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The Comancheros

By James Edward Grant

Since there is no
reconciliation, we proceed.
You will please stand with
your backs to one another.
It may amuse you to know, monsieur,
I never believed you cheated at cards.
Maybe I don't have your sense of humour.
There's a lady who prefers
your attentions to mine.
I intend to simplify her choice.
Rachel?

Margot? No.

When I begin to count, you
will each take ten paces.
You will turn and fire
on the count of ten.
If either man stops or turns
before the count is complete,
it will be my distasteful
duty to shoot him down.

- Good luck.

- Thanks.

One, two, three,
four, five, six, seven,
eight, nine, ten.
Fool. If he hadn't stepped aside,
I'd have hit him in the shoulder.
Many of us will be

sorry to see you hang.

Hang? They've never enforced
the laws against duelling before.

The son of Judge Beaubien
has never been killed before.

Most certainly he will have you arrested
and hanged before the week is out.

I'm sorry. It will take the
incentive out of duelling.

I wouldn't wanna spoil
it for the rest of you.

When one has proven himself
on the field of honour,
one cannot turn tail and run
like a common criminal, can one?

One can.

Paul Regret, cabin 39.

Well?

I sent you to do an errand, Amelung.
He's registered as Paul Regret,
cabin number 39. He has no luggage.
You could have met this handsome chap
without sending me to snoop out his name.
I think you just want to humiliate me.
I'll not need either
of you until morning.

13, black, odd. No winner.

- 23, please.

- 23 it is.

Place your bets, ladies and gentlemen.

Place your bets, please.

Five outside.

Nine inside. The winner,
nine. Nobody there.

- Place your bets, please.

- Place your bets, ladies and gentlemen.

King outside.

Six inside. Winner six. Guess
it isn't your night, sir.

23, red and high. A winner!

Madame! Madame has won.

- Thank you.

- Pardon me, young lady.

But the one value of my white hair
is that I may address beautiful women
without being thought presumptuous.

Will you favour an old
man with this waltz?

Thank you, but this dance is taken.

And here's the gentleman who has it.

Surely you remember we
have this dance, Mr Regret?

I have a poor memory, but not
for matters of utmost importance.

- Excuse us, sir.

- With envy, young man.

Thank you, Mr Regret. You
saved me from a dreary fate.

He is a darling, but I...

I am happy I was on the spot when

you found yourself in such difficulty.
How did you know my name?
That was fortunate. I heard
the head waiter address you.
I dare say the salon
will be full of cigar
smoke and loud talk
about the price of cotton.
Salons usually are at this hour.
Too bad. I would like a glass of wine.
May I suggest my cabin?
Frankly, I prefer my cabin.
Shall we say number 127 in half an hour?
It wasn't fair of me to come here.
- Fair?
- I'm not worth the effort.
I haven't been lucky at the tables.
What do you take me for?
A liar, to start with. A beautiful
liar, but a liar nevertheless.
No waiter has so far
called me by my name.
I'm sorry, my dear. But when
the irate husband appears,
you'll find the contents of my
pocket not worth your trouble.
- You think me a blackmailer?
- Or whatever.
Whatever your game is, the
trophy is not worth the chase.
- Look at my hand, please.
- It's very graceful.
The smallest stone in that ring
could buy and sell you, Paul Regret.
Why should I want money from you?
Experience has taught me to
look carefully at a gift horse.
Am I to believe you weighed, appraised and
selected me out of all the men on the boat?
Do not be too conceited.
It's not a very large boat.
We certainly have picked a
wonderful evening to fall in love.
Don't be ordinary. What passes between

us tonight has nothing to do with love.
You don't believe that love exists?
I believe this very night, all over the
world, men and women
are saying to each other
"I love you" when what they
really mean is "I desire you".
You are a very unusual woman.
It is unusual to be honest.
I like independent women,
but I also want the right
to be able to choose my own.
Mr Regret.
You like independent women and
I admire men who can't be bought.
I think we've misjudged each other.
It's three days to Galveston.
Shall we start again?
To the beginning.
Wh... What?
\$300 for a suit of clothes.
Where I come from, we could
outfit 30 men for that.
- Who are you?
- The name's Cutter. Jake Cutter.
Cap'n Texas Rangers.
This tailor's gonna be mighty
unhappy when he don't get his money.
Course, he'll get a lot of advertising.
You wearing that \$300
suit onto the gallows.
- You can't do this.
- Well, now, let's see.
This here says Monsewer Paul Regret.
- That's Mr Paul Regret
in English, ain't it? - Yes.
- You're under arrest.
- I've committed no crime in Texas.
Right. But you killed
a man in Louisiana.
I'm taking you to the ranger headquarters
where a Louisiana marshal will pick you up,
take you back to New
Orleans and the gallows.

We're getting real obliging to
the states down here in Texas.
A lot of folks want to join the Union.
There's a couple of hundred
in gold in that jacket.
Does that give you any ideas, friend?
I've got what you might
consider a weakness.
I'm honest. You start
getting into that \$300 suit.
And I ain't your friend.
Give me a minute to talk to
someone. It's very important. A girl.
Have a heart, friend.
I've been trying to explain to
you that I ain't your friend.
But I don't want anyone to
accuse me of not having a heart.
I'd like it if she
didn't have to see these.
Hide 'em in that hat.
Oh, uh...
I wouldn't try any city-slicker
stuff on this poor old country boy.
- Well, she's gone.
- Anybody can see that.
She said it was for ever.
Looks like country boys aren't the
only ones who get lied to by gals.
I'll turn Galveston
upside down. I'll find her.
You're sort of forgetting, Monsewer.
I got a prior claim.
Regret.
Monsewer Paul Regret.
- You say this trip'll take five days?
- Right. Step aboard.
- What, on this mule?
- On the mule.
- Riding him's gonna slow us down.
- Very sad.
But if you were to take off for the tall
and uncut, I could run you down real easy.
- How we gonna eat?

