seldom got downright drunk, but he did enjoy feeling misty along about sundown, keeping his mood good with tasteful swigs as the sky to the west began to color up. The whiskey didn't damage his intellectual powers any, but it did make him more tolerant of the raw sorts he had to live with: Call and Pea Eye and Deets, young Newt, and old Bolivar, the cook.

When the sky had pinked up nicely over the western flats, Augustus went around to the back of the house and kicked the kitchen door a time or two. "Better warm up the sowbelly and mash a few beans," he said. Old Bolivar didn't answer, so Augustus kicked the door once or twice more, to emphasize his point, and went back to the porch. The blue shoat was waiting for him at the corner of the house, quiet as a cat. It was probably hoping he would drop something—a belt or a pocketknife or a hat—so he could eat it.

"Git from here, shoat," Augustus said. "If you're that hungry go hunt up another snake." It occurred to him that a leather belt couldn't be much tougher or less palatable than the fried goat Bolivar served up three or four times a week. The old man had been a competent Mexican bandit before he ran out of steam and crossed the river. Since then he had led a quiet life, but it *was* a fact that goat kept turning up on the table. The Hat Creek Cattle Company didn't trade in them, and it was unlikely that Bolivar was buying them out of his own pocket—stealing goats was probably his way of keeping up his old skills. His old skills did not include cooking. The goat meat tasted like it had been fried in tar, but Augustus was the only member of the establishment sensitive enough to raise a complaint. "Bol, where'd you get the tar you fried this goat in?" he asked regularly, his quiet attempt at wit falling as usual on deaf ears. Bolivar ignored all queries, direct or indirect.

Augustus was getting about ready to start talking to the sow and the shoat when he saw Call and Pea Eye walking up from the lots. Pea Eye was tall and lank, had never been full in his life, and looked so awkward that he appeared to be about to fall down even when he was standing still. He looked totally helpless, but that was another case of looks deceiving. In fact, he was one of the ablest men Augustus had ever known. He had never been an outstanding Indian fighter, but if you gave him something he could work at deliberately, like carpentering or blacksmithing, or well-digging or harness repair, Pea was excellent. If he had been a man to do sloppy work, Call would have run him off long before.

Augustus walked down and met the men at the wagons. "It's a little early for you two to be quittin', ain't it, girls?" he said. "Or is this Christmas or what?"

Both men had sweated their shirts through so many times during the day that they were practically black. Augustus offered Call the jug, and Call put a foot on a wagon tongue and took a swig just to rinse the dry out of his mouth. He spat a mouthful of perfectly good whiskey in the dust and handed the jug to Pea Eye.

"Girls yourself," he said. "It ain't Christmas." Then he went on to the house, so abruptly that Augustus was a little taken aback. Call had never been one for fine manners, but if the day's work had gone to his satisfaction he would usually stand and pass the time a minute.

The funny thing about Woodrow Call was how hard he was to keep in scale. He wasn't a big man—in fact, was barely middle-sized—but when you walked up and looked him in the eye it didn't seem that way. Augustus was four inches taller than his partner, and Pea Eye three inches taller yet, but there was no way you could have convinced Pea Eye that Captain Call was the short man. Call had him buffaloed, and in that respect Pea had plenty of company. If a man meant to hold his own with Call it was necessary to keep in mind that Call wasn't as big as he seemed. Augustus was the one man in south Texas who could usually keep him in scale, and he built on his advantage whenever he could. He started many a day by pitching Call a hot biscuit and remarking point-blank, "You know, Call, you ain't really no giant."

A simple heart like Pea could never understand such behavior. It gave Augustus a laugh sometimes to consider that Call could hoodwink a man nearly twice his size, getting Pea to confuse the inner with the outer man. But of course Call himself had such a single-track mind that he scarcely

realized he was doing it. He just did it. What made it a fascinating trick was that Call had never noticed that he had a trick. The man never wasted five minutes appreciating himself; it would have meant losing five minutes off whatever job he had decided he wanted to get done that day.

"It's a good thing I ain't scairt to be lazy," Augustus told him once.

"You may think so. I don't," Call said.

"Hell, Call, if I worked as hard as you, there'd be no thinking done at all around this outfit. You stay in a lather fifteen hours a day. A man that's always in a lather can't think nothin' out."

"I'd like to see you think the roof back on that barn," Call said.

A strange little wind had whipped over from Mexico and blown the roof off clean as a whistle, three years before. Fortunately it only rained in Lonesome Dove once or twice a year, so the loss of the roof didn't result in much suffering for the stock, when there was stock. It mostly meant suffering for Call, who had never been able to locate enough decent lumber to build a new roof. Unfortunately a rare downpour had occurred only about a week after the wind dropped the old roof in the middle of Hat Creek. It had been a real turd-floater, and also a lumber-floater, washing much of the roof straight into the Rio Grande.

"If you think so much, why didn't you think of that rain?" Call asked. Ever since, he had been throwing the turd-floater up to Augustus. Give Call a grievance, however silly, and he would save it like money.

Pea Eye wasn't spitting out any mash whiskey. He had a skinny neck—his Adam's apple bulged so when he drank that it reminded Augustus of a snake with a frog stuck in its gullet.

"Call looks mad enough to kick the stump," Augustus said, when Pea finally stopped to breathe.

"She bit a hunk out of him, that's why," Pea said. "I don't know why the Captain wants to keep her."

"Fillies are his only form of folly," Augustus said. "What's he doing letting a horse bite him? I thought you boys were digging the new well?"

"Hit rock," Pea said. "Ain't room for but one man to swing a pick down in that hole, so Newt swung it while I shod horses. The Captain took a ride. I guess he thought he had her sweated down. He turned his back on her and she bit a hunk out."

The mare in question was known around town as the Hell Bitch. Call had bought her in Mexico, from some *caballeros* who claimed to have killed an Indian to get her—a Comanche, they said. Augustus doubted

that part of the story: it was unlikely one Comanche had been riding around by himself in that part of Mexico, and if there had been two Comanches the *caballeros* wouldn't have lived to do any horse trading. The mare was a dapple gray, with a white muzzle and a white streak down her forehead, too tall to be pure Indian pony and too short-barreled to be pure thoroughbred. Her disposition did suggest some time spent with Indians, but which Indians and how long was anybody's guess. Every man who saw her wanted to buy her, she was that stylish, but Call wouldn't even listen to an offer, though Pea Eye and Newt were both anxious to see her sold. They had to work around her every day and suffered accordingly. She had once kicked Newt all the way into the blacksmith's shop and nearly into the forge. Pea Eye was at least as scared of her as he was of Comanches, which was saying a lot.

"What's keeping Newt?" Augustus asked.

"He may have went to sleep down in that well," Pea Eye said.

Then Augustus saw the boy walking up from the lots, so tired he was barely moving. Pea Eye was half drunk by the time Newt finally made the wagons.

"'I god, Newt, I'm glad you got here before fall," Augustus said. "We'd have missed you during the summer."

"I been throwin' rocks at the mare," Newt said, with a grin. "Did you see what a hunk she bit out of the Captain?"

Newt lifted one foot and carefully scraped the mud from the well off the sole of his boot, while Pea Eye continued to wash the dust out of his throat.

Augustus had always admired the way Newt could stand on one leg while cleaning the other boot. "Look at that, Pea," he said. "I bet you can't do that."

Pea Eye was so used to seeing Newt stand on one leg to clean his boot that he couldn't figure out what it was Gus thought he couldn't do. A few big swigs of liquor sometimes slowed his thinking down to a crawl. This usually happened at sundown, after a hard day of well-digging or horseshoeing; at such times Pea was doubly glad he worked with the Captain, rather than Gus. The less talk the Captain had to listen to, the better humor he was in, whereas Gus was just the opposite. He'd rattle off five or six different questions and opinions, running them all together like so many unbranded cattle—it made it hard to pick out one and think about it carefully and slowly, the only ways Pea Eye liked to think. At such times

his only recourse was to pretend the questions had hit him in his deaf ear, the left one, which hadn't really worked well since the day of their big fight with the Keechis—what they called the Stone House fight. It had been pure confusion, since the Indians had been smart enough to fire the prairie grass, smoking things up so badly that no one could see six feet ahead. They kept bumping into Indians in the smoke and having to shoot point-blank; a Ranger right next to Pea had spotted one and fired too close to Pea's ear.

That was the day the Indians got away with their horses, which made Captain Call about as mad as Pea had ever seen him. It meant they had to walk down the Brazos for nearly two hundred miles, worrying constantly about what would happen if the Comanches discovered they were afoot. Pea Eye hadn't noticed he was half deaf until they had walked most of the way out.

Fortunately, while he was worrying the question of what it was he couldn't do, old Bolivar began to whack the dinner bell, which put an end to discussion. The old dinner bell had lost its clapper, but Bolivar had found a crowbar that somebody had managed to break, and he laid into the bell so hard that you couldn't have heard the clapper if there had been one.

The sun had finally set, and it was so still along the river that they could hear the horses swishing their tails, down in the lots—or they could until Bolivar laid into the bell. Although he probably knew they were standing around the wagons, in easy hearing distance, Bolivar continued to pound the bell for a good five minutes. Bolivar pounded the bell for reasons of his own; even Call couldn't control him in that regard. The sound drowned out the quiet of sunset, which annoyed Augustus so much that at times he was tempted to go up and shoot the old man, just to teach him a lesson.

"I figure he's calling bandits," Augustus said, when the ringing finally stopped. They started for the house, and the pigs fell in with them, the shoat eating a lizard he had caught somewhere. The pigs liked Newt even better than Augustus—when he didn't have anything better to do he would feed them scraps of rawhide and scratch their ears.

"If them bandits were to come, maybe the Captain would let me start wearing a gun," Newt said wistfully. It seemed he would never get old enough to wear a gun, though he was well into his teens.

"If you was to wear a gun somebody would just mistake you for a gun-

fighter and shoot you," Augustus said, noting the boy's wistful look. "It ain't worth it. If Bol ever calls up any bandits I'll lend you my Henry."

"That old man can barely cook," Pea Eye remarked. "Where would he get any bandits?"

"Why, you remember that greasy bunch he had," Augustus said. "We used to buy horses from 'em. That's the only reason Call hired him to cook. In the business we're in, it don't hurt to know a few horsethieves, as long as they're Mexicans. I figure Bol's just biding his time. As soon as he gains our trust his bunch will sneak up some night and murder us all."

He didn't believe anything of the kind—he just liked to stimulate the boy once in a while, and Pea too, though Pea was an exceptionally hard man to stimulate, being insensitive to most fears. Pea had just sense enough to fear Comanches—that didn't require an abundance of sense. Mexican bandits did not impress him.

Newt had more imagination. He turned and looked across the river, where a big darkness was about to settle. Every now and then, about sundown, the Captain and Augustus and Pea and Deets would strap on guns and ride off into that darkness, into Mexico, to return about sunup with thirty or forty horses or perhaps a hundred skinny cattle. It was the way the stock business seemed to work along the border, the Mexican ranchers raiding north while the Texans raided south. Some of the skinny cattle spent their lives being chased back and forth across the Rio Grande. Newt's fondest hope was to get old enough to be taken along on the raids. Many a night he lay in his hot little bunk, listening to old Bolivar snore and mumble below him, peering out the window toward Mexico, imagining the wild doings that must be going on. Once in a while he even heard gunfire, though seldom more than a shot or two, from up or down the river—it got his imagination to working all the harder.

"You can go when you're grown," the Captain said, and that was all he said. There was no arguing with it, either—not if you were just hired help. Arguing with the Captain was a privilege reserved for Mr. Gus.

They no sooner got in the house than Mr. Gus began to exercise the privilege. The Captain had his shirt off, letting Bolivar treat his mare bite. She had got him just above the belt. Enough blood had run down into his pants that one pants leg was caked with it. Bol was about to pack the bite with his usual dope, a mixture of axle grease and turpentine, but Mr. Gus made him wait until he could get a look at the wound himself.

"'I god, Woodrow," Augustus said. "As long as you've worked around

horses it looks like you'd know better than to turn your back on a Kiowa mare."

Call was thinking of something and didn't answer for a minute. What he was thinking was that the moon was in the quarter—what they called the rustler's moon. Let it get full over the pale flats and some Mexicans could see well enough to draw a fair bead. Men he'd ridden with for years were dead and buried, or at least dead, because they'd crossed the river under a full moon. No moon at all was nearly as bad: then it was too hard to find the stock, and too hard to move it. The quarter moon was the right moon for a swing below the border. The brush country to the north was already thick with cattlemen, making up their spring herds and getting trail crews together; it wouldn't be a week before they began to drift into Lonesome Dove. It was time to go gather cattle.

"Who said she was Kiowa?" he said, looking at Augustus.

"I've reasoned it out," Augustus said. "You could have done the same if you ever stopped working long enough to think."

"I can work and think too," Call said. "You're the only man I know whose brain don't work unless it's in the shade."

Augustus ignored the remark. "I figure it was a Kiowa on his way to steal a woman that lost that mare," he said. "Your Comanche don't hunger much after señoritas. White women are easier to steal, and don't eat as much besides. The Kiowa are different. They fancy señoritas."

"Can we eat or do we have to wait till the argument's over?" Pea Eye asked.

"We starve if we wait for that," Bolivar said, plunking a potful of sowbelly and beans down on the rough table. Augustus, to the surprise of no one, was the first to fill his plate.

"I don't know where you keep finding these Mexican strawberries," he said, referring to the beans. Bolivar managed to find them three hundred and sixty-five days a year, mixing them with so many red chilies that a spoonful of beans was more or less as hot as a spoonful of red ants. Newt had come to think that only two things were certain if you worked for the Hat Creek Cattle Company. One was that Captain Call would think of more things to do than he and Pea Eye and Deets could get done, and the other was that beans would be available at all meals. The only man in the outfit who didn't fart frequently was old Bolivar himself—he never touched beans and lived mainly on sourdough biscuits and chickory cof-

fee, or rather cups of brown sugar with little puddles of coffee floating on top. Sugar cost money, too, and it irked the Captain to spend it, but Bolivar could not be made to break a habit. Augustus claimed the old man's droppings were so sugary that the blue shoat had taken to stalking him every time he went to shit, which might have been true. Newt had all he could do to keep clear of the shoat, and his own droppings were mostly bean.

By the time Call got his shirt on and came to the table, Augustus was reaching for a second helping. Pea and Newt were casting nervous glances at the pot, hoping for seconds themselves but too polite to grab before everyone had been served. Augustus's appetite was a kind of natural calamity. Call had watched it with amazement for thirty years and yet it still surprised him to see how much Augustus ate. He didn't work unless he had to, and yet he could sit down night after night and out-eat three men who had put in a day's labor.

In their rangering days, when things were a little slow the boys would sit around and swap stories about Augustus's eating. Not only did he eat a lot, he ate it fast. The cook that wanted to hold him at the grub for more than ten minutes had better have a side of beef handy.

Call pulled out a chair and sat down. As Augustus was ladling himself a big scoop of beans, Call stuck his plate under the ladle. Newt thought it such a slick move that he laughed out loud.

"Many thanks," Call said. "If you ever get tired of loafing I guess you could get a job waiting tables."

"Why, I had a job waiting tables once," Augustus said, pretending he had meant to serve Call the beans. "On a riverboat. I wasn't no older than Newt when I had that job. The cook even wore a white hat."

"What for?" Pea Eye asked.

"Because it's what real cooks are supposed to wear," Augustus said, looking at Bolivar, who was stirring a little coffee into his brown sugar. "Not so much a hat as a kind of big white cap—it looked like it could have been made out of a bedsheet."

"I'd be damned if I'd wear one," Call said.

"Nobody would be loony enough to hire you to cook, Woodrow," Augustus said. "The cap is supposed to keep the cook's old greasy hairs from falling into the food. I wouldn't be surprised if some of Bol's hairs have found their way into this sow bosom."

Newt looked at Bolivar, sitting over by the stove in his dirty serape.

Bolivar's hair looked like it had had a can of secondhand lard poured over it. Once every few months Bol would change clothes and go visit his wife, but his efforts at improving his appearance never went much higher than his mustache, which he occasionally tried to wax with grease of some kind.

"How come you to quit the riverboat?" Pea Eye asked.

"I was too young and pretty," Augustus said. "The whores wouldn't let me alone."

Call was sorry it had come up. He didn't like talk about whores—not anytime, but particularly not in front of the boy. Augustus had little shame, if any. It had long been a sore spot between them.

"I wish they'd drownt you then," Call said, annoyed. Conversation at the table seldom led to any good.

Newt kept his eyes on his plate, as he usually did when the Captain grew annoyed.

"Drown me?" Augustus said. "Why, if anybody had tried it, those girls would have clawed them to shreds." He knew Call was mad, but wasn't much inclined to humor him. It was his dinner table as much as Call's, and if Call didn't like the conversation he could go to bed.

Call knew there was no point in arguing. That was what Augustus wanted: argument. He didn't really care what the question was, and it made no great difference to him which side he was on. He just plain loved to argue, whereas Call hated to. Long experience had taught him that there was no winning arguments with Augustus, even in cases where there was a simple right and wrong at issue. Even in the old days, when they were in the thick of it, with Indians and hardcases to worry about, Augustus would seize any chance for a dispute. Practically the closest call they ever had, when the two of them and six Rangers got surprised by the Comanches up the Prairie Dog Fork of the Red and were all digging holes in the bank that could have turned out to be their graves if they hadn't been lucky and got a cloudy night and sneaked away, Augustus had kept up a running argument with a Ranger they called Ugly Bobby. The argument was entirely about coon dogs, and Augustus had kept it up all night, though most of the Rangers were so scared they couldn't pass water.

Of course the boy lapped up Augustus's stories about riverboats and whores. The boy hadn't been anywhere, so it was all romance to him.

"Listening to you brag about women don't improve the taste of my food," he said, finally.

"Call, if you want better food you have to start by shooting Bolivar," Augustus said, reminded of his own grievance against the cook.

"Bol, I want you to quit whackin' that bell with that crowbar," he said. "You can do it at noon if you want to but let off doin' it at night. A man with any sense can tell when it's sundown. You've spoilt many a pretty evening for me, whackin' that bell."

Bolivar stirred his sugary coffee and held his peace. He whacked the dinner bell because he liked the sound, not because he wanted anybody to come and eat. The men could eat when they liked—he would whack the bell when *he* liked. He enjoyed being a cook—it was a good deal more relaxing than being a bandit—but that didn't mean that he intended to take orders. His sense of independence was undiminished.

"Gen-eral Lee freed the slaves," he remarked in a surly tone.

Newt laughed. Bol never had been able to get the war straight, but he had been genuinely sorry when it ended. In fact, if it had kept going he would probably have stayed a bandit—it was a safe and profitable profession with most of the Texans gone. But the ones who came back from the war were mostly bandits themselves, and they had better guns. The profession immediately became overcrowded. Bolivar knew it was time to quit, but once in a while he got the urge for a little shooting.

"It wasn't General Lee, it was Abe Lincoln who freed the slaves," Augustus pointed out.

Bolivar shrugged. "No difference," he said.

"A big difference," Call said. "One was a Yankee and one wasn't."

Pea Eye got interested for a minute. The beans and sowbelly had revived him. He had been very interested in the notion of emancipation and had studied over it a lot while he went about his work. It was obviously just pure luck that he himself hadn't been born a slave, but if he had been unlucky Lincoln would have freed him. It gave him a certain admiration for the man.

"He just freed Americans," he pointed out to Bolivar.

Augustus snorted. "You're in over your head, Pea," he said. "Who Abe Lincoln freed was a bunch of Africans, no more American than Call here."

Call pushed back his chair. He was not about to sit around arguing slavery after a long day, or after a short one either.

"I'm as American as the next," he said, taking his hat and picking up a rifle.

"You was born in Scotland," Augustus reminded him. "I know they brought you over when you was still draggin' on the tit, but that don't make you no less a Scot."

Call didn't reply. Newt looked up and saw him standing at the door, his hat on and his Henry in the crook of his arm. A couple of big moths flew past his head, drawn to the light of the kerosene lamp on the table. With nothing more said, the Captain went out the door.

2.

CALL WALKED THE RIVER for an hour, though he knew there was no real need. It was just an old habit he had, left over from wilder times: checking, looking for a sign of one kind or another, honing his instincts, as much as anything. In his years as a Ranger captain it had been his habit to get off by himself for a time, every night, out of camp and away from whatever talking and bickering were going on. He had discovered early on that his instincts needed privacy in which to operate. Sitting around a fire being sociable, yawning and yarning, might be fine in safe country, but it could cost you an edge in country that wasn't so safe. He liked to get off by himself, a mile or so from camp, and listen to the country, not the men.

Of course, real scouting skills were superfluous in a place as tame as Lonesome Dove, but Call still liked to get out at night, sniff the breeze and let the country talk. The country talked quiet; one human voice could drown it out, particularly if it was a voice as loud as Augustus McCrae's. Augustus was notorious all over Texas for the strength of his voice. On a still night he could be heard at least a mile, even if he was more or less whispering. Call did his best to get out of range of Augustus's voice so that he could relax and pay attention to other sounds. If nothing else, he might get a clue as to what weather was coming—not that there was much mystery about the weather around Lonesome Dove. If a man looked straight up at the stars he was apt to get dizzy, the night was so clear. Clouds were scarcer than cash money, and cash money was scarce enough.

There was really little in the way of a threat to be looked for, either. A coyote might sneak in and snatch a chicken, but that was about the worst that was likely to happen. The mere fact that he and Augustus were there had long since discouraged the local horsethieves.

Call angled west of the town, toward a crossing on the river that had

once been favored by the Comanches in the days when they had the leisure to raid into Mexico. It was near a salt lick. He had formed the habit of walking up to the crossing almost every night, to sit for a while on a little bluff, just watching. If the moon was high enough to cast a shadow, he sheltered beside a clump of chaparral. If the Comanches ever came again, it stood to reason they would make for their old crossing, but Call knew well enough that the Comanches weren't going to come again. They were all but whipped, hardly enough warriors left free to terrorize the upper Brazos, much less the Rio Grande.

The business with the Comanches had been long and ugly—it had occupied Call most of his adult life—but it was really over. In fact, it had been so long since he had seen a really dangerous Indian that if one had suddenly ridden up to the crossing he would probably have been too surprised to shoot—exactly the kind of careless attitude he was concerned to guard against in himself. Whipped they might be, but as long as there was one free Comanche with a horse and a gun it would be foolish to take them lightly.

He tried hard to keep sharp, but in fact the only action he had scared up in six months of watching the river was one bandit, who might just have been a *vaquero* with a thirsty horse. All Call had had to do in that instance was click the hammer of his Henry—in the still night the click had been as effective as a shot. The man wheeled back into Mexico, and since then nothing had disturbed the crossing except a few mangy goats on their way to the salt lick.

Even though he still came to the river every night, it was obvious to Call that Lonesome Dove had long since ceased to need guarding. The talk about Bolivar calling up bandits was just another of Augustus's overworked jokes. He came to the river because he liked to be alone for an hour, and not always be crowded. It seemed to him he was pressed from dawn till dark, but for no good reason. As a Ranger captain he was naturally pressed to make decisions—and decisions that might mean life or death to the men under him. That had been a natural pressure—one that went with the job. Men looked to him, and kept looking, wanting to know he was still there, able to bring them through whatever scrape they might be in. Augustus was just as capable, beneath all his rant, and would have got them through the same scrapes if it had been necessary, but Augustus wouldn't bother rising to an occasion until it became absolutely necessary. He left the worrying to Call—so the men looked to Call for

orders, and got drunk with Augustus. It never ceased to gripe him that Augustus could not be made to act like a Ranger except in emergencies. His refusal was so consistent that at times both Call and the men would almost hope for an emergency so that Gus would let up talking and arguing and treat the situation with a little respect.

But somehow, despite the dangers, Call had never felt pressed in quite the way he had lately, bound in by the small but constant needs of others. The physical work didn't matter: Call was not one to sit on a porch all day, playing cards or gossiping. He intended to work; he had just grown tired of always providing the example. He was still the captain, but no one had seemed to notice that there was no troop and no war. He had been in charge so long that everyone assumed all thoughts, questions, needs and wants had to be referred to him, however simple these might be. The men couldn't stop expecting him to captain, and he couldn't stop thinking he had to. It was ingrained in him, he had done it so long, but he was aware that it wasn't appropriate anymore. They weren't even peace officers: they just ran a livery stable, trading horses and cattle when they could find a buyer. The work they did was mostly work he could do in his sleep, and yet, though his day-to-day responsibilities had constantly shrunk over the last ten years, life did not seem easier. It just seemed smaller and a good deal more dull.

Call was not a man to daydream—that was Gus's department—but then it wasn't really daydreaming he did, alone on the little bluff at night. It was just thinking back to the years when a man who presumed to stake out a Comanche trail would do well to keep his rifle cocked. Yet the fact that he had taken to thinking back annoyed him, too: he didn't want to start working over his memories, like an old man. Sometimes he would force himself to get up and walk two or three more miles up the river and back, just to get the memories out of his head. Not until he felt alert again—felt that he could still captain if the need arose—would he return to Lonesome Dove.

After supper, when Call left for the river, Augustus, Pea Eye, Newt, Bolivar and the pigs repaired to the porch. The pigs nosed around in the yard, occasionally catching a lizard or a grasshopper, a rat snake or an unwary locust. Bolivar brought out a whetstone and spent twenty minutes or so sharpening the fine bone-handled knife that he wore at his belt. The handle was made from the horn of a mule deer and the thin blade flashed

in the moonlight as Bolivar carefully drew it back and forth across the whetstone, spitting on the stone now and then to dampen its surface.

Although Newt liked Bolivar and considered him a friend, the fact that Bol felt it necessary to sharpen the knife every night made him a little nervous. Mr. Gus's constant joking about bandits—although Newt knew it was joking—had its effect. It was a mystery to him why Bol sharpened the knife every single night, since he never cut anything with it. When he asked him about it Bol smiled and tested the blade gently with his thumb.

"It's like a wife," he said. "Every night you better stroke it."

That made no sense to Newt, but got a laugh from Augustus.

"If that's the case your wife is likely pretty rusty by now, Bol," he said. "She don't get sharpened more than twice a year."

"She is old," Bolivar said.

"The older the violin, the sweeter the music," Augustus said. "Us old folks appreciate whetting just as much as the young, or maybe more. You ought to bring her up here to live, Bol. Think of the money you'd save on whetstones."

"That knife would cut through a man's naik like it was butter," Pea Eye said. He had an appreciation of such things, being the owner of a fine Bowie knife himself. It had a fourteen-inch blade and he had bought it from a soldier who had personally commissioned it from Bowie. He didn't sharpen it every night like Bol did his, but he took it out of its big sheath once in a while to make sure it hadn't lost its edge. It was his Sunday knife and he didn't use it for ordinary work like butchering or cutting leather. Bolivar never used his for ordinary work either, though once in a while, if he was in a good mood, he would throw it and stick it in the side of a wagon, or maybe shave off a few fine curls of rawhide with it. Newt would then feed the rawhide to the pigs.

Augustus himself took a dim view of the utility of knives, particularly of fancy knives. He carried a plain old clasp in his pocket and used it mainly for cutting his toenails. In the old days, when they all lived mostly off game, he had carried a good skinning knife as a matter of necessity, but he had no regard at all for the knife as a fighting weapon. So far as he was concerned, the invention of the Colt revolver had rendered all other short-range weapons obsolete. It was a minor irritant that he had to spend virtually every night of his life listening to Bol grind his blade away.

"If I have to listen to something, I'd rather listen to you whet your wife," he said.

"I don't bring her," Bol said. "I know you. You would try to corrupt her."

Augustus laughed. "No, I ain't much given to corrupting old women," he said. "Ain't you got any daughters?"

"Only nine," Bolivar said. Abruptly, not even getting up, he threw the knife at the nearest wagon, where it stuck, quivering for a moment. The wagon was only about twenty feet away, so it was no great throw, but he wanted to make a point about his feeling for his daughters. Six were married already, but the three left at home were the light of his life.

"I hope they take after their mother," Augustus said. "If they take after you you're in for a passel of old maids." His Colt was hanging off the back of the chair and he reached around and got it, took it out of its holster, and idly twirled the chamber a time or two, listening to the pretty little clicks.

Bolivar was sorry he had thrown the knife, since it meant he would have to get up and walk across the yard to retrieve it. At the moment his hip joints hurt, as well as several other joints, all the result of letting a horse fall on him five years before.

"I am better-looking than a buzzard like you," he said, pulling himself up.

Newt knew Bolivar and Mr. Gus were just insulting one another to pass the time, but it still made him nervous when they did it, particularly late in the day, when they had both been hitting their respective jugs for several hours. It was a peaceful night, so still that he could occasionally hear the sound of the piano down at the Dry Bean saloon. The piano was the pride of the saloon, and, for that matter, of the town. The church folks even borrowed it on Sundays. Luckily the church house was right next to the saloon and the piano had wheels. Some of the deacons had built a ramp out at the back of the saloon, and a board track across to the church, so that all they had to do was push the piano right across to the church. Even so, the arrangement was a threat to the sobriety of the deacons, some of whom considered it their duty to spend their evenings in the saloon, safeguarding the piano.

Once they safeguarded it so well on Saturday night that they ran it off its rail on Sunday morning and broke two legs off it. Since there weren't enough sober men in church that morning to carry it inside, Mrs. Pink

Higgins, who played it, had to sit out in the street and bang away at the hymns, while the rest of the congregation, ten ladies and a preacher, stayed inside and sang. The arrangement was made more awkward still by the fact that Lorena Wood came out on the backstairs of the saloon, practically undressed, and listened to the hymns.

Newt was deeply in love with Lorena Wood, though so far he had not even had an opportunity to speak to her. He was painfully aware that if the chance for personal speech ever did arise he would have no idea what to say. On the rare occasions when he had an errand that took him by the saloon he lived in terror, afraid some accident might occur which would actually force him to speak to her. He *wanted* to speak to Lorena, of course—it represented the very summit of his life's hopes—but he didn't want to have to do it until he had decided on the best thing to say, which so far he had not, though Lorena had been in town for several months, and he had been in love with her from the moment he first glimpsed her face.

On an average day, Lorena occupied Newt's thoughts about eight hours, no matter what tasks occupied his hands. Though normally an open young man, quick to talk about his problems—to Pea Eye and Deets, at least—he had never so much as uttered Lorena's name aloud. He knew that if he did utter it a terrible amount of ribbing would ensue, and while he didn't mind being ribbed about most things, his feeling for Lorena was too serious to admit frivolity. The men who made up the Hat Creek outfit were not great respecters of feeling, particularly tender feeling.

There was also the danger that someone might slight her honor. It wouldn't be the Captain, who was not prone to jesting about women, or even to mentioning them. But the thought of the complications that might arise from an insult to Lorena had left Newt closely acquainted with the mental perils of love long before he had had an opportunity to sample any of its pleasures except the infinite pleasure of contemplation.

Of course, Newt knew that Lorena was a whore. It was an awkward fact, but it didn't lessen his feelings for her one whit. She had been abandoned in Lonesome Dove by a gambler who decided she was bad for his luck; she lived over the Dry Bean and was known to receive visitors of various descriptions, but Newt was not a young man to choke on such details. He was not absolutely sure what whores did, but he assumed that Lorena had come by her profession as accidentally as he had come by his. It was pure accident that he happened to be a horse wrangler for the Hat

Creek outfit, and no doubt an equally pure one that had made Lorena a whore. What Newt loved about her was her nature, which he could see in her face. It was easily the most beautiful face that had ever been seen in Lonesome Dove, and he had no doubt that hers was the most beautiful nature, too. He intended to say something along those lines to her when he finally spoke to her. Much of his time on the porch after supper was spent in trying to figure out what words would best express such a sentiment.

That was why it irritated him slightly when Bol and Mr. Gus started passing insults back and forth, as if they were biscuits. They did it almost every night, and pretty soon they'd be throwing knives and clicking pistols, making it very hard for him to concentrate on what he would say to Lorena when they first met. Neither Mr. Gus nor Bolivar had lived their lives as peaceful men, and it seemed to him they might both be itching for one last fight. Newt had no doubt that if such a fight occurred Mr. Gus would win. Pea Eye claimed that he was a better pistol shot than Captain Call, though it was hard for Newt to imagine anyone being better at anything than Captain Call. He didn't want the fight to happen, because it would mean the end of Bol, and despite a slight nervousness about Bol's bandit friends, he did like Bol. The old man had given him a serape once, to use as a blanket, and had let him have the bottom bunk when he was sick with jaundice. If Mr. Gus shot him it would mean Newt had one less friend. Since he had no family, this was not a thought to be taken lightly.

"What do you reckon the Captain does out there in the dark?" he asked.

Augustus smiled at the boy, who was hunched over on the lower step, as nervous as a red pup. He asked the same question almost every night when he thought there might be a fight. He wanted Call around to stop it, if it ever started.

"He's just playin' Indian fighter," he said.

Newt doubted that. The Captain was not one to play. If he felt he had to go off and sit in the dark every night, he must think it important.

Mention of Indians woke Pea Eye from an alcoholic doze. He hated Indians, partly because for thirty years' fear of them had kept him from getting a good night's sleep. In his years with the Rangers he never closed his eyes without expecting to open them and find some huge Indian get-

ting ready to poke him with something sharp. Most of the Indians he had actually seen had all been scrawny little men, but it didn't mean the huge one who haunted his sleep wasn't out there waiting.