- Ever been out in the fresh air?
A side of bacon, beans, a
coffee pot and a frying pan?
- All the comforts of home.
- Yeah. All the comforts of home.
I'm beginning to hate this mule
already. He's got a mean look.
His name is Mabel.
Well, come on, Mabel.
Break out the coffee.
It's in your saddlebag.
Get it.
All right.
Unless you want this salt pork burned.
Captain Jake.
My friend, you're a very brave man.
And pretty soon you're gonna
catch on I ain't your friend.
Captain Jake.
It's getting very tiresome
lugging this saddle around.
I don't suppose you'd take my word
of honour that I won't try to escape?
Monsewer, you are a lulu.
What do you find that's so interesting
about this miserable country?
I used to own a cattle
spread over there.
- You were a rancher?
- Yeah.
2,000 head of longhorn.
Indians run you out?
No. They weren't any trouble then.
Not till a few years ago.
Something's stirrin' them up now.
- The drought get you?
- My wife died.
Oh.
That's unfortunate.
So I gave the spread to
some right nice people.
Folks that used to work for me.
Well, I personally
could never see marriage.

Seems like a fella'd
always feel that curiosity
about the next woman
he was going to meet.
Lots feel that way.
Did once myself.
Hold it.
That's an Indian sign.
You're gonna live a lot longer
if you follow after me. Ya!
I expect we'll find
the little girl inside.
Did you know these people?
Rode many a night herd with all of 'em.
I was at the baby's christening.
I guess that's about
all we can do for 'em.
I hate to do this...
Hey, Jake, that's a pretty
good-looking mount you got there.
Hi, Jake. You been horse-trading?
How come you're riding a mule?
Because I took to liking
mules. You got any objection?
- No, sir.
- Or you? Or you?
No, not me.
- Hello, Tobe. Major wanted to see me.
- He'll be right back.
Say, how do you spell "Louisiana"?
L-o-u-i...
- What do you wanna know for?
- I'm writing my pa a letter.
"Captain Jake went to pick up a prisoner
wanted by the state of Louisiana."
"He came back with a mule and
a split head and no prisoner."
I might have a "PS" for your pa.
"Dear Mulehead. We didn't beat this
boy enough when he was growing up."
- Major.
- Hi, Jake.
- I got a little surprise for you.
- Yeah?

Yeah. Something that may prove that theory you've been bending our ears with.

- You mean a gang running the Comanches?

- Yeah.

Picked up a fella with a wagonload of guns.

Come on back here.

I'm sorry.

Between you and me, I feel a sight better I was stopped.

Stopped before I went off and done some fool thing I might be ashamed of.

Like them guns. Wouldn't be right if they fell into the wrong hands.

Might even got to the Comanches. Now I look back on it, I can see how bad it was.

That's how come that I give myself up.

Yup. After breaking one ranger's jaw and slicing up two others with a bowie knife.

I feel bad about that.

I wasn't using my head.

You used everything else.

Feet, fists and teeth.

Yes, sir. But them rangers sure won me over.

If I'd have knowed men like that, I might never have fell in with bad companions.

Those are the fellas we wanna hear about, those bad companions.

And it's my Christian duty to tell you everything I know.

Which ain't nothin'.

Well, the truth is I ran into a man in Yuma.

He said I'd get the best price for my guns in Sweetwater.

Said if I'd go down to Sweetwater, check in a hotel, I'd be got in touch with.

But I never did find out who.

And that's the gospel truth.

You still don't know where you got those guns.

I've been beatin' my head tryin' to remember.

If I could only find that bill o' sale.
Those guns were stolen from the
quartermaster depot on Fort Sill.
No! Well, then the man who sold 'em to
me, he must have been mixed up in it.
If I'd have knowed that, I
sure would have reported it.
I think he's telling the
truth about one thing.
It's the first time he
brought guns into Texas.
And the last. Bless you
for believing me, sir.
I believe you because I know where
you spent the last five years.
- The Yuma Territorial Prison.
- Well, yes, sir.
But they had a right to lock
me up. I done a bad thing.
What with me not never having no
schooling and knowing no better.
But now I'm all straightened
out. I been saved by the law.
Maybe the Comanche contact
man won't know him by sight.
You want me to take his place? Take the
guns to Sweetwater and
meet the contact man?
Hey, that ain't a bad idea.
And you're sure welcome to use
my name, sir. McBain. Ed McBain.
Maybe that'll make up some for
the way I almost disgraced it.
Think of me being mixed up with them.
Me, who ain't never been
in no trouble before.
- Well, not hardly.
- All right, McBain.
Just a minute. Might wanna
do a little readin' tonight.
Either one of you gentlemen
got an extra Bible?
Oh, sure, Mr McBain! We been
holding the room for ten days.

Never knew when you might be gettin' in.

- Reckon that'll cost me extra.

- Won't cost you nothin'.

- It's all been taken care of.

- Oh?

Yes, sir, Your friend says to
tell you your money ain't no good.

Says anything you want's on him. It's
one of the best rooms in the house.

Says to stay tight, spraddle out,
and you'll be got in touch with.

That's room 19. That's right
up on the first floor, sir.

That's right, sir.

- Am I in the right place?

- I guess so.

We were supposed to meet two gentlemen.

Well, ladies, you're halfway home.

Ed McBain at your service.

I'm Adabelle La Domergue and
this is my friend Guadalupe.

Guadalupe Felipa Carmela Lpez de Reyes.

- Fuzzy for short.

- Well, it's delightful to meet you, Fuzzy.

- Who provided the refreshments?

- I really don't know.

They were already here
when we ladies arrived.

Well, a toast to him, anyway.

Mr McBain, I just want you to know that we
don't usually go out on blind dates but...

Oh, no.