"Why, they could come," he said. "The Captain's right to watch. If I wasn't so lazy I'd go help him."

"He don't want you to help him," Augustus said testily. Pea's blind loyalty to Call was sometimes a trial. He himself knew perfectly well why Call headed for the river every night, and it had very little to do with the Indian threat. He had made the point many times, but he made it again.

"He heads for the river because he's tired of hearing us yap," he said. "He ain't a sociable man and never was. You could never keep him in camp, once he had his grub. He'd rather sit off in the dark and prime his gun. I doubt he'd find an Indian if one was out there."

"He used to find them," Pea said. "He found that big gang of them up by Fort Phantom Hill."

"'I god, Pea," Augustus said. "Of course he found a few here and there. They used to be thicker than grass burrs, if you remember. I'll guarantee he won't scratch up none tonight. Call's got to be the one to out-suffer everybody, that's the pint. I won't say he's a man to hunt glory like some I've knowed. Glory don't interest Call. He's just got to do his duty nine times over or he don't sleep good."

There was a pause. Pea Eye had always been uncomfortable with Gus's criticisms of the Captain, without having any idea how to answer them. If he came back at all he usually just adopted one of the Captain's own remarks.

"Well, somebody's got to take the hard seat," he said.

"Fine with me," Augustus said. "Call can suffer for you and me and Newt and Deets and anybody else that don't want to do it for themselves. It's been right handy having him around to assume them burdens all these years, but if you think he's doing it for us and not because it's what he happens to like doing, then you're a damn fool. He's out there sitting behind a chaparral bush congratulating himself on not having to listen to Bol brag on his wife. He knows as well as I do there isn't a hostile within six hundred miles of here."

Bolivar stood over by the wagon and relieved himself for what seemed to Newt like ten or fifteen minutes. Often when Bol started to relieve himself Mr. Gus would yank out his old silver pocket watch and squint at

it until the pissing stopped. Sometimes he even got a stub of a pencil and a little notebook out of the old black vest he always wore and wrote down how long it took Bolivar to pass his water.

"It's a clue to how fast he's failing," Augustus pointed out. "An old man finally dribbles, same as a fresh calf. I best just keep a record, so we'll know when to start looking for a new cook."

For once, though, the pigs took more interest in Bol's performance than Mr. Gus, who just drank a little more whiskey. Bol yanked his knife out of the side of the wagon and disappeared into the house. The pigs came to Newt to get their ears scratched. Pea Eye slumped against the porch railing—he had begun to snore.

"Pea, wake up and go to bed," Augustus said, kicking at his leg until he waked him. "Newt and I might forget and leave you out here, and if we done that these critters would eat you, belt buckle and all."

Pea Eye got up without really opening his eyes and stumbled into the house.

"They wouldn't really eat him," Newt said. The blue shoat was on the lower step, friendly as a dog.

"No, but it takes a good threat to get Pea moving," Augustus said.

Newt saw the Captain coming back, his rifle in the crook of his arm. As always, Newt felt relieved. It eased something inside him to know the Captain was back. It made it easier to sleep. Lodged in his mind somewhere was the worry that maybe some night the Captain *wouldn't* come back. It wasn't a worry that he would meet with some accident and be killed, either: it was a worry that he might just leave. It seemed to Newt that the Captain was probably tired of them all, and with some justice. He and Pea and Deets did their best to pull their weight, but Mr. Gus never pulled any weight at all, and Bol sat around and drank tequila most of the day. Maybe the Captain would just saddle up the Hell Bitch some night and go.

Once in a great while Newt dreamed that the Captain not only left, but took him with him, to the high plains that he had heard about but never seen. There was never anyone else in the dreams: just him and the Captain, horseback in a beautiful grassy country. Those were sweet dreams, but just dreams. If the Captain did leave he would probably just take Pea along, since Pea had been his corporal for so many years.

"I don't see any scalps," Augustus said, when Call came up.

Call ignored him, leaned his rifle against the porch rail and lit a smoke.

"This would have been a good night to cross some stock," he said.

"Cross 'em and do what with 'em?" Augustus asked. "I ain't seen no cattle buyers yet."

"We could actually take the cattle to them," Call said. "It's been done. It ain't against the law for you to work."

"It's against my law," Augustus said. "Them buyers ain't nailed down. They'll show up directly. Then we'll cross the stock."

"Captain, can I go next time?" Newt asked. "I believe I'm getting old enough."

Call hesitated. Pretty soon he was going to have to say yes, but he wasn't ready to just then. It wasn't really fair to the boy—he would have to learn sometime—but still Call couldn't quite say it. He had led boys as young, in his day, and seen them killed, which was why he kept putting Newt off.

"You'll get old quick if you keep sitting up all night," he said. "Work to do tomorrow. You best go to bed."

The boy went at once, looking a little disappointed.

"Night, son," Augustus said, looking at Call when he said it. Call said nothing.

"You should have let him sit," Augustus said, a little later. "After all, the boy's only chance for an education is listening to me talk."

Call let that one float off. Augustus had spent a year in a college, back in Virginia somewhere, and claimed to have learned his Greek letters, plus a certain amount of Latin. He never let anyone forget it.

They could hear the piano from down at the Dry Bean. An old-timer named Lippy Jones did all the playing. He had the same problem Sam Houston had had, which was a hole in his belly that wouldn't quite heal shut. Someone had shot Lippy with a big bore gun; instead of dying he ended up living with a leak. With a handicap like that, it was lucky he could play the piano.

Augustus got up and stretched. He took his Colt and holster off the back of the chair. So far as he was concerned the night was young. He had to step over the shoat to get off the porch.

"You oughtn't to be so stubborn about that boy, Woodrow," he said. "He's spent about enough of his life shoveling horseshit."

"I'm a sight older than him and I still shovel my share of it," Call said.

"Well, that's your choice," Augustus said. "It's my view that there are more fragrant ways to make a fortune. Card playing, for one. I believe I'll straggle down to that gin palace and see if I can scare up a game."

Call was about finished with his smoke. "I don't mind your card playin', if that's all it is," he said.

Augustus grinned. Call never changed. "What else would it be?" he asked.

"You never used to gamble this regular," Call said. "You better watch that girl."

"Watch her for what?"

"To see she don't get you to marry her," Call said. "You're just enough of an old fool to do it. I won't have that girl around."

Augustus had a good laugh. Call was given to some funny notions, but that was one of the funniest, to think that a man of his years and experience would marry a whore.

"See you for breakfast," he said.

Call sat on the steps a little while longer, listening to the blue pigs snore.

3.

LORENA HAD NEVER LIVED in a place where it was cool—it was her one aim. It seemed to her she had learned to sweat at the same time she had learned to breathe, and she was still doing both. Of all the places she had heard men talk about, San Francisco sounded the coolest and nicest, so it was San Francisco she set her sights on.

Sometimes it seemed like slow going. She was nearly twenty and hadn't got a mile past Lonesome Dove, which wasn't fast progress considering that she had only been twelve when her parents got nervous about Yankees and left Mobile.

That much slow progress would have discouraged most women, but Lorena didn't allow her mind to dwell on it. She had her flat days, of course, but that was mostly because Lonesome Dove itself was so flat. She got tired of looking out the window all day and seeing nothing but brown land and gray chaparral. In the middle of the day the sun was so hot the land looked white. She could see the river from her window, and Mexico. Lippy told her she could make a fortune if she cared to establish

herself in Mexico, but Lorena didn't care to. From what she could see of the country it didn't look any more interesting than Texas, and the men stunk just as bad as Texans, if not worse.

Gus McCrae claimed to have been to San Francisco, and would talk to her for hours about how blue the water was in the bay, and how the ships came in from everywhere. In the end he overtalked it, like he did everything. Once or twice Lorena felt she had a clear picture of it, listening to Gus, but by the time he finally quit talking she would have lost it and just be lying there, wishing it would cool off.

In that respect, Gus was unusual, for most men didn't talk. He would blab right up until he shoved his old carrot in, and then would be blabbing again, before it was even dry. Generous as he was by local standards—he gave her five dollars in gold every single time—Lorena still felt a little underpaid. It should have been five dollars for wetting his carrot and another five dollars for listening to all the blab. Some of it was interesting, but Lorena couldn't keep her mind on so much talk. It didn't seem to hurt Gus's feelings any. He talked just as cheerful whether she was listening or not, and he never tried to talk her into giving him two pokes for the price of one, as most of the younger men did.

It was peculiar that he was her most regular customer, because he was also her oldest. She made a point of not letting anything men did surprise her much, but secretly it did surprise her a little that a man as old as Gus would still be so partial to it. In that respect he put a lot of younger men to shame, including Mosby Marlin, who had held her up for two years over in east Texas. Compared to Gus, Mosby couldn't even be said to have a carrot, though he did have a kind of little stringy radish that he was far too proud of.

She had only been seventeen when she met Mosby, and both her parents were dead. Her pa fell out in Vicksburg, and her ma only made it to Baton Rouge, so it was Baton Rouge where she was stranded when Mosby found her. She hadn't done any sporting up to that time, though she had developed early and had even had some trouble with her own pa, though he was feverish to the point of delirium when the trouble happened. He died soon after. She knew Mosby was a drunkard from the first, but he told her he was a Southern gentleman and he had an expensive buggy and a fine pair of horses, so she believed him.

Mosby claimed that he wanted to marry her, and Lorena believed that too, and let him drag her off to a big old drafty house near a place called

Gladewater. The house was huge, but it didn't even have glass in the windows or rugs or anything; they had to set smoke pots in the rooms to keep the mosquitoes from eating them alive, which the mosquitoes did anyway. Mosby had a mother and two mean sisters and no money, and no intention of marrying Lorena anyway, though he kept claiming he would for a while.

In fact, the womenfolk treated Lorena worse than they treated the nigras, and they didn't treat the nigras good. They didn't treat Mosby good, either, or one another good—about the only creatures that ever saw any kindness around that house were Mosby's hounds. Mosby assured her he'd set the hounds on her if she ever tried to run away.

It was in the nights, when Lorena had to lay there with the smoke from the smoke pots so thick she couldn't breathe, and the clouds of mosquitoes nearly as thick as the smoke, and Mosby constantly bothering her with his radish, that Lorena's spirits sunk so low she ceased to want to talk. She became a silent woman. Soon after, the sporting started, because Mosby lost so much money one night that he offered two of his friends a poke in exchange for his debt. Lorena was so surprised that she didn't have time to arm herself, and the men had their way, but the next morning when the two were gone she went at Mosby with his own quirt and cut his face so badly they put her in the cellar for two days and didn't even bring her food.

Two or three months later it happened again with some more friends, and this time Lorena didn't fight. She was so tired of Mosby and his radish and the smoke pots that she was willing to consider anything different. The mother and the mean sisters wanted to drive her out of the house, and Lorena would have been glad to go, but Mosby threw such a fit that one of the sisters ran off herself to live with an aunt.

Then one night Mosby just plain sold a poke to a traveling man of some kind: he seemed to be planning to do it regular, only the second man he sold her to happened to take a fancy to Lorena. His name was John Tinkersley, the tallest and prettiest man Lorena had seen up to that point, and the cleanest. When he asked her if she was really married to Mosby she said no. Tinkersley suggested then and there that she accompany him to San Antonio. Lorena was glad to agree. Mosby was so shocked by her decision that he offered to go get the preacher and marry her on the spot, but by that time Lorena had figured out that being married to Mosby would be even worse than what she had already been

through. Mosby tried for a while to work himself up to a fight, but he was no match for Tinkersley and he knew it. The best he could salvage was to sell Tinkersley a horse for Lorena, plus the sidesaddle that belonged to the sister who had run off.

San Antonio was a big improvement over Gladewater, if only because there were no smoke pots and few mosquitoes. They kept two rooms in a hotel—not the finest in town but fine enough—and Tinkersley bought Lorena some pretty clothes. Of course he financed that by selling the horse and the sidesaddle, which disappointed Lorena a little. She had discovered that she liked riding. She would have been happy to ride on to San Francisco, but Tinkersley had no interest in that. Clean and tall and pretty as he was, he turned out, in the end, to be no better bargain than Mosby. If he had a soft spot, it was for himself, not for her. He even spent money getting his fingernails cut, which was something Lorena had never dreamed a man would do. For all that, he was a hard man. Fighting with Mosby had been like fighting with a little boy, whereas the first time she talked back to Tinkersley he hit her so hard her head cracked a wash-pot on the bureau behind her. Her ears rang for three days. He threatened to do worse than that, too, and Lorena didn't suppose they were idle threats. She held her tongue around Tinkersley from then on. He made it clear that marriage wasn't what he had had in mind when he took her away from Mosby, which was all right in itself, since she had already got out of the habit of thinking about marriage.

That didn't mean she was in the habit of thinking about herself as a sporting woman, but it was precisely that habit that Tinkersley expected her to acquire.

"Well, you're already trained, ain't you?" he said. Lorena didn't consider what had happened in Gladewater any training for anything, but then it was clear there wasn't anything respectable she was trained for, even if she could get away from Tinkersley without being killed. For a few days she had thought Tinkersley might love her, but he soon made it clear that she meant about as much to him as a good saddle. She knew that for the time being the sporting life was about her only choice. At least the hotel room was nice and there were no mean sisters. Most of the sports who came to see her were men Tinkersley gambled with in the bar down below. Once in a while a nice one would even give her a little money directly, instead of leaving it with Tinkersley, but Tinkersley was smart about such things and he found her hiding place and cleaned her

out the day they took the stage to Matamoros. He might not have done it if he hadn't had a string of losses, but the fact that he was handsome didn't mean that he was a good gambler, as several of the sports pointed out to Lorena. He was just a middling gambler, and he had such a run of bad luck in San Antonio that he decided there might be less competition down on the border.

It was on that trip that they had the real fight. Lorena felt swollen with anger about the money—swollen enough, finally, not to be scared of him. What she wanted was to kill him for being so determined to leave her absolutely nothing. If she had known more about guns she *would* have killed him. She thought with a gun you just pulled the trigger, but it turned out his had to be cocked first. Tinkersley was lying on the bed drunk, but not so drunk he didn't notice when she stuck his own gun in his stomach. When she realized it wasn't going to go off she had just time to hit him in the face with it, a lick that actually won the fight for her, although before he gave up and went to look for a doctor to stitch his jaw up Tinkersley did bite her on the upper lip as they were rolling around, Lorena still hoping the gun would shoot.

The bite had left a faint little scar just above her upper lip; to Lorena's amusement it was that trifling scar that seemed to make men crazy for a time with her. Of course it wasn't just the scar—she had developed well and had also gotten prettier as she got older. But the scar played its part. Tinkersley got drunk in Lonesome Dove the day he left her, and he told everyone in the Dry Bean that she was a murderous woman. So she had a reputation in the town before she even unpacked her clothes. Tinkersley had left her with no money at all, but fortunately she could cook when she had to; the Dry Bean was the only place in Lonesome Dove that served food, and Lorena had been able to talk Xavier Wanz, who owned it, into letting her do the cooking until the cowboys got over being scared of her and began to approach her.

Augustus was the man who got it started. While he was pulling off his boots the first time he smiled at her.

"Where'd you get that scar?" he asked.

"Somebody bit me," Lorena said.

Once Gus became a regular, she had no trouble making a living in the town, although in the summer, when the cowboys were mostly off on the trail, pickings sometimes grew slim. While she was well past the point of

trusting men, she soon perceived that Gus was in a class by himself, at least in Lonesome Dove. He wasn't mean, and he didn't treat her like most men treated a sporting woman. She knew he would probably even help her if she ever really needed help. It seemed to her he had got rid of something other men hadn't got rid of—some meanness or some need. He was the one man besides Lippy she would sometimes talk to—a little. With most of the sports she had nothing at all to say.

In fact, her silence soon came to be widely commented on. It was part of her, like the scar, and, like the scar, it drew men to her even though it made them deeply uneasy. It was not a trick, either, although she knew it unnerved the sports and made matters go quicker. Silent happened to be how she felt when men were with her.

In respect to her silence, too, Gus McCrae was different. At first he seemed not to notice it—certainly he didn't let it bother him. Then it began to amuse him, which was not a reaction Lorena had had from anyone else. Most men chattered like squirrels when they were with her, no doubt hoping she would say something back. Of course Gus was a great blabber, but his blabbing wasn't really like the chattering the other sports did. He was just full of opinion, which he freely poured out, as much for his own amusement as for anything. Lorena had never particularly looked at life as if it was something funny, but Gus did. Even her lack of talk struck him as funny.