I... I'm afraid we have
a previous engagement.

Last time we had the
pleasure of your company,
we was involved in four fistfights,
a stabbing and a shooting...
and all before midnight!

Yee-ha!

McBain, what'd you do with them guns? I
tore your wagon apart
and I didn't find 'em.

I found a false bottom but no guns.

- You got 'em or ain't you got 'em?

- I buried 'em.

You what? What kind of a sneakin' somethin' is that?

That is a damn distrustful way to start off a deal.

I didn't want 'em to fall into the wrong hands.

Well, you got me there. But you're dealing with the right party now.

The name's Tully Crow.

You ain't done thatjug much damage. Mind if I help myself?

- Go ahead.

- Snuff?

Cigar man.

Buried them guns, huh?

That was smart. Real inspitorial.

Six crates of rifles. Yeah.

You figured somebody mightjust take 'em on approval.

Could've cooked the goose that lays the golden eggs.

How's that?

If I hadn't made the right contact here, I'd have to sell the rest of 'em someplace else.

- You got more?

- Steady supply.

Now that is somethin' I never knew.

So you can see how important it was to both of us to get started off right.

Yeah. I'll give you \$100 for every gun you got.

I understand the Comanches pay five times that. What's this?

Leave that be. If I'd had that then, I wouldn't have this now.

- You ever dealt with a Comanche direct?

- Can't say I have.

I did. They took everything I had to sell and went after this.

What stopped 'em?

- Comancheros. Fellas I'm dealing with now.

- Comancheros?

That's right. Fellas with real fine connections with the Comanche.

They needed me. I had a steady supply, just like you.

Only it ran out. So now I'm willing to take on a partner.

When do we meet these Comancheros?

You don't. I do.

No good. I go where these guns go.

- Why?

- You're the only partner I got.

Or will have.

If anything happens to you, I'm out of business.

That's right. So nothing better happen to me, huh, partner?

So wrap yourself around your half of this jug and we'll go out on this town and celebrate.

Now the moon shines tonight on pretty Red Wing

The breeze is sighing

The night bird's crying

Far away 'neath the stars

Her love is sleeping

While Red Wing's weeping

Her heart away

How'd you like that, darling? Hearing my voice sound like a golden trumpet.

Come on, you swamp-toed jungle rat! Let's get a jug up here.

All right, all right. Don't get bored. I'm bringing it.

Not that stuff! The good stuff.

- This is the good stuff!

- You think me and my partner are blind?

Just walk slow, boys. Go home to your firesides bright, huh?

- You shoot pretty good drunk.

- Better drunk than sober.

You know what the secret it?

Soothingness. That's
right. Soothingness.
You see something I don't see?
No, sir. I don't see nothing.
- You're looking at my scalp, huh?
- No, sir. I ain't.
Well, I still got it, no thanks to you.
And right up here on top where it counts.
If you don't like it, you
can do something about it.
I like it! Very much.
You like it very much? Maybe
I can fix yours the same way.
Beat it.
- What'd you do that for?
- Soothingness, partner.
- Good old McBain. Partners.
- Partners.
Share and share alike.
And by that crimson settin'
sun Peace come to Forest Glade
And of the redskins there was
none For history had been made.
Partner. You win.
You fight a good fight,
Ed. I gotta give you that.
A little quiet around here. Why don't you
and me go someplace we can have some fun?
- Get a steak.
- Good idea.
Oh, the moon shines
tonight on pretty Red Wing
On pretty Red Wing
The breeze is sighing...
McBain.
I'm only as drunk as I
wanna be, same as you.
Right, partner.
How we gonna round out the evenin'?
- Cigar?
- Thank you.
Why don't we dig up those
guns and go sell 'em?
Not yet, McBain. Not yet.

We gotta grow on each other
a little more, partner.
But I got one rule. Never go
to bed without making a profit.
Did you give any thought
to that game back there?
Let's give it a try.
All right, men. Ante up, please.
Room for two more?
For more men and more money if
you don't mind being separated.
I might as well warn
you boys I'm a bad loser.
I'm Ed McBain.
- All right.
- Bill Kane.
- My name's Garth.
- And my name's Tully Crow.
And the name of the game is
five-card stud. Cough up the dues.
Cut the cards if you're a traveller.
Good luck to everybody.
See you.
- Three queens.
- You're sure lucky tonight, brother.
You can't keep from winning
tonight, can you, partner?
They've been runnin' pretty good.
But not for me. Seems least a man can do
is let his partner win one now and then.
- You couldn't win one if he let you.
- How is that?
- You play too wild, mister.
- Man's right.
- Luck ain't got a thing to do with cards.
- Not the way those cards was being dealt.
Now, you better do a
little beggin' your pardon.
What for? I don't mind losin'. I
just like to have a run for my money.
- I'll give you your money back.
- Don't do me no favours.
Just try dealin' a hand
straight next time around.

- No call for that kind of talk, mister.
- You better watch your step, brother.
Let's remember we're gentlemen.
Forget it. He's just spittin' out
words to see where they splatter.
You think I miss much? You think
I didn't see that look you passed
to this cold-footed, slippery-fingered
gentleman on my right when you sat down?
How many partners you
got in this game, partner?
That's whisky talking, Crow.
You know better than that.
Whisky don't muddle me none.
And you better remember that next time
you run your thumb over them cards.
There ain't gonna be no
next time. I'm gettin' out.
- Give the change to the swabber.
- No, you ain't out. Not till I say so.
Time we both quit, Crow.
You don't like losing to me and
I don't like winning from you.
Nobody's dropping out
till I get my money back.
Mind a suggestion, friend?
The trouble is you don't enjoy
the game for its own reward.
Stimulation, relaxation,
pleasant association and
the interesting conversation.
Shut your mouth.
Keep your seat. Don't cut in on this.
Crow, this isn't gonna get
any better picking at it.
I don't want any quarrel with you.
We got a deal. That's more important.
And, like I said, I'll
give you your money back.
- But I'm walking out.
- You're gonna sit down.
You're gonna play poker.
It might take me longer to get it
back that way, but you got time.

You took it quick enough.
We'll talk about that in the morning.
McBain, you try walkin' out on
me now and see how far you get -
deal or no deal.
You need me as much as I need you, Crow.
Give that some thought.
Self-defence, McBain.
My name ain't McBain,
and you're under arrest.
Thanks for not giving me away, but...
he's dead now. It doesn't matter.
- How do you know you killed him?
- There wasn't time not to. On your feet!
Give me that peashooter.
Unlock 'em.
I know you know how
to handle one of these.
Dig.
- Dig what?
- A hole.
Don't worry. It's for
takin' somethin' out.
You haven't asked why
I use the name McBain.
Well, you're still a ranger,
so you were working undercover.
Maybe you think you'd have been better
off if you'd have just told Crow who I was.
Maybe.
Be glad you didn't. Then
I'd have killed you both.
Well, he made that easier than I would.
Yeah. He was fast.
Fairly.
Fill that up again.
What for?
You wouldn't want someone to fall in
there and break their neck, would ya?
Fill it up.
Oh, the moon shines
tonight on pretty Red Wing
On pretty Red Wing
Well, it's not the

moon shinin' out here.
It's the sun and it's
hot. It's real hot.
Not back here. It's real cool.
Too bad there's not room for both of us.
If you'll permit me a statement.
This is very uncivilised.
Well, now, Monsewer,
that's something nobody
ever accused me of - being civilised.
Especially people who
bend shovels over my head.
I presume you won't
take my word of honour
that I would behave if you
permit me back in the wagon.
You presume right.
Oh, the moon shines
tonight on pretty Red Wing
On pretty Red Wing
Da da da-da da
McLain! Have the men roll up
their blankets and saddle up.
We move out in ten minutes.
- Hello, Jake!
- Hello, Bender.
Whoa!
- Hi, Tobe.
- Captain Jake.
- Carson.
- Hi, Jake.
- What's all the ruckus about?
- About 200 Comanches on the Upper Brazos.
Ow!
Major Henry has a patrol
out warning the ranchers.
- That thing hasn't healed up yet?
- Partly.
- It'll be all right.
- You can take it.
Who's that?
Monsewer, you haven't got
the sense of a jack rabbit.
Letting hot horses drink. Keep 'em away

from the water till they've cooled out.

- Don't you know anything about horses?

- I know enough about horses.

When I want one I call a groom. When

I'm done, I call a groom to take him

and the groom says

"Yes, sir, Mr Regret."

- That's all I wanna know about horses.

- You better cool off a little yourself.

I'm gonna let you founder if

you want to, but not the horses.

Watch him.

- Hello, Bub.

- Hi, Mr Jake.

- Major.

- Hello, Jake.

I'm surprised to see

you. Who's your prisoner?

That's the fella that

escaped. The \$300-suit fella.

- Uh-huh. How did you wind up with

him? - It's a long story, Major.

- Can we get in the shade?

- I don't know why not.

- Here's some fresh water for you.

- Oh, thanks.

That's sure some fancy shirt.

My ma's got one like that. I

never seen none on no man before.

Is this a ranger station?

You're sure ignorant! Ain't you

never seen a grain ranch before?

- What are the rangers doing here?

- Chasing Comanches.

- Comanches? Indians?

- Sure. The worst kind.

Everybody knows that.

Everybody but you, seems like.

- How about Tobe?

- I'm leaving him with you.

I want him to rest his leg.

Say, Jake, uh...

Think you can talk Schofield into moving

into town till this trouble's over?

- I'll do the best I can, Major.

- Thanks, Jake.

All right. Move out!

- Have you watered the horses yet?

- You told me not to.

But they've cooled out now.

Here.

Then I gotta feed you. Miss

Schofield's cooking's too good for you.

Miss Schofield's busy.

Starting to have a baby.

- Is that right?

- He'll have to eat Schofield's cooking.

- Hiya, Jake.

- Hello, Lem.

- Got a little grain for your team.

- Good. Feed 'em.

- I hear your missis is gonna have a baby.

- Pretty soon, I guess.

Great. With things the way they are,

don't you think it'd be a good idea

to get Martha out of here

till the Indian trouble's over?

I'm going to but

Martha's having the baby.

I wanted to get in as

much grain as I could.

I've just been putting it off.

I got another problem. I

gotta feed this prisoner.

Come here. I don't want you cuffed

to me and I don't wanna lose you.

I don't think you'll be too spry

with this tucked under your arm.

It should hold him.

Let's get to the victuals.

Jim! Feed these horses, will you?

Martha! We've got company.

- Hello there, big Jake.

- Hello, Martha.

Sorry to be using your

house at a time like this.

There's no one I'd rather

have than you, Jake.

- Back again, Miss Schofield.

- You're always welcome, Tobe.

Jake.

That young fella with you. What's that he's carrying under his arm?

Well, that's an anvil,

Martha. He's carrying an anvil.

Why ever would he wanna do that?

He's become attached to it, sort of.

Now, you get back to

resting. We'll make out.

Jake, it's so good to see you.

Pa! You make sure Jake eats off the good china - the set him and Bess give us for our anniversary.

I will, Ma.

Seems like just the other day that you and Bess was sitting here, eating.

Time flies. How long is it since she's been gone, Jake?

About two years, ain't it?

Two years,

two months, 13 days.

- You make yourself at home, young man.

- Thank you.

Set that anvil up here, Monsewer.

Comanches!

- You got any rifles?

- In the corner.

Pretty good shooting for a handgun.

White men riding with

Indians. Comancheros.

That's what I've been

trying to tell Major Henry.