One day he walked in and sat down in a chair, the usual look of amusement on his face. Lorena assumed he was going to take his boots off and she went over to the bed, but when she looked around he was sitting there, one foot on the other knee, twirling the rowel of his spur. He always wore spurs, although it was not often she saw him on horseback. Once in a while, in the early morning, the bawling of cattle or the nickering of horses would awaken her and she would look out the window and see him and his partner and a gang of riders trailing their stock through the low brush to the east of town. Gus was noticeable, since he rode a big black horse that looked like it could have pulled three stagecoaches by itself. But he kept his spurs on even when he wasn't riding so he would have them handy when he wanted something to jingle.

"Them's the only musical instruments I ever learned to play," he told her once.

Since he just sat there twirling his spur and smiling at her, Lorena didn't

know whether to get undressed or what. It was July, blistering hot. She had tried sprinkling the bedsheets, but the heat dried them sometimes before she could even lay down.

"'I god, it's hot," Gus said. "We could all be living in Canada just as cheap. I doubt I've even got the energy to set my post."

Why come then? Lorena thought.

Another unusual thing about Gus was that he could practically tell what she was thinking. In this case he looked abashed and dug a ten-dollar gold piece out of his pocket, which he pitched over to her. Lorena felt wary. It was five dollars too much, even if he did decide to set his post. She knew old men got crazy sometimes and wanted strange things—Lippy was a constant problem, and he had a hole in his stomach and could barely keep up his piano playing. But it turned out she had no need to worry about Gus.

"I figured out something, Lorie," he said. "I figured out why you and me get along so well. You know more than you say and I say more than I know. That means we're a perfect match, as long as we don't hang around one another more than an hour at a stretch."

It made no sense to Lorena, but she relaxed. There was no likelihood he would try anything crazy on her.

"This is ten dollars," she said, thinking maybe he just hadn't noticed what kind of money he was handing over.

"You know, prices are funny," he said. "I've known a good many sporting girls and I've always wondered why they didn't price more flexible. If I was in your place and I had to traipse upstairs with some of these old smelly sorts, I'd want a sight of money, whereas if it was some good-looking young sprout who kept himself barbered up, why a nickel might be enough."

Lorena remembered Tinkersley, who had had the use of her for two years, taken all she brought in, and then left her without a cent.

"A nickel wouldn't be enough," she said. "I can do without the barbering."

But Augustus was in a mood for discussion. "Say you put two dollars as your low figure," he said. "That's for the well-barbered sprout. What would the high figure be, for some big rank waddy who couldn't even spell? The pint I'm making is that all men ain't the same, so they shouldn't be the same price, or am I wrong? Maybe from where you sit all men *are* the same."

Once she thought about it, Lorena saw his point. All men weren't quite the same. A few were nice enough that she might notice them, and a goodly few were mean enough that she couldn't help noticing them, but the majority were neither one nor the other. They were just men, and they left money, not memories. So far it was only the mean ones who had left memories.

"Why'd you give me this ten?" she asked, willing to be a little curious, since it seemed it was going to be just talk anyway.

"Hoping to get you to talk a minute," Augustus said, smiling. He had the most white hair she had ever seen on a man. He mentioned once that it had turned white when he was thirty, making his life more dangerous, since the Indians would have considered the white scalp a prize.

"I was married twice, you remember," he said. "Should have been married a third time but the woman made a mistake and didn't marry me."

"What's that got to do with this money?" Lorena asked.

"The pint is, I ain't a natural bachelor," Augustus said. "There's days when a little bit of talk with a female is worth any price. I figure the reason you don't have much to say is you probably never met a man who liked to hear a woman talk. Listening to women ain't the fashion in this part of the country. But I expect you got a life story like everybody else. If you'd like to tell it, I'm the one that'd like to hear it."

Lorena thought that over. Gus didn't seem uncomfortable. He just set there, twirling his rowel.

"In these parts what your business is all about is woman's company anyway," he said. "Now in a cold clime it might be different. A cold clime will perk a boy up and make him want to wiggle his bean. But down here in this heat it's mostly company they're after."

There was something to that. Men looked at her sometimes like they wished she would be their sweetheart—the young ones particularly, but some of the old ones too. One or two had even wanted her to let them keep her, though where they meant to do the keeping she didn't know. She was already living in the only spare bedroom in Lonesome Dove. Little marriages were what they wanted—just something that would last until they started up the trail. Some girls did it that way—hitched up with one cowboy for a month or six weeks and got presents and played at being respectable. She had known girls who did it that way in San Antonio. The thing that struck her was that the girls seemed to believe it as

much as the cowboys did. They would act just as silly as respectable girls, getting jealous of one another and pouting all day if their boys didn't act to suit them. Lorena had no interest in conducting things that way. The men who came to see her would have to realize that she was not interested in playacting.

After a bit, she decided she wasn't interested in telling Augustus her life story, either. She buttoned her dress back up and handed him the ten dollars.

"It ain't worth ten dollars," she said. "Even if I could remember it all."

Augustus stuck the money back in his pocket. "I ought to know better than to try and buy conversation," he said, still grinning. "Let's go down and play some cards."

4.

WHEN AUGUSTUS LEFT CALL sitting on the steps he took a slow stroll through the wagon yard and down the street, stopping for a moment on the sandy bottom of Hat Creek to strap on his pistol. The night was quiet as sleep, no night when he expected to have to shoot anybody, but it was only wise to have the pistol handy in case he had to whack a drunk. It was an old Colt dragoon with a seven-inch barrel and, as he was fond of saying, weighed about as much as the leg he strapped it to. One whack would usually satisfy most drunks, and two whacks would drop an ox if Augustus cared to put his weight into it.

The border nights had qualities that he had come to admire, different as they were from the qualities of nights in Tennessee. In Tennessee, as he remembered, nights tended to get mushy, with a cottony mist drifting into the hollows. Border nights were so dry you could smell the dirt, and clear as dew. In fact, the nights were so clear it was tricky; even with hardly any moon the stars were bright enough that every bush and fence post cast a shadow. Pea Eye, who had a jumpy disposition, was always shying from shadows, and he had even blazed away at innocent chaparral bushes on occasion, mistaking them for bandits.

Augustus was not particularly nervous, but even so he had hardly started down the street before he got a scare: a little ball of shadow ran right at his feet. He jumped sideways, fearing snakebite, although his brain knew snakes didn't roll like balls. Then he saw an armadillo hustle

past his feet. Once he saw what it was, he tried to give it a kick to teach it not to walk in the street scaring people, but the armadillo hurried right along as if it had as much right to the street as a banker.

The town was not roaring with people, nor was it bright with lights, though a light was on at the Pumphreys', whose daughter was about to have a baby. The Pumphreys ran a store; the baby their daughter was expecting would arrive in the world to find itself fatherless, since the boy who had married the Pumphrey girl had drowned in the Republican River in the fall of the year, with the girl only just pregnant.

There was only one horse hitched outside the Dry Bean when Augustus strolled up—a rangy sorrel that he recognized as belonging to a cowboy named Dishwater Boggett, so named because he had once rushed into camp so thirsty from a dry drive that he wouldn't wait his turn at the water barrel and had filled up on some dishwater the cook had been about to throw out. Seeing the sorrel gave Augustus a prime feeling because Dish Boggett loved card playing, though he lacked even minimal skills. Of course he also probably lacked ante money, but that didn't necessarily rule out a game. Dish was a good hand and could always get hired—Augustus didn't mind playing for futures with such a man.

When he stepped in the door, everybody was looking peeved, probably because Lippy was banging away at "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean," a song that he loved to excess and played as if he hoped it could be heard in the capital of Mexico. Xavier Wanz, the little Frenchman who owned the place, was nervously wiping his tables with a wet rag. Xavier seemed to think keeping the tables well wiped was the crucial factor in his business, though Augustus was often forced to point out to him that such a view was nonsense. Most of the patrons of the Dry Bean were so lacking in fastidiousness that they wouldn't have noticed a dead skunk on the tables, much less a few crumbs and spilled drinks.

Xavier himself had a near-monopoly on fastidiousness in Lonesome Dove. He wore a white shirt the year round, clipped his little mustache once a week and even wore a bow tie, or, at least, a black shoestring that did its best to serve as a bow tie. Some cowpoke had swiped Xavier's last real bow tie, probably meaning to try and impress some girl somewhere up the trail. Since the shoestring was limp, and not stiff like a bow tie should be, it merely added to the melancholy of Xavier's appearance, which would have been melancholy enough without it. He had been

born in New Orleans and had ended up in Lonesome Dove because someone had convinced him Texas was the land of opportunity. Though he soon discovered otherwise, he was too proud or too fatalistic to attempt to correct his mistake. He approached day-to-day life in the Dry Bean with a resigned temper, which on occasion stopped being resigned and became explosive. When it exploded, the placid air was apt to be rent by Creole curses.

"Good evening, my good friend," Augustus said. He said it with as much gravity as he could muster, since Xavier appreciated a certain formality.

In return, Xavier nodded stiffly. It was hard to extend the amenities when Lippy was at the height of a performance.

Dish Boggett was sitting at one of the tables with Lorena, hoping to persuade her to give him a poke on credit. Though Dish was barely twenty-two, he wore a walrus mustache that made him look years older than he was, and much more solemn. In color the mustache was stuck between yellow and brown—kind of prairie-dog-colored, Augustus thought. He frequently suggested to Dish that if he wanted to eat prairie dog he ought to remember to pick his teeth, a reference to the mustache whose subtlety was lost on Dish.

Lorena had her usual look—the look of a woman who was somewhere else. She had a fine head of blond hair, whose softness alone set her apart in a country where most women's hair had a consistency not much softer than saddle strings. Her cheeks hollowed a little—it gave her a distracting beauty. Augustus's experience had taught him that hollow-cheeked beauty was a dangerous kind. His two wives had both been fat-cheeked and trustworthy but had possessed little resistance to the climate. One had expired of pleurisy in only the second year of their marriage, while the other had been carried off by scarlet fever after the seventh. But the woman Lorena put him most in mind of was Clara Allen, whom he had loved hardest and deepest, and still loved. Clara's eyes were direct and sparkled with interest, whereas Lorena's were always side-looking. Still, there was something about the girl that reminded him of Clara, who had chosen a stolid horse trader when she decided to marry.

"'I god, Dish," he said, going over to the table, "I never expected to see you loafing down here in the south this time of the year."

"Loan me two dollars, Gus," Dish said.

"Not me," Augustus said. "Why would I loan money to a loafer? You ought to be trailing cattle by this time of year."

"I'll be leaving next week to do just that," Dish said. "Loan me two dollars and I'll pay you in the fall."

"Unless you drown or get stomped or shoot somebody and get hung," Augustus said. "No sir. Too many perils ahead. Anyway, I've known you to be sly, Dish. You've probably got two dollars and just don't want to spend it."

Lippy finished his concert and came and joined them. He wore a brown bowler hat he had picked up on the road to San Antonio some years before. Either it had blown out of a stagecoach or the Indians had snatched some careless drummer and not bothered to take his hat. At least those were the two theories Lippy had worked out in order to explain his good fortune in finding the hat. In Augustus's view the hat would have looked better blowing around the country for two years than it did at present. Lippy only wore it when he played the piano; when he was just gambling or sitting around attending to the leak from his stomach he frequently used the hat for an ashtray and then sometimes forgot to empty the ashes before putting the hat back on his head. He only had a few strips of stringy gray hair hanging off his skull, and the ashes didn't make them look much worse, but ashes represented only a fraction of the abuse the bowler had suffered. It was also Lippy's pillow, and had had so many things spilled on it or in it that Augustus could hardly look at it without gagging.

"That hat looks about like a buffalo cud," Augustus said. "A hat ain't meant to be a chamber pot, you know. If I was you I'd throw it away."

Lippy was so named because his lower lip was about the size of the flap on a saddlebag. He could tuck enough snuff under it to last a normal person at least a month; in general the lip lived a life of its own, there toward the bottom of his face. Even when he was just sitting quietly, studying his cards, the lip waved and wiggled as if it had a breeze blowing across it, which in fact it did. Lippy had something wrong with his nose and breathed with his mouth wide open.

Accustomed as she was to hard doings, it had still taken Lorena a while to get used to the way Lippy slurped when he was eating, and she had once had a dream in which a cowboy walked by Lippy and buttoned the lip to his nose as if it were the flap of a pocket. But her disgust was

nothing compared to Xavier's, who suddenly stopped wiping tables and came over and grabbed Lippy's hat off his head. Xavier was in a bad mood, and his features quivered like those of a trapped rabbit.

"Disgrace! I won't have this hat. Who can eat?" Xavier said, though nobody was trying to eat. He took the hat around the bar and flung it out the back door. Once as a boy he had carried slops in a restaurant in New Orleans that actually used tablecloths, a standard of excellence which haunted him still. Every time he looked at the bare tables in the Dry Bean he felt a failure. Instead of having tablecloths, the tables were so rough you could get a splinter just running your hand over them. Also, they weren't attractively round, since the cowboys could not be prevented from whittling on their edges—over the years sizable chunks had been whittled off, giving most of the tables an unbalanced look.

He himself had a linen tablecloth which he brought out once a year, on the anniversary of the death of his wife. His wife had been a bully and he didn't miss her, but it was the only occasion sufficient to provide an excuse for the use of a tablecloth in Lonesome Dove. His wife, whose name had been Therese, had bullied horses, too, which is why his team had run off and flung themselves and the buggy into a gully, the buggy landing right on top of Therese. At the annual dinner in her honor Xavier proved that he was still a restaurateur of discipline by getting drunk without spilling a drop on the fine tablecloth. Augustus was the only one invited to the dinners, but he only came every three or four years, out of politeness; not only were the occasions mournful and silly—everyone in Lonesome Dove had been glad to see the last of Therese—they were mildly dangerous. Augustus was neither as disciplined a drinker as Xavier nor as particular about tablecloths, either, and he knew that if he spilled liquor on the precious linen the situation would end badly. He would not likely have to shoot Xavier, but it might be necessary to whack him on the head, and Augustus hated to hit such a small head with such a large pistol.

To Xavier's mind, Lippy's hat was the final exacerbation. No man of dignity would allow such a hat in his establishment, much less on the head of an employee, so from time to time he seized it and flung it out the door. Perhaps a goat would eat it; they were said to eat worse. But the goats ignored the hat, and Lippy always went out and retrieved it when he remembered that he needed an ashtray.

"Disgrace!" Xavier said again, in a somewhat happier tone.

Lippy was unperturbed. "What's wrong with that hat?" he asked. "It was made in Philadelphia. Says so inside it."

It did say so, but Augustus, not Lippy, was the one who had originally made the point. Lippy could not have read a word as big as Philadelphia, and he had only the vaguest notion of where the city was. All he knew was that it must be a safe and civilized place if they had time to make hats instead of fighting Comanches.

"Xavier, I'll make you a deal," Augustus said. "Loan Dish here two dollars so we can get a little game going, and I'll rake that hat into a tow-sack and carry it home to my pigs. It's the only way you'll ever get rid of it."

"If you wear it again I will burn it," Xavier said, still inflamed. "I will burn the whole place. Then where will you go?"

"If you was to burn that pianer you best have a swift mule waiting," Lippy said, his lip undulating as he spoke. "The church folks won't like it."

Dish found the conversation a burden to listen to. He had delivered a small horse herd in Matamoros and had ridden nearly a hundred miles upriver with Lorie in mind. It was funny he would do it, since the thought of her scared him, but he had just kept riding and here he was. He mainly did his sporting with Mexican whores, but now and then he found he wanted a change from small brown women. Lorena was so much of a change that at the thought of her his throat clogged up and he lost his ability to talk. He had already been with her four times and had a vivid memory of how white she was: moon-pale and touched with shadows, like the night outside. Only not like the night, exactly—he could ride through the night peacefully, and a ride with Lorena was not peaceful. She used some cheap powder, a souvenir of her city living, and the smell of it seemed to follow Dish for weeks. He didn't like just paying her, though—it seemed to him it would be better if he brought her a fine present from Abilene or Dodge. He could get away with that with the señoritas—they liked the idea of presents to look forward to, and Dish was careful never to renege. He always came back from Dodge with ribbons and combs.

But somehow he could not get up the nerve even to make the suggestion to Lorena. It was hard enough to make a plain business offer. Often she seemed not to hear questions when they were put to her. It was hard to make a girl realize you had special feelings for her when she wouldn't

look at you, didn't hear you, and made your throat clog up. It was even harder to live with the thought that the girl in question didn't want you to have the special feelings, particularly if you were about to go up the trail and not see her for many months.

Confusing as these feelings were, they were made even worse for Dish by the realization that he couldn't afford even the transaction that the girl would accept. He was down to his last two bits, having lost a full month's wages in a game in Matamoros. He had no money, and no eloquence with which to persuade Lorena to trust him, but he did have a dogged persistence and was prepared to sit in the Dry Bean all night in hope that his evident need would finally move her.