Better get your head down, Jake,

or you'll never tell him again.

- Looks like they're pulling out.

- Don't bet on it.

- How are you fixed for ammunition?

- I could use some.

- I need some.

- I'll see what I can do.

- Any more rifle shells?

- Top drawer, highboy.
Bub, keep that fire going!
Look out! They're regroupin'.
Looks like you lost him again, Jake.
Hold it. You may need that ammunition.
Kind of surprised to see you back.
I'm kind of surprised I came back.
Looks like this little
fracas is about over.
I'll take that gun now.
He didn't make it.
Jake.
I'm gonna take the responsibility
and move all of these settlers out.
Everybody west of the Llano River.
I figure you'll wanna see that
Melinda and her daughter get out.
I planned to do that when I
saw the size of this war party.
- Major, there's one other thing.
- Yeah?
Regret.
That's too bad. We owe him something.
But orders are orders.
I thought somebody could
talk to Judge Breen.
- If there's a way, the judge'll know it.
- It'd help if you'd talk to him.
He doesn't take too kindly to me since I
drew those fourjacks
against his full house.
He just never was a good loser.
I'll be in Llano with the patrol three
days from now, and I'll see you there.
Take a couple of horses
and I'll bring your wagon.
- It's a boy, gentlemen! A boy!
- Captain Jake!
New blood in the Schofield family!
He's as red as a lobster and
fightin' mad, but he's a dandy.
We're gonna name him after you, Jake.
Cutter we'll call him. Cutter Schofield.
I appreciate the honour, but I think we

ought to name him Regret
after Monsewer here.
If it wasn't for the Monsewer, our scalps'd
be dangling from some Comanche tepee
and this little tad'd never
grow up to lie about Texas.
Regret Schofield. Sounds nice.
May grow up to be president.
- You can take big odds against that.
- It's all settled.
Son, take Regret in to your mother.
Gentlemen, there's
ajug in the wellhouse!
After what happened back at
Schofield's, you making me a godfather,
aren't you carrying this
thing a little too far?
I feel bad about it, Monsewer. If
it was up to me, it'd be different.
Who else is it up to?
There's just you and I.
I've thought on it a lot.
Gave myself a lot of argument.
But I just can't do it.
"Let him make a run
for it" I say to myself.
- Then what would you say? - I'd say
to myself "You can't let him run."
"You swore an oath when
they put that badge on you."
- That's important to you?
- I said I swore an oath.
- Words.
- Monsewer, words are what men live by.
Words they say and mean.
You must have had a
real careless upbringing.
However...
Now, please don't get any ideas.
Cos it'd break my heart did I
have to put a bullet in your back.
It'd make me sad also.
You've been doing a lot of
complaining about my cooking.

Get ready for the best meal in Texas.

Mommy! Mommy!

Look who's here. Uncle Jake.

- Uncle Jake!

- How are you, honey?

- Where's your mommy?

- There.

Oh, this is Monsewer

Paul Regret, Bessie.

- How you doin'?

- Hi, Monsewer.

- Hello, Jake.

- Hello, Melinda.

I, uh... see that the
fence has broken down again.

It only lasts from one of
your visits to the next.

Well, I, uh...

Oh, this is Monsewer Paul Regret.

- How do you do?

- Mrs Marshall.

It's a pleasure to meet
any friend of Jake's.

Well, thank you, ma'am.

My friend Jake here was telling
me you're the best cook in Texas.

Isn't this a wonderful surprise, Mommy?

And I've got a surprise for you, Bessie.

You're going to pack your things
and go into town with Uncle Jake.

There may be some visitors here
that aren't as welcome as us.

- We'll be ready.

- Oh, uh...

Not until my friend here has
tasted some real Texas cooking.

I hope I can live up to your bragging.

Frre Jacques, frre Jacques

Dormez-vous?

Dormez-vous?

Sonnez les matines

Sonnez les matines

Ding dang dong

Ding dang dong

Listen, Mommy. We're singing in French.
Go get Mother the silver
teapot that Uncle Jake gave us.
All right, Mommy.
Frre Jacques...
- Bessie sings well.
- She gets that from her father, I guess.
He had a fine voice.
You said your husband was dead
four years. Was it Indians?
No. He was killed. The
battle of San Jacinto.
When Texas won its independence?
The same shell burst hit my
husband and Jake and Sam Houston.
- They were all standing together.
- President Sam Houston?
No, he wasn't president then.
That was before we were a republic.
Then Jake brought my
husband's body home.
He made us move away from the
frontier and take this place.
Your Bessie's named after Jake's wife.
We grew up together. Everybody was
so surprised when she married Jake.
They were so different. He's so big
and tough - at least on the outside.
And she was so tiny and so gentle.
But one never knows about those things.
They got along just fine.
Well, I better go
inspect Bessie's progress.
- Captain Jake?
- Yeah?
Can you give me one good reason
why you don't marry that woman?
Why don't you mind your own business?
I haven't got one good reason...
that'd make sense to you.
Every time I quit to get married,
that miserable, low-down silver-tongued
Houston starts bending my ear
about how Texas needs

every man and every gun,
what with this Comanche
and renegade trouble.

But duty and patriotism
doesn't make sense to you.

- You think I'm simple-minded. -

Yes, I do think you're simple-minded.

Well, don't make a point of saying that
too often. And once more'll be too often.

- But I envy you.

- You what?

Two women in one man's lifetime.

Yeah, I really do envy you.

I guess you're right.

I'm God-given lucky.

It really happened to me.

At least I think it
really happened to me.

I suppose I can't be too sure
about it cos I just met the girl.

Well, it doesn't go by the calendar.

It either is or it isn't. Time
doesn't have much to do with it.

Yeah? Then it happened to me.

- Why'd you let her get away?

- Because a big ugly character with a star
snapped some handcuffs
on me and dragged me away.

- The woman at the boat?