Under the circumstances it was a sore trial to Dish that Augustus had come in. It seemed to him that Lorie had been getting a little friendlier, and if nothing had happened to distract her he might soon have prevailed. At least it had been just him and her at the table, which had been nice in itself. But now it was him and her and Augustus and Lippy, making it difficult, if not impossible, for him to plead his case—though all he had really been doing by way of pleading was to look at her frequently with big hopeful eyes.

Lippy began to feel unhappy about the fact that Xavier had thrown his hat out the door. Augustus's mention of the pigs put the whole matter in a more ominous light. After all, the pigs might come along and eat the hat, which was one of the solidest comforts in his meager existence. He would have liked to go and retrieve the hat before the pigs came along, but he knew that it wasn't really wise to provoke Xavier unduly when he was in a bad mood anyway. He couldn't see out the back door because the bar was in the way—for all he knew the hat might already be gone.

"I wisht I could get back to St. Louis," he said. "I hear it's a right busy town." He had been reared there, and when his heart was heavy he returned to it in his thoughts.

"Why, hell, go," Augustus said. "Life's a short affair. Why spend it here?"

"Well, you are," Dish said, in a surly tone, hoping Gus would take the hint and set out immediately.

"Dish, you sound like you've got a sour stomach," Augustus said. "What you need is a good satisfying game of cards."

"Nothing of the kind," Dish said, casting a bold and solicitous glance at Lorena.

Looking at her, though, was like looking at the hills. The hills stayed as they were. You could go to them, if you had the means, but they extended no greeting.

Xavier stood at the door, staring into the dark. The rag he used to wipe the tables was dripping onto his pants leg, but he didn't notice.

"It's too bad nobody in town ain't dead," Augustus remarked. "This group has the makings of a first-rate funeral party. What about you, Wanz? Let's play cards."

Xavier acquiesced. It was better than nothing. Besides, he was a devilish good cardplayer, one of the few around who was a consistent match for Augustus. Lorena was competent—Tinkersley had taught her a little. When the Dry Bean was full of cowboys she was not allowed to sit in, but on nights when the clientele consisted of Augustus, she often played.

When she played, she changed, particularly if she won a little—Augustus frequently did his best to help her win a little, just to see the process take place. The child in her was briefly reborn—she didn't chatter, but she did occasionally laugh out loud, and her cloudy eyes cleared and became animated. Once in a while, when she won a really good pot, she would give Augustus a little punch with her fist. It pleased him when that happened—it was good to see the girl enjoying herself. It put him in mind of family games, the kind he had once played with his lively sisters in Tennessee. The memory of those games usually put him to drinking more than he liked to—and all because Lorie ceased being a sulky whore for a little while and reminded him of happy girls he had once known.

They played until the rustler's moon had crossed to the other side of town. Lorena brightened so much that Dish Boggett fell worse in love with her than ever; she filled him with such an ache that he didn't mind that Xavier won half of his next month's wages. The ache was very much with him when he finally decided there was no hope and stepped out into the moonlight to unhitch his horse.

Augustus had come with him, while Lippy sneaked out the back door to retrieve his hat. The light in Lorena's room came on while they were standing there, and Dish looked up at it, catching just her shadow as she passed in front of the lamp.

"Well, Dish, so you're leaving us," Augustus said. "Which outfit's lucky enough to have you this trip?"

The quick glimpse of Lorena put Dish in such perplexity of spirit that he could hardly focus on the question.

"Reckon I'm going with the UU's," he said, his eyes still on the window.

The cause of Dish's melancholy was not lost on Augustus.

"Why that's Shanghai Pierce's bunch," he said.

"Yup," Dish said, starting to lift his foot to his stirrup.

"Now hold on a minute, Dish," Augustus said. He fished in his pocket and came out with two dollars, which he handed to the surprised cowboy.

"If you're riding north with old Shang we may never meet again this side of the bourn," Augustus said, deliberately adopting the elegiac tone. "At the very least you'll get your hearing ruint. That voice of his could deafen a rock."

Dish had to smile. Gus seemed unaware that one of the more persistent topics of dispute on the Texas range was whether his voice was louder than Shanghai Pierce's. It was commonly agreed that the two men had no close rivals when it came to being deafening.

"Why'd you give me this money?" Dish asked. He had never been able to figure Gus out.

"You asked me for it, didn't you?" Augustus said. "If I'd given it to you before the game started I might as well have handed it to Wanz, and he don't need no two dollars of mine."

There was a pause while Dish tried to puzzle out the real motive, if there was one.

"I'd not want it thought I'd refuse a simple loan to a friend," Augustus said. "Specially not one who's going off with Shanghai Pierce."

"Oh, Mr. Pierce don't go with us," Dish said. "He goes over to New Orleans and takes the train."

Augustus said nothing, and Dish soon concluded that he was to get the loan, even if the aggravation of Mr. Pierce's company wasn't involved.

"Well, much obliged then," Dish said. "I'll see you in the fall if not sooner."

"There's no need for you to ride off tonight," Augustus said. "You can throw your blanket down on our porch, if you like."

"I might do that," Dish said. Feeling rather awkward, he rehitched his horse and went to the door of the Dry Bean, wanting to get upstairs before Lorie turned off her light.

"I believe I left something," he said lamely, at the door of the saloon.

"Well, I won't wait, Dish," Augustus said. "But we'll expect you for breakfast if you care to stay."

As he strolled away he heard the boy's footsteps hitting the stairs at the back of the saloon. Dish was a good boy, not much less green than Newt, though a more experienced hand. Best to help such boys have their moment of fun, before life's torments snatched them.

From a distance, standing in the pale street, he saw two shadows against the yellow box of light from Lorie's room. She wasn't that set against Dish, it seemed to him, and she had been pepped up from the card playing. Maybe even Lorie would be surprised and find a liking for the boy. Occasionally he had known sporting women to marry and do well at it—if Lorie were so inclined Dish Boggett would not be a bad man to settle on.

The light had gone off at the Pumphreys' and the armadillo was no longer there to roll its shadow at him. The pigs were stretched out on the porch, lying practically snout to snout. Augustus was about to kick them off to make room for the guest he more or less expected, but they looked so peaceful he relented and went around to the back door. If Dish Boggett, with his prairie dog of a mustache, considered himself too refined to throw his bedroll beside two fine pigs, then he could rout them out himself.

5.

WHATEVER SUBJECT Augustus had on his mind when he went to bed was generally still sitting there when he woke up. He was such a short sleeper that the subject had no time to slip out of mind. Five hours was as much as he ever slept at a stretch, and four hours was more nearly his average.

"A man that sleeps all night wastes too much of life," he often said. "As I see it the days was made for looking and the nights for sport."

Since sport was what he had been brooding about when he got home, it was still in his thoughts when he arose, which he did about 4 A.M., to see to the breakfast—in his view too important a meal to entrust to a Mexican bandit. The heart of his breakfast was a plenitude of sourdough biscuits, which he cooked in a Dutch oven out in the backyard. His pot dough had been perking along happily for over ten years, and the first thing he did upon rising was check it out. The rest of the breakfast was secondary, just a matter of whacking off a few slabs of bacon and frying a panful of pullet eggs. Bolivar could generally be trusted to deal with the coffee.

Augustus cooked his biscuits outside for three reasons. One was because the house was sure to heat up well enough anyway during the day, so there was no point in building any more of a fire than was necessary for bacon and eggs. Two was because biscuits cooked in a Dutch oven tasted better than stove-cooked biscuits, and three was because he liked to be outside to catch the first light. A man that depended on an indoor cookstove would miss the sunrise, and if he missed sunrise in Lonesome Dove, he would have to wait out a long stretch of heat and dust before he got to see anything so pretty.

Augustus molded his biscuits and went out and got a fire going in the Dutch oven while it was still good dark—just enough of a fire to freshen up his bed of mesquite coals. When he judged the oven was ready he brought the biscuits and his Bible out in the backyard. He set the biscuits in the oven, and sat down on a big black kettle that they used on the rare occasions when they rendered lard. The kettle was big enough to hold a small mule, if anybody had wanted to boil one, but for the last few years it had remained upside down, making an ideal seat.

The eastern sky was red as coals in a forge, lighting up the flats along the river. Dew had wet the million needles of the chaparral, and when the rim of the sun edged over the horizon the chaparral seemed to be spotted with diamonds. A bush in the backyard was filled with little rainbows as the sun touched the dew.

It was tribute enough to sunup that it could make even chaparral bushes look beautiful, Augustus thought, and he watched the process happily, knowing it would only last a few minutes. The sun spread reddish-gold light through the shining bushes, among which a few goats wandered, bleating. Even when the sun rose above the low bluffs to the south, a layer of light lingered for a bit at the level of the chaparral, as if independent of its source. Then the sun lifted clear, like an immense coin. The dew quickly died, and the light that filled the bushes like red dust dispersed, leaving clear, slightly bluish air.

It was good reading light by then, so Augustus applied himself for a few minutes to the Prophets. He was not overly religious, but he did consider himself a fair prophet and liked to study the styles of his predecessors. They were mostly too long-winded, in his view, and he made no effort to read them verse for verse—he just had a look here and there, while the biscuits were browning.

While he was enjoying a verse or two of Amos, the pigs walked around

the corner of the house, and Call, at almost the same moment, stepped out the back door, pulling on his shirt. The pigs walked over and stood directly in front of Augustus. The dew had wet their blue coats.

"They know I've got a soft heart," he said to Call. "They're hoping I'll feed them this Bible."

"I hope you pigs didn't wake up Dish," he added, for he had checked and seen that Dish was there, sleeping comfortably with his head on his saddle and his hat over his eyes, only his big mustache showing.

To Call's regret he had never been able to come awake easily. His joints felt like they were filled with glue, and it was an irritation to see Augustus sitting on the black kettle looking as fresh as if he'd slept all night, when in fact he had probably played poker till one or two o'clock. Getting up early and feeling awake was the one skill he had never truly perfected—he got up, of course, but it never felt natural.

Augustus lay down the Bible and walked over to look at Call's wound.

"I oughta slop some more axle grease on it," he said. "It's a nasty bite."

"You tend to your biscuits," Call said. "What's Dish Boggett doing here?"

"I didn't ask the man his business," Augustus said. "If you die of gangrene you'll be sorry you didn't let me dress that wound."

"It ain't a wound, it's just a bite," Call said. "I was bit worse by bedbugs down in Saltillo that time. I suppose you set up reading the Good Book all night."

"Not me," Augustus said. "I only read it in the morning and the evening, when I can be reminded of the glory of the Lord. The rest of the day I'm just reminded of what a miserable stink hole we stuck ourselves in. It's hard to have fun in a place like this, but I do my best."

He went over and put his hand on top of the Dutch oven. It felt to him like the biscuits were probably ready, so he took them out. They had puffed up nicely and were a healthy brown. He took them quickly into the house and Call followed. Newt was at the table, sitting straight upright, a knife in one hand and a fork in the other, but sound asleep.

"We come to this place to make money," Call said. "Nothing about fun was in the deal."

"Call, you don't even like money," Augustus said. "You've spit in the eye of every rich man you've ever met. You like money even less than you like fun, if that's possible."

Call sighed, and sat down at the table. Bolivar was up and stumbling around the stove, shaking so that he spilled coffee grounds on the floor.

"Wake up, Newt," Augustus said. "If you don't you'll fall over and stick yourself in the eye with your own fork."

Call gave the boy a little shake and his eyes popped open.

"I was having a dream," Newt said, sounding very young.

"Your tough luck, then, son," Augustus said. "Morning around here is more like a nightmare. Now look what's happened!"

In an effort to get the coffee going, Bolivar had spilled a small pile of coffee grounds into the grease where the eggs and bacon were frying. It seemed a small enough matter to him, but it enraged Augustus, who liked to achieve an orderly breakfast at least once a week.

"I guess it won't hurt the coffee none to taste like eggs," he said testily. "Most of the time your eggs taste like coffee."

"I don't care," Bolivar said. "I feel sick."

Pea Eye came stumbling through about that time, trying to get his pizzle out of his pants before his bladder started to flood. It was a frequent problem. The pants he wore had about fifteen small buttons, and he got up each morning and buttoned every one of them before he realized he was about to piss. Then he would come rushing through the kitchen trying to undo the buttons. The race was always close, but usually Pea would make it to the back steps before the flood commenced. Then he would stand there and splatter the yard for five minutes or so. When he could hear sizzling grease in one ear and the sound of Pea Eye pissing in the other, Augustus knew that the peace of the morning was over once again.

"If a woman ever stumbled onto this outfit at this hour of the day she'd screech and poke out her eyes," Augustus said.

At that point someone did stumble onto it, but only Dish Boggett, who had always been responsive to the smell of frying bacon.

It was a surprise to Newt, who immediately snapped awake and tried to get his cowlick to lay down. Dish Boggett was one of his heroes, a real cowboy who had been up the trail all the way to Dodge City more than once. It was Newt's great ambition: to go up the trail with a herd of cattle. The sight of Dish gave him hope, for Dish wasn't somebody totally out of reach, like the Captain. Newt didn't imagine that he could ever be what the Captain was, but Dish seemed not that much different from himself. He was known to be a top hand, and Newt welcomed every chance to be around him; he liked to study the way Dish did things.

"Morning, Dish," he said.

"Why, howdy there," Dish said, and went to stand beside Pea Eye and attend to the same business.

It perked Newt up that Dish didn't treat him like a kid. Someday, if he was lucky, maybe he and Dish would be cowboys together. Newt could imagine nothing better.

Augustus had fried the eggs hard as marbles to compensate for the coffee grains, and when they looked done to him he poured the grease into the big three-gallon syrup can they used for a grease bucket.

"It's poor table manners to piss in hearing of those at the table," he said, directing his remarks to the gentlemen on the porch. "You two are grown men. What would your mothers think?"

Dish looked a little sheepish, whereas Pea was merely confused by the question. His mother had passed away in Georgia when he was only six. She had not had time to give him much training before she died, and he had no idea what she might think of such an action. However, he was sure she would not have wanted him to go in his pants.

"I had to hurry," he said.

"Howdy, Captain," Dish said.

Call nodded. In the morning he had the advantage of Gus, since Gus had to cook. With Gus cooking, he got his choice of the eggs and bacon, and a little food always brought him to life and made him consider all the things that ought to be done during the day. The Hat Creek outfit was just a small operation, with just enough land under lease to graze small lots of cattle and horses until buyers could be found. It amazed Call that such a small operation could keep three grown men and a boy occupied from sunup until dark, day after day, but such was the case. The barn and corrals had been in such poor shape when he and Gus bought the place that it took constant work just to keep them from total collapse. There was nothing important to do in Lonesome Dove, but that didn't mean there was enough time to keep up with the little things that needed doing. They had been six weeks sinking a new well and were still far from deep enough.

When Call raked the eggs and bacon onto his plate, such a crowd of possible tasks rushed into his mind that he was a minute responding to Dish's greetings.

"Oh, hello, Dish," he said, finally. "Have some bacon."

"Dish is planning to shave his mustache right after breakfast," Augustus said. "He's getting tired of livin' without women."

In fact, with the aid of Gus's two dollars, Dish had been able to prevail on Lorena. He had awakened on the porch with a clear head, but when Augustus mentioned women he remembered it all and suddenly felt weak with love. He had been keenly hungry when he sat down at the table, his mouth watering for the eggs and fryback, but the thought of Lorena's white body, or the portion of it he had got to see when she lifted her nightgown, made him almost dizzy for a moment. He continued to eat, but the food had lost its taste.

The blue shoat came to the door and looked in at the people, to Augustus's amusement. "Look at that," he said. "A pig watching a bunch of human pigs." Though he had been outpositioned at the frying pan, he was in prime shape to secure his share of the biscuits, half a dozen of which he had already sopped in honey and consumed.

"Throw that pig them eggshells," he said to Bolivar. "He's starving."

"I don't care," Bolivar said, sucking coffee-colored sugar out of a big spoon. "I feel sick."

"You're repeating yourself, Bol," Augustus said. "If you're planning on dying today I hope you dig your grave first."

Bolivar looked at him sorrowfully. So much talk in the morning gave him a headache to go with his shakes. "If I dig a grave it will be yours," he said simply.

"Going up the trail, Dish?" Newt asked, hoping to turn the conversation to more cheerful matters.

"I hope to," Dish said.

"It would take a hacksaw to cut these eggs," Call said. "I've seen bricks that was softer."

"Well, Bol spilled coffee in them," Augustus said. "I expect it was hard coffee."

Call finished the rocklike eggs and gave Dish the once-over. He was a lank fellow, loose-built, and a good rider. Five or six more like him and they could make up a herd themselves and drive it north. The idea had been in his mind for a year or more. He had even mentioned it to Augustus, but Augustus merely laughed at him.

"We're too old, Call," he said. "We've forgot everything we need to know."

"You may have," Call said. "I ain't."

Seeing Dish put Call in mind of his idea again. He was not eager to spend the rest of his life on well-digging or barn repair. If they made up a

fair herd and did well with it, they would make enough to buy some good land north of the brush country.

"Are you signed to go with someone then?" he asked Dish.

"Oh, no, I ain't signed on," Dish said. "But I've gone before, and I imagine Mr. Pierce will hire me again—or if not him someone else."

"We might give you work right here," Call said.

That got Augustus's attention. "Give him work doing what?" he asked. "Dish here's a top hand. He don't cotton to work that requires walking, do you, Dish?"

"I don't, for a fact," Dish said, looking at the Captain but seeing Lorena. "I've done a mess of it though. What did you have in mind?"

"Well, we're going down to Mexico tonight," Call said. "Going to see what we can raise. We might make up a herd ourselves, if you wanted to wait a day or two while we look it over."

"That mare bite's drove you crazy," Augustus said. "Make up a herd and do what with it?"

"Drive it," Call said.

"Well, we might drive it over to Pickles Gap, I guess," Augustus said. "That ain't enough work to keep a hand like Dish occupied for the summer."

Call got up and carried his dishes to the washtub. Bolivar wearily got off his stool and picked up the water bucket.

"I wish Deets would come back," he said.

Deets was a black man; he had been with Cal and Augustus nearly as long as Pea Eye. Three days before, he had been sent to San Antonio with a deposit of money, a tactic Call always used, since few bandits would suspect a black man of having any money on him.

Bolivar missed him because one of Deets's jobs was to carry water.

"He'll be back this morning," Call said. "You can set your clock by Deets."

"You might set yours," Augustus said. "I wouldn't set mine. Old Deets is human. If he ever run into the right dark-complexioned lady you might have to wind your clock two or three times before he showed up. He's like me. He knows that some things are more important than work."

Bolivar looked at the water bucket with irritation. "I'd like to shoot this damn bucket full of holes," he said.

"I don't think you could hit that bucket if you was sitting on it," Augustus said. "I've seen you shoot. You ain't the worst shot I ever

knew—that would be Jack Jennell—but you run him a close race. Jack went broke as a buffalo hunter quicker than any man I ever knew. He couldn't have hit a buffalo if one had swallowed him."

Bolivar went out the door with the bucket, looking as if it might be a while before he came back.

Dish meanwhile was doing some hard thinking. He had meant to leave right after breakfast and ride back to the Matagorda, where he had a sure job. The Hat Creek outfit was hardly known as a trail-driving bunch, but on the other hand Captain Call was not a man to indulge in idle talk. If he was contemplating a drive he would probably make one. Meanwhile there was Lorena, who might come to see him in an entirely different light if he could spend time with her for a few days running. Of course, getting to spend time with her was expensive, and he had not a cent, but if word got around that he was working for the Hat Creek outfit he could probably attract a little credit.

One thing Dish prided himself on was his skill at driving a buggy; it occurred to him that since Lorena seemed to spend most of her time cooped up in the Dry Bean, she might appreciate a buggy ride along the river in a smart buggy, if such a creature could be found in Lonesome Dove. He got up and carried his plate to the wash bucket.

"Captain, if you mean it I'd be pleased to stay the day or two," Dish said.

The Captain had stepped out on the back porch and was looking north, along the stage road that threaded its way through the brush country toward San Antonio. The road ran straight for a considerable distance before it hit the first gully, and Captain Call had his eyes fixed on it. He seemed not to hear Dish's reply, although he was only a few feet away. Dish stepped out on the porch to see what it was that distracted the man. Far up the road he could see two horsemen coming, but they were so far yet that it was impossible to tell anything about them. At moments, heat waves from the road caused a quavering that made them seem like one horseman. Dish squinted but there was nothing special about the riders that his eye could detect. Yet the Captain had not so much as turned his head since they appeared.

"Gus, come out here," the Captain said.

Augustus was busy cleaning his plate of honey, a process that involved several more biscuits.

"I'm eating," he said, though that was obvious.

"Come see who's coming," the Captain said, rather mildly, Dish thought.

"If it's Deets my watch is already set," Augustus said. "Anyway, I don't suppose he's changed clothes, and if I have to see his old black knees sticking out of them old quilts he wears for pants it's apt to spoil my digestion."

"Deets is coming all right," Call said. "The fact is, he ain't by himself."

"Well, the man's always aimed to marry," Augustus said. "I imagine he just finally met up with that dark-complexioned lady I was referring to."

"He ain't met no lady," Call said with a touch of exasperation. "Who he's met is an old friend of ours. If you don't come here and look I'll have to drag you."

Augustus was about through with the biscuits anyway. He had to use a forefinger to capture the absolute last drop of honey, which was just as sweet licked off a finger as it was when eaten on good sourdough biscuits.

"Newt, did you know honey is the world's purest food?" he said, getting up.

Newt had heard enough lectures on the subject to have already forgotten more than most people ever know about the properties of honey. He hurried his plate to the tub, more curious than Mr. Gus about who Deets could have found.

"Yes, sir, I like it myself," he said, to cut short the talk of honey.

Augustus was a step behind the boy, idly licking his forefinger. He glanced up the road to see what Call could be so aroused about. Two riders were coming, the one on the left clearly Deets, on the big white gelding they called Wishbone. The other rider rode a pacing bay; it took but a moment for recognition to strike. The rider seemed to slump a little in the saddle, in the direction of his horse's off side, a tendency peculiar to only one man he knew. Augustus was so startled that he made the mistake of running his sticky fingers through his own hair.

"'I god, Woodrow," he said. "That there's Jake Spoon."

6.

THE NAME STRUCK NEWT like a blow, so much did Jake Spoon mean to him. As a very little boy, when his mother had still been alive, Jake Spoon was the man who came most often to see her. It had begun to be clear to him, as he turned over his memories, that his mother had been a whore,

like Lorena, but this realization tarnished nothing, least of all his memories of Jake Spoon. No man had been kinder, either to him or his mother—her name had been Maggie. Jake had given him hard candy and pennies and had set him on a pacing horse and given him his first ride; he had even had old Jesus, the bootmaker, make him his first pair of boots; and once when Jake won a lady's saddle in a card game he gave the saddle to Newt and had the stirrups cut down to his size.

Those were the days before order came to Lonesome Dove, when Captain Call and Augustus were still Rangers, with responsibilities that took them up and down the border. Jake Spoon was a Ranger too, and in Newt's eyes the most dashing of them all. He always carried a pearl-handled pistol and rode a pacing horse—easier on the seat, Jake claimed. The dangers of his profession seemed to sit lightly on him.

But then the fighting gradually died down along the border and the Captain and Mr. Gus and Jake and Pea Eye and Deets all quit rangering and formed the Hat Creek outfit. But the settled life seemed not to suit Jake, and one day he was just gone. No one was surprised, though Newt's mother was so upset by it that for a time he got a whipping every time he asked when Jake was coming back. The whippings didn't seem to have much to do with him, just with his mother's disappointment that Jake had left.

Newt stopped asking about Jake, but he didn't stop remembering him. It was barely a year later that his mother died of fever; the Captain and Augustus took him in, although at first they argued about him. At first Newt missed his mother so much that he didn't care about the arguments. His mother and Jake were both gone and arguments were not going to bring them back.

But when the worst pain passed and he began to earn his keep around the Hat Creek outfit by doing the numerous chores that the Captain set him, he often drifted back in his mind to the days when Jake Spoon had come to see his mother. It seemed to him that Jake might even be his father, though everyone told him his name was Newt Dobbs, not Newt Spoon. Why it was Dobbs, and why everyone was so sure, was a puzzle to him, since no one in Lonesome Dove seemed to know anything about a Mr. Dobbs. It had not occurred to him to ask his mother while she was alive—last names weren't used much around Lonesome Dove, and he didn't realize that the last name was supposed to come from the father. Even Mr. Gus, who would talk about anything, seemed to have no infor-

mation about Mr. Dobbs. "He went west when he shouldn't have" was his only comment on the man.

Newt had never asked Captain Call to amplify that information—the Captain preferred to volunteer what he wanted you to know. In his heart, though, Newt didn't believe in Mr. Dobbs. He had a little pile of stuff his mother had left, just a few beads and combs and a little scrapbook and some cutout pictures from magazines that Mr. Gus had been kind enough to save for him, and there was nothing about a Mr. Dobbs in the scrapbook and no picture of him amid the pictures, though there was a scratchy picture of his grandfather, Maggie's father, who had lived in Alabama.

If, as he suspected, there had been no Mr. Dobbs, or if he had just been a gentleman who stopped at the rooming house a day or two—they had lived in the rooming house when Maggie was alive—then it might be that Jake Spoon was really his father. Perhaps no one had informed him of it because they thought it more polite to let Jake do so himself when he came back.

Newt had always assumed Jake *would* come back, too. Scraps of news about him had blown back down the cow trails—word that he was a peace officer in Ogallala, or that he was prospecting for gold in the Black Hills. Newt had no idea where the Black Hills were, or how you went about finding gold in them, but one of the reasons he was eager to head north with a cow herd was the hope of running into Jake somewhere along the way. Of course he wanted to wear a gun and become a top hand and have the adventure of the drive—maybe they would even see buffalo, though he knew there weren't many left. But underneath all his other hopes was the oldest yearning he had, one that could lie covered over for months and years and still be fresh as a toothache: the need to see Jake Spoon.

Now the very man was riding toward them, right there beside Deets, on a pacing horse as pretty as the one he had ridden away ten years before. Newt forgot Dish Boggett, whose every move he had been planning to study. Before the two riders even got very close Newt could see Deets's big white teeth shining in his black face, for he had gone away on a routine job and was coming back proud of more than having done it. He didn't race his horse up to the porch or do anything silly, but it was plain even at a distance that Deets was a happy man.

Then the horses were kicking up little puffs of dust in the wagon yard

and the two were almost there. Jake wore a brown vest and a brown hat, and he still had his pearl-handled pistol. Deets was still grinning. They rode right up to the back porch before they drew rein. It was obvious that Jake had come a long way, for the pacing bay had no flesh on him.

Jake's eyes were the color of coffee, and he wore a little mustache. He looked them all over for a moment, and then broke out a slow grin.

"Howdy, boys," he said. "What's for breakfast?"

"Why, biscuits and fatback, Jake," Augustus said. "The usual fare. Only we won't be serving it up for about twenty-four hours. I hope you've got a buffalo liver or a haunch of venison on you to tide you over."

"Gus, don't tell me you've et," Jake said, swinging off the bay. "We rode all night, and Deets couldn't think of nothing to talk about except the taste of them biscuits you make."

"While you was talking, Gus was eating them," Call said. He and Jake shook hands, looking one another over.

Jake looked at Deets a minute. "I knowed we should have telegraphed from Pickles Gap," he said, then turned with a grin and shook Gus's hand.

"You always was a hog, Gus," Jake said.

"And you were usually late for meals," Augustus reminded him.

Then Pea Eye insisted on shaking hands, though Jake had never been very partial to him. "By gosh, Jake, you stayed gone a while," Pea Eye said.

While they were shaking Jake noticed the boy, standing there by some lank cowhand with a heavy mustache. "My lord," he said. "Are you little Newt? Why you're plumb growed. Who let that happen?"

Newt felt so full of feeling that he could hardly speak. "It's me, Jake," he said. "I'm still here."

"What do you think, Captain?" Deets asked, handing Call the receipt from the bank. "Didn't I find the prodigal?"

"You found him," Call said. "I bet he wasn't in church, either."

Deets had a laugh at that. "No, sir," he said. "Not in church."

Jake was introduced to Dish Boggett, but once he shook hands he turned and had another look at Newt as if the fact that he was nearly grown surprised him more than anything else in Lonesome Dove.

"I swear, Jake," Augustus said, looking at the bay horse, "you've rode that horse right down to the bone."

"Give him a good feed, Deets," Call said. "I judge it's been a while since he's had one."

Deets led the horses off toward the roofless barn. It was true that he made his pants out of old quilts, for reasons that no one could get him to explain. Colorful as they were, quilts weren't the best material for riding through mesquite and chaparral. Thorns had snagged the pants in several places, and cotton ticking was sticking out. For headgear Deets wore an old cavalry cap he had found somewhere—it was in nearly as bad shape as Lippy's bowler.

"Didn't he have that cap when I left?" Jake asked. He took his own hat off and slapped the dust off his pants leg with it. He had curly black hair, but Newt saw to his surprise that there was a sizable bald spot on the top of his head.

"He found that cap in the fifties, to the best of my recollection," Augustus said. "You know Deets is like me—he's not one to quit on a garment just because it's got a little age. We can't all be fine dressers like you, Jake."

Jake turned his coffee eyes on Augustus and broke out another slow grin. "What'd it take to get you to whip up another batch of them biscuits?" he said. "I've come all the way from Arkansas without tasting a good bite of bread."

"From the looks of that pony it's been fast traveling," Call said, which was as close to prying as he intended to get. He had run with Jake Spoon off and on for twenty years, and liked him well; but the man had always worried him a little, underneath. There was no more likable man in the west, and no better rider, either; but riding wasn't everything, and neither was likableness. Something in Jake didn't quite stick. Something wasn't quite consistent. He could be the coolest man in the company in one fight, and in the next be practically worthless.

Augustus knew it too. He was a great sponsor of Jake's and had stayed fond of him although for years they were rivals for Clara Allen, who eventually showed them both the door. But Augustus felt, with Call, that Jake wasn't long on backbone. When he left the Rangers Augustus said more than once that he would probably end up hung. So far that hadn't happened, but riding up at breakfast time on a gant horse was an indication of trouble. Jake prided himself on pretty horses, and would never ride a horse as hard as the bay had been ridden if trouble wasn't somewhere behind him.

Jake saw Bolivar coming from the old cistern with a bucketful of water. Bolivar was a new face, and one that had no interest in his homecoming.

A little cool water sloshed over the edges of the bucket, looking very good to a man with a mouth as dusty as Jake's.

"Boys, I'd like a drink and maybe even a wash, if you can spare one," he said. "My luck's been running kinda muddy lately, but I'd like to get water enough in me that I can at least spit before I tell you about it."

"Why, sure," Augustus said. "Go fill the dipper. You want us to stay out here and hold off the posse?"

"There ain't no posse," Jake said, going in the house.

Dish Boggett felt somewhat at a loss. He had been all ready to hire on, and then this new man rode up and everyone had sort of forgotten him. Captain Call, a man known for being all business, seemed a little distracted. He and Gus just stood there as if they expected a posse despite what Jake Spoon had said.

Newt noticed it too. Mr. Gus ought to go in and cook Jake some biscuits, but he just stood there, thinking about something, evidently. Deets was on his way back from the lots.

Dish finally spoke up. "Captain, like I said, I'd be glad to wait if you have some plans to make up a herd," he said.

The Captain looked at him strangely, as if he might have forgotten his name, much less what he was doing there. But it wasn't the case.

"Why, yes, Dish," he said. "We might be needing some hands, if you don't mind doing some well-digging while you wait. Pea, you best get these boys started."

Dish was almost ready to back out then and there. He had drawn top wages for the last two years without being asked to do anything that couldn't be done from a horse. It was insensitive of the Captain to think that he could just order him off, with a boy and an old idiot like Pea Eye, to wrestle a spade and crowbar all day. It scratched his pride, and he had a notion to go get his horse and let them keep their well-digging. But the Captain was looking at him hard, and when Dish looked up to say he had changed his mind, their eyes met and Dish didn't say it. There had been no real promises made, much less talk of wages, but somehow Dish had taken one step too far. The Captain was looking at him eye to eye, as if to see if he was going to stand by his own words or if he meant to wiggle like a fish and change his mind. Dish had only offered to stay because of Lorie, but suddenly it had all gotten beyond her. Pea and Newt were already walking toward the barn. It was clear from the Captain's attitude

that unless he wanted to lose all reputation, he had trapped himself into at least one day's well-digging.

It seemed to him he ought to at least say something to salvage a little pride, but before he could think of anything Gus came over and clapped him on the shoulder.

"You should have rode on last night, Dish," he said with an irritating grin. "You may never see the last of this outfit now."

"Well, you was the one that invited me," Dish said, highly annoyed. Since there was no help for it short of disgrace, he started for the lots.

"If you come to Chiny you can stop digging," Augustus called after him. "That's the place where the men wear pigtails."

"I wouldn't ride him if I were you," Call said. "We may need him."

"I didn't send him off to dig no well," Augustus said. "Don't you know that's an insult to his dignity? I'm surprised he went. I thought Dish had more grit."

"He said he'd stay," Call said. "I ain't feeding him three times a day to sit around and play cards with you."