- Yeah.

Well, I'm sorry, Monsewer. Real sorry.

Captain Jake, I believe you.

I actually believe that
you're really sincerely sorry.

You've got a lot of Cupid in you
but, I must admit, Cupid
picked a strange place to hide.

Monsewer, you may not
live long enough to hang.

Your brougham awaits.

You go down and take care of the horses.

Remember I'm watching.

Ya!

- Take care of the team, will ya, Lem?

- Yes, sir.

Linda, this is a surprise.

- Hello, Jake.

- Hello, Mrs Breen.

- Looks like we'll be on your hands awhile.

- My, Bessie, how you have grown.

- Where's the judge?

- In his office with some rangers.

You better go in and get located.

We'll take care of this stuff later.

Think this friend of

yours will be of much help?

I wouldn't hold out

too much hope, Monsewer.

My conscience'll be clear. I'll have done
all I could to keep you from gettin' hung.

Oh, great. As I drop through the trap,
my last thought'll be "Well,
big Jake did all he could."

- Evenin', Jake.

- Judge.

- This is Monsewer Paul Regret.

- How do you do?

I'm Thadeus Jackson Breen.

Judge of the Texas Circuit Court.

Most say - except them

that's unfair-minded -

that I'm the finest legal

mind in the entire Southwest.

So you can have faith

in your lawyer, son.

- How much money you got?

- I don't have any.

I begin to doubt your

chances against the law.

Judge, you're doing

this one for nothing.

A workman is worthy of his hire.

Sure, but suppose these

rangers start talking?

About where a certain Judge was during a
ranger raid on a certain
section of this town.

- I was advising a client.

- And a pretty one she was, too, Judge.
Seemed to be hangin'
on every word you said.
See, Regret? We don't aim to just stand
by and see a fellow fighting man go down.
Not without doing everything
that we can for him.

- I don't understand. - Major
here's told me what your troubles are.
I've thought it over in the light of my 40
years' experience in legal jurisprudence,
and I've come to the positive conclusion
that there ain't no way to
do this legal and honest.
But, being good, sensible Texans,
we'll do her illegal and dishonest.
All the boys here in the room have
agreed to sign a paper I've prepared.
We're gonna all commit perjury. That's
legal language for a
plain dumb-blasted lie.
Every man in this room's gonna swear that
you are a member of the Texas Rangers,
and have been for the
last couple of years.
Ain't no possible chance you
killed nobody in Louisiana.
Even Sam Houston himself wouldn't go
up against the word of a dozen rangers.
So, my boy, you are a member of the finest
underpaid organisation of men in the world.

- I don't know what to say. - It's
better than gettin' your neck stretched.
Well, thanks, men. It isn't only modesty
that makes me doubt
I'll make a good ranger.
If I had some money, I'd buy
you something to celebrate with.
Credit can be arranged.
My brother's saloon.
Sure!
Honest Ben Breen.

- Jake.
- Yeah?

- Tobe insists he's the third man.
- Oh.
- I was born and raised in the Bend
Country. - You're only 18 years old.
At 18, you were the only
white man south of the Pecos.
You told us till we were sick and tired of
hearing how you settled up Pecos Country.
We get to be bores as
we get older. He'll do.
Now, Tobe, keep this wagon
in sight at all times.
- Let us know you're around.
- Don't worry.
I appreciate your volunteering,
Regret. Shows mighty fine spirit.
Good luck, men.
Did I volunteer for something?
You weren't handy. I knew you'd
want me to speak up for you.
Jake, I often wonder what
I ever did to deserve you.
Yee-ha!
I've often had every penny
I own on the turn of a card,
but never my life on
a bundle of feathers.
- You claim to be a gambler, don't you?
- This may cure me permanently.
Our guardian angel's still on the job.
Why the mystery with the frying pan, sir?
Why does he have to stay out of sight -
alone in the middle of 1,000
miles of this ugly Texas country.
Don't you bet on that, gambler.
An Indian speciality is not being seen.
Kick out the fire.
Cutter.
Put it away. They're tame.
- Tame? Tame Indians?
- Tame as dishwater.
Well, I think we can afford one cigar.
Huh?
Oh, no. No whisky.

Tame Indians! How do
you tell the difference?
How do you know these
from the wild ones?
It's pretty hard to
explain to a city fella.
But you take like that
snake there at your feet.
Don't shoot him, he's a gopher snake.
He's a friend. He eats mice and rats.
We'll put him in the shade.
You see those darker
markings? Crosspatch overlay?
Makes him look like a rattler,
but you can see a
thousand like that one.
And when you see your first
rattlesnake, you'll know the difference.
You still haven't told me how you
tell a Comanche from a tame Indian.
It's just like your first
rattler. One look and you'll know.
Come on. Get aboard.
Ya!
Big country.
Is this where we'll
find the Comancheros?
You could hide the
state of Louisiana here
and never find 'em if
they didn't want you to.
That's our job, findin' 'em.
Or lettin' them find us.
Well, old Tobe is still on the job.
You know, I'm tryin' to go
along with your thinking.
But do you really believe that emblem will
convince a Comanche that we're gunrunners?
- It had better.
- Yeah.
What's the matter?
I don't know.
Comanches!
He's alone.

I hope that Tobe isn't taking a nap.
Well, we're about to find out
whether this passport'll work.
Comancheros! Comancheros! Rifles!
Comancheros!
I wish I had more practice at praying.
Comancheros! Comancheros!
Over here, my friends! Whisky!
Over here! Whisky! Here, whisky!
Over here, my friends.
Whisky!
You got a unique way of paying
off your help around here.
Who's ramrodding this outfit?
You'll find out. What do you want?
Monsewer, break open
that false wagon bed.
My name's McBain. I got
guns and I wanna do business.
72 rifles... just like this one.
Pass 'em out. Let the boys handle 'em.
Hold it!
You must be the boss man.
We brought 72 of these.
Just like this... except
without firing pins.
Be useless to you unless
you do business with us.
Your presence here
has made me very happy.
Bastinado!
The pretty man from the boat.
It's gonna get awful
thirsty around here.
Better think of a new plan, Jake.
This one didn't work out so well.
The hell it didn't. We found
the hide-out, didn't we?
Yeah. I wonder if they know
how much trouble they're in.
Water.
Give me some water.
- Who ordered this?
- Amelung.