"No need to now," Augustus said. "I got Jake for that. I bet you don't get Jake down in your well."

At that moment Jake stepped out on the back porch, his sleeves rolled up and his face red from the scrubbing he had given it with the old piece of sacking they used for a towel.

"That old *pistolero*'s been cleaning his gun on this towel," Jake said. "It's filthy dirty."

"If it's just his six-shooter he's cleaning on it you oughtn't to complain," Augustus said. "There's worse things he could wipe on it."

"Hell, don't you men ever wash?" Jake asked. "That old Mex didn't even want to give me a pan of water."

It was the kind of remark Call had no patience with, but that was Jake, more interested in fancy arrangements than in the more important matters.

"Once you left, our standards slipped," Augustus said. "The majority of this outfit ain't interested in refinements."

"That's plain," Jake said. "There's a damn pig on the back porch. What about them biscuits?"

"Much as I've missed you, I ain't overworking my sourdough just because you and Deets couldn't manage to get here in time," Augustus said. "What I will do is fry some meat."

He fried it, and Jake and Deets ate it, while Bolivar sat in the corner and sulked at the thought of two more breakfasts to wash up after. It amused Augustus to watch Jake eat—he was so fastidious about it—but the sight put Call into a black fidget. Jake could spend twenty minutes picking at some eggs and a bit of bacon. It was obvious to Augustus that Call was trying to be polite and let Jake get some food in his belly before he told his story, but Call was not a patient man and had already controlled his urge to get to work longer than was usual. He stood in the door, watching the whitening sky and looking restless enough to bite himself.

"So where have you been, Jake?" Augustus asked, to speed things up.

Jake looked thoughtful, as he almost always did. His coffee-colored eyes always seemed to be traveling leisurely over scenes from his own past, and they gave the impression that he was a man of sorrows—an impression very appealing to the ladies. It disgusted Augustus a little that ladies were so taken in by Jake's big eyes. In fact, Jake Spoon had had a perfectly easy life, doing mostly just what he pleased and keeping his boots clean; what his big eyes concealed was a slow-working brain. Basically Jake just dreamed his way through life and somehow got by with it.

"Oh, I've been seeing the country," he said. "I was up to Montana two years ago. I guess that's what made me decide to come back, although I've been meaning to get back down this way and see you boys for some years."

Call came back in the room and straddled a chair, figuring he might as well hear it.

"What's Montana got to do with us?" he asked.

"Why, Call, you ought to see it," Jake said. "A prettier country never was."

"How far'd you go?" Augustus asked.

"Way up, past the Yellowstone," Jake said. "I was near to the Milk River. You can smell Canady from there."

"I bet you can smell Indians too," Call said. "How'd you get past the Cheyenne?"

"They shipped most of them out," Jake said. "Some of the Blackfeet are still troublesome. But I was with the Army, doing a little scouting."

That hardly made sense. Jake Spoon might scout his way across a card table, but Montana was something else.

"When'd you take to scouting?" Call asked dryly.

"Oh, I was just with a feller taking some beef to the Blackfeet," Jake said. "The Army came along to help."

"A lot of damn help the Army would be, driving beef," Gus said.

"They helped us keep our hair," Jake said, laying his knife and fork across his plate as neatly as if he were eating at a fancy table.

"My main job was to skeer the buffalo out of the way," he said.

"Buffalo," Augustus said. "I thought they was about gone."

"Pshaw," Jake said. "I must have seen fifty thousand up above the Yellowstone. The damn buffalo hunters ain't got the guts to take on them Indians. Oh, they'll finish them, once the Cheyenne and the Sioux finally cave in, and they may have even since I left. The damn Indians have the grass of Montana all to themselves. And has it got grass. Call, you ought to see it."

"I'd go today if I could fly," Call said.

"Be safer to walk," Augustus said. "By the time we walked up there maybe they would have licked the Indians."

"That's just it, boys," Jake said. "The minute they're licked there's going to be fortunes made in Montana. Why, it's cattle land like you've never seen, Call. High grass and plenty of water."

"Chilly, though, ain't it?" Augustus asked.

"Oh, it's got weather," Jake said. "Hell, a man can wear a coat."

"Better yet, a man can stay inside," Augustus said.

"I've yet to see a fortune made inside," Call said. "Except by a banker, and we ain't bankers. What did you have in mind, Jake?"

"Getting to it first," Jake said. "Round up some of these free cattle and take 'em on up. Beat all the other sons of bitches, and we'd soon be rich."

Augustus and Call exchanged looks. It was odd talk to be hearing from Jake Spoon, who had never been known for his ambition—much less for a fondness for cows. Pretty whores, pacing horses and lots of clean shirts had been his main requirements in life.

"Why, Jake, what reformed you?" Gus asked. "You was never a man to hanker after fortune."

"Living with the cows from here to Montana would mean a change in your habits, if I remember them right," Call said.

Jake grinned his slow grin. "You boys," he said. "You got me down for lazier than I am. I ain't no lover of cow shit and trail dust, I admit, but I've seen something that you haven't seen: Montana. Just because I like to play cards don't mean I can't smell an opportunity when one's right

under my nose. Why, you boys ain't even got a barn with a roof on it. I doubt it would bust you to move."

"Jake, if you ain't something," Augustus said. "Here we ain't seen hide nor hair of you for ten years and now you come riding in and want us to pack up and go north to get scalped."

"Well, Gus, me and Call are going bald anyway," Jake said. "You're the only one whose hair they'd want."

"All the more reason not to carry it to a hostile land," Augustus said. "Why don't you just calm down and play cards with me for a few days? Then when I've won all your money we'll talk about going places."

Jake whittled down a match and began to meticulously pick his teeth.

"By the time you clean me, Montana will be all settled up," he said. "I don't clean quick."

"What about that horse?" Call asked. "You didn't gant him like that just so you could get here and help us beat the rush to Montana. What's this about your luck running thick?"

Jake looked a little more sorrowful as he picked his teeth. "Kilt a dentist," he said. "A pure accident, but I kilt him."

"Where'd this happen?" Call asked.

"Fort Smith, Arkansas," Jake said. "Not three weeks ago."

"Well, I've always considered dentistry a dangerous profession," Augustus said. "Making a living by yanking people's teeth out is asking for trouble."

"He wasn't even pulling my tooth," Jake said. "I didn't even know there was a dentist in the town. I got in a little argument in a saloon and a damn mule skinner threw down on me. Somebody's old buffalo rifle was leaning against the wall right by me and that's what I went for. Hell, I was sitting on my own pistol—I never wouldn't have got to it in time. I wasn't even playin' cards with the mule skinner."

"What riled him then?" Gus asked.

"Whiskey," Jake said. "He was bull drunk. Before I even noticed, he took a dislike to my dress and pulled his Colt."

"Well, I don't know what took you to Arkansas in the first place, Jake," Augustus said. "A fancy dresser like yourself is bound to excite comment in them parts."

Call had found, over the years, that it only did to believe half of what Jake said. Jake was not a bald liar, but once he thought over a scrape, his imagination sort of worked on it and shaded it in his own favor.

"If the man pointed a gun at you and you shot him, then that was self-defense," Call said. "I still don't see where the dentist comes in."

"It was bad luck all around," Jake said. "I never even shot the mule skinner. I did shoot, but I missed, which was enough to scare him off. But of course I shot that dern buffalo gun. It was just a little plank saloon we were sitting in. A plank won't stop a fifty-caliber bullet."

"Neither will a dentist," Augustus observed. "Not unless you shoot down on him from the top, and even then I expect the bullet would come out his foot."

Call shook his head—Augustus could think of the damnedest things.

"So where was the dentist?" he asked.

"Walking along on the other side of the street," Jake said. "They got big wide streets in that town, too."

"But not wide enough, I guess," Call said.

"Nope," Jake said. "We went to the door to watch the mule skinner run off and saw the dentist laying over there dead, fifty yards away. He had managed to get in the exact wrong spot."

"Pea done the same thing once," Augustus said. "Remember, Woodrow? Up in the Wichita country? Pea shot at a wolf and missed and the bullet went over a hill and kilt one of our horses."

"I won't forget that," Call said. "It was little Billy it killed. I hated to lose that horse."

"Of course we couldn't convince Pea he'd done it," Augustus said. "He don't understand trajectory."

"Well, I understand it," Jake said. "Everybody in town liked that dentist."

"Aw, Jake, that won't stick," Augustus said. "Nobody really likes dentists."

"This one was the mayor," Jake said.

"Well, it was accidental death," Call said.

"Yeah, but I'm just a gambler," Jake said. "They all like to think they're respectable back in Arkansas. Besides, the dentist's brother was the sheriff, and somebody told him I was a gunfighter. He invited me to leave town a week before it happened."

Call sighed. All the gunfighter business went back to one lucky shot Jake had made when he was a mere boy starting out in the Rangers. It was funny how one shot could make a man's reputation like that. It was a hip shot Jake made because he was scared, and it killed a Mexican bandit

who was riding toward them on a dead run. It was Call's opinion, and Augustus's too, that Jake hadn't even been shooting at the bandit—he was probably shooting in hopes of bringing down the horse, which might have fallen on the bandit and crippled him a little. But Jake shot blind from the hip, with the sun in his eyes to boot, and hit the bandit right in the Adam's apple, a thing not likely to occur more than once in a lifetime, if that often.

But it was Jake's luck that most of the men who saw him make the shot were raw boys too, with not enough judgment to appreciate how lucky a thing it was. Those that survived and grew up told the story all across the West, so there was hardly a man from the Mexican border to Canada who hadn't heard what a dead pistol shot Jake Spoon was, though any man who had fought with him through the years would know he was no shot at all with a pistol and only a fair shot with a rifle.

Call and Augustus had always worried about Jake because of his unearned reputation, but he was a lucky fellow and there were not many men around dumb enough to enjoy pistol fights, so Jake managed to get by. It was ironic that the shot which finally got him in trouble was as big an accident as the shot that had made his fame.

"How'd you get loose from the sheriff?" Call asked.

"He was gone when it happened," Jake said. "He was up in Missouri, testifying on some stage robbers. I don't know if he's even back to Fort Smith yet."

"They wouldn't have hung you for an accident, even in Arkansas," Call said.

"I am a gambler, but that's one I didn't figure to gamble on," Jake said. "I just went out the back door and left, hoping July would get too busy to come after me."

"July's the sheriff?" Gus asked.

"Yes, July Johnson," Jake said. "He's young, but he's determined. I just hope he gets busy."

"I don't know why a lawman would want a dentist for a brother," Augustus said rather absently.

"If he warned you out of the town you should have left," Call said. "There's plenty of other towns besides Fort Smith."

"Jake probably had him a whore," Augustus said. "He usually does."

"You're one to talk, Gus," Jake said.

They all fell silent for a time while Jake thoughtfully picked his teeth with the sharpened match. Bolivar was sound asleep, sitting on his stool.

"I should have rode on, Call," Jake said apologetically. "But Fort Smith's a pretty town. It's on the river, and I like to have a river running by me. They eat catfish down there. It got where it kinda suited my tooth."

"I'd like to see the fish that could keep me in a place I wasn't wanted," Call said. Jake had always been handy with excuses.

"That's what we'll tell the sheriff when he shows up to take you back," Augustus said. "Maybe he'll take you fishing while you're waiting to be hung."

Jake let it pass. Gus would have his joke, and he and Call *would* disapprove of him when he got in some unlucky scrape. It had always been that way. But the three of them were *compañeros* still, no matter how many dentists he killed. Call and Gus had been the law themselves and didn't always bow and scrape to it. They would not likely let some young sheriff take him off to hang because of an accident. He was willing to take a bit of ribbing. When trouble came, if it did, the boys would stick and July Johnson would have to ride back home empty-handed.

He stood up and walked to the door to look over the hot, dusty little town.

"I hardly thought to find you boys still here," he said. "I thought you'd have some big ranch somewhere by now. This town was a two-bit town when we came here and it looks to me like it's lost about fifteen cents since then. Who's left that we all know?"

"Xavier and Lippy," Augustus said. "Therese got kilt, thank God. A few of the boys are left but I forget who. Tom Bynum's left."

"He would be," Jake said. "The Lord looks after fools like Tom."

"What do you hear of Clara?" Augustus asked. "I suppose since you traveled the world you've been to see her. Dropped in for supper, innocentlike, I guess."

Call stood up to go. He had heard enough to know why Jake had come back, and didn't intend to waste the day listening to him jaw about his travels, particularly not if it meant having to hear any talk about Clara Allen. He had heard enough about Clara in the old days, when Gus and Jake had both been courting her. He had been quite happy to think it all ended when she married, but it hadn't ended, and listening to Gus pine

over her was almost as bad as having him and Jake fighting about her. Now, with Jake back, it would all start again, though Clara Allen had been married and gone for over fifteen years.

Deets stood up when Call did, ready for work. He hadn't said a word while eating, but it was clear he took much pride in being the one who had seen Jake first.

"Well, it ain't a holiday," Call said. "Work to do. Me and Deets will go see if we can help them boys."

"That Newt surprised me," Jake said. "I had it in mind he was still a spud. Is Maggie still here?"

"Maggie's been dead several years," Augustus said. "You wasn't hardly over the hill when it happened."

"I swear," Jake said. "You mean you've had little Newt for all these years?"

There was a long silence, in which only Augustus felt comfortable. Deets felt so uncomfortable that he stepped in front of the Captain and went out the door.

"Why, yes, Jake," Gus said. "We've had him since Maggie died."

"I swear," Jake said again.

"It was only the Christian thing," Augustus said. "Taking him in, I mean. After all, one of you boys is more than likely his pa."

Call put on his hat, picked up his rifle and left them to their talk.

7.

JAKE SPOON STOOD in the door of the low house, watching Call and Deets head for the barn. He had been looking forward to being home from the moment he looked out the door of the saloon and saw the dead man laying in the mud across the wide main street of Fort Smith, but now that he was home it came back to him how nervous things could be if Call wasn't in his best mood.

"Deets's pants are a sight, ain't they," he said mildly. "Seems to me he used to dress better."

Augustus chuckled. "He used to dress worse," he said. "Why, he had that sheepskin coat for fifteen years. You couldn't get in five feet of him without the lice jumping on you. It was because of that coat that we made him sleep in the barn. I ain't finicky except when it comes to lice."

"What happened to it?" Jake asked.

"I burned it," Augustus said. "Done it one summer when Deets was off

on a trip with Call. I told him a buffalo hunter stole it. Deets was ready to track him and get his coat back, but I talked him out of it."

"Well, it was his coat," Jake said. "I don't blame him."

"Hell, Deets didn't need it," Augustus said. "It ain't cold down here. Deets was just attached to it because he had it so long. You remember when we found it, don't you? You was along?"

"I may have been along but I don't remember," Jake said, lighting a smoke.

"We found that coat in an abandoned cabin up on the Brazos," Augustus said. "I guess the settlers that run out decided it was too heavy to carry. It weighed as much as a good-sized sheep, which is why Call gave it to Deets. He was the only one of us stout enough to carry it all day. Don't you remember that, Jake? It was the time we had that scrape up by Fort Phantom Hill."

"I remember a scrape, but the rest is kinda cloudy," Jake said. "I guess all you boys have got to do is sit around and talk about old times. I'm young yet, Gus. I got a living to make."

In fact, what he did remember was being scared every time they crossed the Brazos, since it would just be ten or twelve of them and no reason not to think they would run into a hundred Comanches or Kiowas. He would have been glad to quit rangering if he could have thought of a way to do it that wouldn't look bad, but there was no way. In the end he came through twelve Indian fights and many scrapes with bandits only to get in real trouble in Fort Smith, Arkansas, as safe a town as you could find.

Now that he had come back, it was just to be reminded of Maggie, who had always threatened to die if he ever left her. Of course, he had thought it just girlish talk, the kind of thing all women said when they were trying to hold a fellow. Jake had heard such talk all the way up the trail, in San Antonio and Fort Worth, Abilene and Dodge, in Ogallala and Miles City—the talk of whores pretending to be in love for one. But Maggie had actually died, when he had only supposed she would just move on to another town. It was a sad memory to come home to, though from what he knew of the situation, Call had done her even worse than he had.

"Jake, I notice you've not answered me about Clara," Augustus said. "If you've been to see her I'd like to hear about it, even though I begrudge you every minute."

"Oh, you ain't got much begrudging to do," Jake said. "I just seen her for a minute, outside a store in Ogallala. That dern Bob was with her, so all I could do was tip my hat and say good morning."

"I swear, Jake, I thought you'd have more gumption than that," Augustus said. "They live up in Nebraska, do they?"

"Yes, on the North Platte," Jake said. "Why, he's the biggest horse trader in the territory. The Army gets most of its horses from him, what Army's in those parts, and the Army wears out a lot of horses. I reckon he's close to rich."

"Any young uns?" Augustus asked.