Cut them down and take care of them.
- Cut them down and care for them.
- This was orders.
I said cut them down!
Oh! The top of my head feels
like an overdone pancake.
Say, you never did tell me what
happened to me after I was knocked out.
Well, a handsome young
woman on a horse came along.
She must have figured it was
Saturday night and we needed a bath.
Pretty boy, hurry it up.
We're waitin' for you.
I can do without the endearing words.
- We going somewhere?
- Trial.
- Trial?
- See whether you live or die. You'll die.
I always figured to
die. Question is, when?
Just hurry it up.
You have broken a law of the society.
The penalty is death.
Does the society approve?
Don't kill them! I beg you! I beg you!
You may still wonder when,
big man, but now you know how.
We go, my friends.
Got another one of those fellas uses
that "my friend" stuff real careless.
Quiet! Quiet! Get back to your seats!
Be civilised, my people.
We have guests today.
There's work to be done.
Gentlemen, you come among us uninvited.
The penalty for that is death.
This society survives
by its secrecy only.
You haven't violated that by entering
here, but you could if you left here.
And it is our intention to see to it
that this secrecy is never violated.
Now, as to this story

of yours that you will
bring us rifles without
firing mechanisms,
take out our money and
return with other rifles,
and the firing mechanisms
of the first shipment...

I admit, it has the merit
of being well thought out.

- You say your name is McBain?

- Ed McBain.

We know of a McBain.

And it's told that this
McBain killed a man
of ours in Sweetwater.

You mean Crow? Fella with
the half-scalped topknot?

- You killed him? - Seemed like
the thing to do at the moment.

It hardly surprises to me to
hear that Crow got himself killed.

If his occupation
didn't, his manner would.

Your name is Paul Regret?

That is his name.

His occupation is gambler.

- Pilar!

- We meet again.

I told you, sir. That is the
man she went back to search for.

Many wasted days trying
to find him again.

He left New Orleans after killing
a man. The other man I don't know.

He killed Crow, which speaks
well for his speed with a gun.

It doesn't give him the right
to enter the place of our society
or to live, after having
discovered its whereabouts.

It is clear they know,
so they die. It is a rule.

A rule you made many years
ago and enforced many times.

It is of little concern
to me what you do,
though I say it would be
intelligent to deal with them.
They offer us a continuing
supply of up-to-date weapons
instead of the few old-fashioned
rifles we get from the South.
Do as you will. Just remember that you
expect me to take over responsibilities.
Therefore I presume you would
be willing to heed my opinion.
But if you prefer to placate that
bloodthirsty mongrel of yours,
then kill them.

I tell you, she has a
personal interest in this man.
That is why she urges
us to deal with him.

Amelung, you're a fool.
I've raised her never to
let emotion cloud a judgment,
which is what you're
doing at this moment.

Your jealousy is apparent and
it's warping your judgment.

That is all.

Bring those prisoners to my quarters!

- Esteban.

- Pilarcita.

Look over there. The
taller of the two men.
Have you seen him before?

Galveston?

We were getting off the
boat in the grey dawn,
and he was boarding just as it docked.

Oh, yes. Now I remember.

You know, McBain, that plan of
yours about the guns delights me.

It starts from the basic proposition
that nobody is trustworthy.

We couldn't double-cross
each other if we tried.

I can't wait to see the
look on Amelung's face.
Don't get the idea that my reproof of
Amelung indicates that
I've adopted you two.
I must put him in his
place now and then.
Help yourself to some wine.
What do you think of our place, McBain?
It took a lot of lookin'
to find just such a layout.
I stumbled on it some
30-odd years ago. I was
a different man physically,
as you'll gather.
At that time, there was a motley collection
of people dealing with the Indians.
I brought organisation to the business.
May I call your attention to the
powder mill? We make our own powder.
The nitrates come from our own mines,
the saltpetre from deposits to the south.
You're a travelled man, Mr
Regret. What do you think of it?
Seems to lack nothing.
- You've done very well.
- I think so.
Lest you think all of this talk is the
idle chatter of a broken chairbound man,
I tell you this for a reason.
We have a society here, a society
that's different from anything visualised
by people anywhere in the world.
The rules of this society
are magnificently simple.
Transgress and you die.
Long and painfully. Look over there.
Not a pretty picture, is it?
A Chinese philosopher once said that
a picture is worth a thousand words.
He stole. We, a society of thieves,
cannot tolerate stealing from each other.
Take a long look over there and decide
whether or not you intend to faithfully

follow the rules of our society.

Gordo.

I'll send for you in due time.

I'll bet that old boy was a man to stand
aside from when he was young and limber.

Right now, if he took a dislike to you,
you could get yourself killed in a hurry.

What bothers me is
finding that girl here.

- Where do you know her from? -

I know her - or knew her briefly.

Briefly? You must

have made quite a dent.

She seems to favour us
staying alive, or at least you.

That was the girl on the boat.

Oh.

We got ourselves two problems.

But the first one's to stay alive.

Toward dark, Major Henry and the
boys are gonna come over that hill

and we'd better have
a place to fight from.

- Fight with what?

- Naturally, when the war breaks out,
we're gonna jump a couple of these
gentlemen and borrow their guns.

Well, naturally. So natural
that I overlooked it.

You take off the road in this
direction, and keep your eyes peeled.

- I'll go the other way.

- All right.