"Two girls, I believe," Jake said. "I heard her boys died. Bob wasn't too friendly—I wasn't asked to supper."

"Even old dumb Bob's got enough sense to keep the likes of you away from Clara," Augustus said. "How did she look?"

"Clara?" Jake said. "Not as pretty as she once was."

"I guess it's a hard life up in Nebraska," Gus said.

After that, neither of them had any more to say for a few minutes. Jake thought it ill-spoken of Gus to bring Clara up, a woman he no longer had any sympathy for since she had shown him the door and married a big dumb horse trader from Kentucky. Even losing her to Gus wouldn't have been so bitter a blow, since Gus had been her beau before he met her.

Augustus felt his own pangs—irked, mainly, that Jake had had a glimpse of Clara, whereas he himself had to make do with an occasional scrap of gossip. At sixteen she had been so pretty it took your breath, and smart too—a girl with some sand, as she had quickly shown when both her parents had been killed in the big Indian raid of '56, the worst ever to rake that part of the country. Clara had been in school in San Antonio when it happened, but she came right back to Austin and ran the store her parents had started—the Indians had tried to set fire to it but for some reason it didn't catch.

Augustus felt he might have won her that year, but as luck would have it he was married then, to his second wife, and by the time she died Clara had developed such an independent mind that winning her was no longer an easy thing.

In fact, it proved an impossible thing. She wouldn't have him, or Jake either, and yet she married Bob Allen, a man so dumb he could hardly walk through a door without bumping his head. They soon went north;

since then, Augustus had kept his ears open for news that she was widowed—he didn't wish Clara any unpleasantness, but horse trading in Indian country was risky business. If Bob should meet an untimely end—as better men had—then he wanted to be the first to offer his assistance to the widow.

"That Bob Allen's lucky," he remarked. "I've known horse traders who didn't last a year."

"Why, hell, you're a horse trader yourself," Jake said. "You boys have let yourselves get stuck. You should have gone north long ago. There's plenty of opportunity left up north."

"That may be, Jake, but all you've done with it is kill a dentist," Augustus said. "At least we ain't committed no ridiculous crimes."

Jake smiled. "Have you got anything to drink around here?" he asked. "Or do you just sit around all day with your throat parched."

"He gets drunk," Bolivar said, waking up suddenly.

Augustus stood up. "Let's go for a stroll," he said. "This man don't like folks idling in his kitchen after a certain hour."

They walked out into the hot morning. The sky was already white. Bolivar followed them out, picking up a rawhide lariat that he kept on a pile of firewood back by the porch. They watched him walk off into the chaparral, the rope in his hand.

"That old *pistolero* ain't very polite," Jake said. "Where's he going with that rope?"

"I didn't ask him," Gus said. He went around to the springhouse, which was empty of rattlesnakes for once. It amused him to think how annoyed Call would be when he came up at noon and found them both drunk. He handed Jake the jug, since he was the guest. Jake uncorked it and took a modest swig.

"Now if we had some shade to drink this in, we'd be in good shape," Jake said. "I don't suppose there's a sporting woman in this town, is there?"

"You are a scamp," Augustus said, taking the jug. "Are you so rich that's all you can think about?"

"I can think about it, rich or poor," Jake said.

They squatted in the shade of the springhouse for a bit, their backs against the adobe, which was still cool on the side the sun hadn't struck. Augustus saw no need to mention Lorena, since he knew Jake would

soon discover her for himself and probably have her in love with him within the week. The thought of Dish Boggett's bad timing made him smile, for it was certain Jake's return would doom whatever chance Dish might have had. Dish had committed himself to a day of well-digging for nothing, for when it came to getting women in love with him Jake Spoon had no equal. His big eyes convinced them he'd be lost without them, and none of them seemed to want him just to go on and be lost.

While they were squatting by the springhouse, the pigs came nosing around the house looking for something to eat. But there wasn't so much as a grasshopper in the yard. They stopped and looked at Augustus a minute.

"Get on down to the saloon," he said. "Maybe you'll find Lippy's hat."

"Folks that keep pigs ain't no better than farmers," Jake said. "I'm surprised at you and Call. If you gave up being lawmen I thought you'd at least stay cattlemen."

"I thought you'd own a railroad by now, for that matter," Augustus said. "Or a whorehouse, at least. I guess life's been a disappointment to us both."

"I may not have no fortune, but I've never said a word to a pig, either," Jake said. Now that he was home and back with friends, he was beginning to feel sleepy. After a few more swigs and a little more argument, he stretched out as close to the springhouse as he could get, so as to have shade for as long as possible. He raised up an elbow to have one more go at the jug.

"How come Call lets you sit around and guzzle this mash all day?" he asked.

"Call ain't never been my boss," Augustus said. "It's no say-so of his when I drink."

Jake looked off across the scrubby pastures. There were tufts of grass here and there, but mostly the ground looked hard as flint. Heat waves were rising off it like fumes off kerosene. Something moved in his line of vision, and for a moment he thought he saw some strange brown animal under a chaparral bush. Looking more closely he saw that it was the old Mexican's bare backside.

"Hell, why'd he take a rope if all he meant to do was shit?" he asked. "Where'd you get the greasy old bastard?"

"We're running a charitable home for retired criminals," Augustus said. "If you'd just retire you'd qualify."

"Dern, I forgot how ugly this country is," Jake said. "I guess if there was a market for snake meat, this would be the place to get rich."

With that he put his hat over his face, and within no more than two minutes began a gentle snoring. Augustus returned the jug to the springhouse. It occurred to him that while Jake was napping he might pay a visit to Lorie; once she fell under Jake's spell he would probably require her to suspend professional activities for a while.

Augustus viewed this prospect philosophically; it was his experience that a man's dealings with women were invariably prone to interruptions, often of a more lasting nature than Jake Spoon was apt to prompt.

He left Jake sleeping and strolled down the middle of Hat Creek. As he passed the corrals, he saw Dish straining at the windlass to bring a big bucket of dirt out of the new well. Call was in the lot, working with the Hell Bitch. He had her snubbed to a post and was fanning her with a saddle blanket. Dish was as wet with sweat as if he'd just crawled out of a horse trough. He'd sweated through the hatband of his hat, and had even sweated through his belt.

"Dish, you're plumb wet," Augustus said. "If there was a well there, I'd figure you fell in it."

"If folks could drink sweat you wouldn't need no well," Dish said. It seemed to Augustus that his tone was a shade unfriendly.

"Look at it this way, Dish," Augustus said. "You're storing up manna in heaven, working like this."

"Heaven be damned," Dish said.

Augustus smiled. "Why, the Bible just asks for the sweat of your brow," he said. "You're even sweating from the belt buckle, Dish. That ought to put you in good with the Seraphim."

The reference was lost on Dish, who bitterly regretted his foolishness in allowing himself to be drawn into such undignified work. Augustus stood there grinning at him as if the sight of a man sweating was the most amusing thing in the world.

"I ought to kick you down this hole," Dish said. "If you hadn't loaned me that money I'd be halfway to the Matagorda by now."

Augustus walked over to the fence to watch Call work the mare. He was about to throw the saddle on her. He had her snubbed close, but she still had her eye turned so she could watch him in case he got careless.

"You ought to blindfold her," Augustus said. "I thought you knowed that much."

"I don't want her blindfolded," Call said.

"If she was blindfolded she might bite the post next time instead of you," Augustus said.

Call got her to accept the blanket and picked up his saddle. Snubbed as she was, she couldn't bite him, but her hind legs weren't snubbed. He kept close to her shoulder as he prepared to ease on the saddle. The mare let go with her near hind foot. It didn't get him but it got the saddle and nearly knocked it out of his hand. He kept close to her shoulder and got the saddle in position again.

"Remember that horse that bit off all that old boy's toes—all the ones on the left foot, I mean?" Augustus said. "That old boy's name was Harwell. He went to the war and got killed at Vicksburg. He never was much of a hand after he lost his toes. Of course, the horse that bit 'em off had a head the size of a punkin. I don't suppose a little mare like that could take off five toes in one bite."

Call eased the saddle on her, and the minute the stirrups slapped against her belly the mare went as high as she could get, and the saddle flew off and landed twenty feet away. Augustus got a big laugh out of it. Call went to the barn and returned with a short rawhide rope.

"If you want help just ask me," Augustus said.

"I don't," Call said. "Not from you."

"Call, you ain't never learned," Augustus said. "There's plenty of gentle horses in this world. Why would a man with your responsibilities want to waste time with a filly that's got to be hobbled and blindfolded before you can even keep a saddle on her?"

Call ignored him. In a moment the mare tentatively lifted the near hind foot with the thought of kicking whatever might be in range. When she did he caught the foot with the rawhide rope and took a hitch around the snubbing post. It left the mare standing on three legs, so she could not kick again without throwing herself. She watched him out of the corner of her eye, trembling a little with indignation, but she accepted the saddle.

"Why don't you trade her to Jake?" Augustus said. "If they don't hang him, maybe he could teach her to pace."

Call left the mare saddled, snubbed and on three legs, and came to the fence to have a smoke and let the mare have a moment to consider the situation.

"Where's Jake?" he asked.

"Catching a nap," Augustus said. "I reckon the anxiety wore him out."

"He ain't changed a bit," Call said. "Not a dern bit."

Augustus laughed. "You're one to talk," he said. "When's the last time you changed? It must have been before we met, and that was thirty years ago."

"Look at her watch us," Call said. The mare *was* watching them—even had her ears pointed at them.

"I wouldn't take it as no compliment," Augustus said. "She ain't watching you because she loves you."

"Say what you will," Call said, "I never seen a more intelligent filly."

Augustus laughed again. "Oh, that's what you look for, is it? Intelligence," he said. "You and me's got opposite ideas about things. It's intelligent creatures you got to watch out for. I don't care if they're horses or women or Indians or what. I learned long ago there's much to be said for dumbness. A dumb horse may step in a hole once in a while, but at least you can turn your back on one without losing a patch of hide."

"I'd rather my horses didn't step in no holes," Call said. "You reckon somebody's really on Jake's trail?"

"Hard to judge," Augustus said. "Jake was always nervous. He's seen more Indians that turned out to be sage bushes than any man I know."

"A dead dentist ain't a sage bush," Call said.

"No—in that case it's the sheriff that's the unknown factor," Gus said. "Maybe he didn't like his brother. Maybe some outlaw will shoot him before he can come after Jake. Maybe he'll get lost and end up in Washington, D.C. Or maybe he'll show up tomorrow and whip us all. I wouldn't lay money."

They fell silent for a moment, the only sound the grinding of the windlass as Dish drew up another bucket of dirt.

"Why not go north?" Call said, taking Augustus by surprise.

"Why, I don't know," Augustus said. "I've never given the matter no thought, and so far as I know you haven't either. I do think we're a shade old to do much Indian fighting."

"There won't be much," Call said. "You heard Jake. It's the same up there as it is down here. The Indians will soon be whipped. And Jake does know good country when he sees it. It sounds like a cattleman's paradise."

"No, it sounds like a goddamn wilderness," Augustus said. "Why, there ain't even a house to go to. I've slept on the ground enough for one

life. Now I'm in the mood for a little civilization. I don't have to have oprys and streetcars, but I do enjoy a decent bed and a roof to keep out the weather."

"He said there were fortunes to be made," Call said. "It stands to reason he's right. Somebody's gonna settle it up and get that land. Suppose we got there first. We could buy you forty beds."

The surprising thing to Augustus was not just what Call was suggesting but how he sounded. For years Call had looked at life as if it were essentially over. Call had never been a man who could think of much reason for acting happy, but then he had always been one who knew his purpose. His purpose was to get done what needed to be done, and what needed to be done was simple, if not easy. The settlers of Texas needed protection, from Indians on the north and bandits on the south. As a Ranger, Call had had a job that fit him, and he had gone about the work with a vigor that would have passed for happiness in another man.

But the job wore out. In the south it became mainly a matter of protecting the cattle herds of rich men like Captain King or Shanghai Pierce, both of whom had more cattle than any one man needed. In the north, the Army had finally taken the fight against the Comanches away from the Rangers, and had nearly finished it. He and Call, who had no military rank or standing, weren't welcomed by the Army; with forts all across the northwestern frontier the free-roving Rangers found that they were always interfering with the Army, or else being interfered with. When the Civil War came, the Governor himself called them in and asked them not to go—with so many men gone they needed at least one reliable troop of Rangers to keep the peace on the border.

It was that assignment that brought them to Lonesome Dove. After the war, the cattle market came into existence and all the big landowners in south Texas began to make up herds and trail them north, to the Kansas railheads. Once cattle became the game and the brush country filled up with cowboys and cattle traders, he and Call finally stopped rangering. It was no trouble for them to cross the river and bring back a few hundred head at a time to sell to the traders who were too lazy to go into Mexico themselves. They prospered in a small way; there was enough money in their account in San Antonio that they could have considered themselves rich, had that notion interested them. But it didn't; Augustus knew that nothing about the life they were living interested Call, particularly. They had enough money that they could have

bought land, but they hadn't, although plenty of land could still be had wonderfully cheap.

It was that they had roved too long, Augustus concluded, when his mind turned to such matters. They were people of the horse, not of the town; in that they were more like the Comanches than Call would ever have admitted. They had been in Lonesome Dove nearly ten years, and yet what little property they had acquired was so worthless that neither of them would have felt bad about just saddling up and riding off from it.

Indeed, it seemed to Augustus that that was what both of them had always expected would happen. They were not of the settled fraternity, he and Call. From time to time they talked of going west of the Pecos, perhaps rangering out there; but so far only the rare settler had cared to challenge the Apache, so there was no need for Rangers.

Augustus had not expected that Call would be satisfied just to rustle Mexican cattle forever, but neither had he expected him to suddenly decide to strike out for Montana. Yet it was obvious the idea had taken hold of the man.

"I tell you what, Call," Augustus said. "You and Deets and Pea go on up there to Montany and build a nice snug cabin with a good fireplace and at least one bed, so it'll be waiting when I get there. Then clear out the last of the Cheyenne and the Blackfeet and any Sioux that look rambunctious. When you've done that, me and Jake and Newt will gather up a herd and meet you on Powder River."

Call looked almost amused. "I'd like to see the herd you and Jake could get there with," he said. "A herd of whores, maybe."

"I'm sure it would be a blessing if we could herd a few up that way," Augustus said. "I don't suppose there's a decent woman in the whole territory yet."

Then the thought struck him that there could be no getting to Montana without crossing the Platte, and Clara lived on the Platte. Bob Allen or no, she would ask *him* to supper, if only to show off her girls. Jake's news might be out of date. Maybe she had even run her husband off since Jake had passed through. Anyway, husbands had been got around a few times in the history of the world, if only to the extent of having to set a place for an old rival at the supper table. Such thoughts put the whole prospect in a more attractive light.

"How far do you reckon it is to Montany, Call?" he asked.

Call looked north across the dusty flats, as if estimating in his mind's

eye the great rise of the plains, stretching even farther than hearsay, away and beyond the talk of men. Jake that morning had mentioned the Milk River, a stream he had never heard of. He knew the country he knew, and had never been lost in it, but the country he knew stopped at the Arkansas River. He had known men to speak of the Yellowstone as if it were the boundary of the world; even Kit Carson, whom he had met twice, had not talked of what lay north of it.

But then his memory went back to a camp they had made on the Brazos, many years before, with an Army captain; there was a Delaware scout with him who had been farther than any man they knew—all the way to the headwaters of the Missouri.

"Remember Black Beaver, Gus?" he asked. "He'd know how far it was."

"I remember him," Augustus said. "It was always a puzzle to me how such a short-legged Indian could cover so much ground."

"He claimed to have been all the way from the Columbia to the Rio Grande," Call said. "That's knowing the country, I'd say."

"Well, he was an Indian," Augustus said. "He didn't have to go along establishing law and order and making it safe for bankers and Sunday-school teachers, like we done. I guess that's why you're ready to head off to Montany. You want to help establish a few more banks."

"That's aggravating," Call said. "I ain't a banker."

"No, but you've done many a banker a good turn," Augustus said. "That's what we done, you know. Kilt the dern Indians so they wouldn't bother the bankers."

"They bothered more than bankers," Call said.

"Yes, lawyers and doctors and newspapermen and drummers of every description," Augustus said.

"Not to mention women and children," Call said. "Not to mention plain settlers."

"Why, women and children and settlers are just cannon fodder for lawyers and bankers," Augustus said. "They're part of the scheme. After the Indians wipe out enough of them you get your public outcry, and we go chouse the Indians out of the way. If they keep coming back then the Army takes over and chouses them worse. Finally the Army will manage to whip 'em down to where they can be squeezed onto some reservation, so the lawyers and bankers can come in and get civilization started. Every bank in Texas ought to pay us a commission for the work we done. If we