Miss Graile?

This is the first chance I've had to
thank you for getting us out of the sun.

- You're welcome. - In a way,

I feel I don't owe you any thanks.

If it weren't for that good-looking fella,
by now I'd be approaching the well-done.

- How long have you known Paul Regret?

- Off and on for quite a while.

I'm beginning to doubt if it was wise to
save him. From now on,

he'll be insufferable.
You're not exactly
making yourself clear.
That fool Amelung had to shout
I went searching for Paul.
Now he'll be so sure of me, he'll be
impossible to manage... Or so he thinks.
But I shall find the opportunity
to teach him otherwise.
Oh, I'm sorry. I'm just... glad
that I'm not your age or Regret's.
I went through all that.
Me and my wife used to fight like a couple
of wildcats with only one tree between us.
But you soon find out that it doesn't make
a tinker's damn who's got the upper hand.
A few years roll by and you kinda settle
down to being at ease with each other.
Then life gets worth living.
In every relationship
between human beings,
one is dominant and one is subservient.
The way you make it sound,
life'd be one long war.
- Isn't it?
- Missy, you got a lot of surprise coming.
Some good, some bad.
Mr McBain!
Speaking of surprises, Mr
McBain, there's something...
- Is that Chief Iron Shirt?
- Yes.
Now we'll have a celebration.
All of his visits call for one.
First time I've ever
seen him in the flesh.
Mr McBain, I might enjoy prolonging this
conversation with you but for one thing.
Your name. Naturally, it's not McBain.
Well, a man in my
business uses many names;
- Just what is your business?
- At the moment, I'm a gunrunner.
Three weeks ago, as I was getting off

the boat in Galveston, you went aboard.
You wore a Texas Rangers
star on your shirt.
You're poised, Mr, uh...
whatever your name is.
What for? Flight?
Where could you go?
To fight? You are unarmed
and there are hundreds of us.
You're the coolest character I ever met.
What happens now?
I don't know.
Hello, Pilar.
Women. How can you figure 'em? She's
been chasin' me for three weeks.
- Saves my life and now she won't
talk to me. - Saved my life, too.
I don't think you
better put that girl in a
class with any of the
other girls you've known.
She'll never act the way you figure.
As a matter of fact,
I wish I knew how she
was gonna act about a
certain little matter.
She knows I'm a ranger.
Told me so in no uncertain terms.
We better get to that corral
and get us some horses.
Try to make it to the
top? What chance'd we have?
- Not much...
- No chance at all.
- We can jump those Comancheros...
- Monsewer, you've changed.
I thought you were the fella
that took care of number one.
Well, I've gotten used to you.
We'll just sit tight.
The girl's got a problem.
She points her finger at me and
hollers "Ranger", your head goes too.
She seems to put quite a value on you.

So we'll just hold on for a few hours and give Tobe a chance.

If they keep this up, they'll save the rangers the trouble. Probably kill themselves all off.

Paul.

Paul, there's some...

I've been wanting to do that for a long time.

Paul, there's something I've got to tell you.

Pilar.

I hope I'm not intruding.

Mr McBain!

I'd like to invite you to join us for dinner tonight.

I suppose that good manners force me to include your romantically inclined friend.

You'll find she has a mind of her own.

Gordo.

After sundown on the terrace.

It looks like the condemned men'll eat a hearty dinner.

Let's go. Move out!

Gracias, seor.

Esteban! 300 more for him.

Oh, gentlemen. If you'll excuse me for about ten minutes. Business.

Gordo, give them some refreshments.

- Don't mind me.

- I'm glad you're here.

I've been trying to tell you all day. Your friend has one chance.

A horse and provisions for you will be waiting by the stairs.

You can escape sometime tonight.

- Will there be a gun in the saddle?

- Don't make conditions.

How naive do you think we are?

If he's followed, he'll never make it to the top of the rim.

- You refuse to accept my plan?

- Well...

Shut up. Keep losing your patience and then we'll find out what happens next. All right. I've done all I can. You're on your own. So. Unless I let your man kill him, and stay here with you like a maquereau... - That's French... - I know what it means, mon cher ami. It's pretty obvious that you feel I'm unique. Oh, your modesty is your most appealing quality. You backtracked trying to find me again. And I feel the same way about you. We can't stay here together. You can't stay in Texas, being wanted by the authorities. So we'll go somewhere else. Anywhere else. Just you and me. How do I know you're not lying? You don't. There's no way you can prove that I'm not lying. Every time a man and a woman talk like this to each other, neither can prove to themselves that they aren't being lied to. Pilar, what all this adds up to is that I love you. And there's no way you can tell whether I'm not lying. You believe or don't believe. Good evening, friend. Excuse me, Pilarcita. I've been told to have the wagon brought here at dawn so that these two men may leave. But I'll bring it myself so there's no mistakes. Thank you, Esteban. - Viejo? - Yeah? How about a light? El grande mucho. - Muchsimas gracias. - De nada.

You must give me your opinion
about the wine we're having.
Our own grapes, you know.
Oh, it would be a shame to have our
guest of honour drown in a plate of soup.
Gentlemen, you must
forgive the noble chief.
His semi-annual visits
are a great occasion.

- Papa.

- Yes?

I'm leaving here for ever.
I'm going away with Paul.
This is no life for me and
this is no place for you.
How frail is human judgment,
particularly the female's.
It would be common sense to pick the
big ugly one and not the handsome one.
He has definite indications
of character in his face.
That big nose that someone broke at
one time, the scars above the eyebrows
all show that at one time he has enforced,
or tried to enforce, his will upon others.
Obviously a man of great determination.
Thank you, Mr Graile. Compliments are
always welcome, no matter what the source.

- A wonderful man!

- Papa, stop this!

I'm in no mood. I'm leaving
and I wish you would leave, too.
Iron Shirt can get you to the south
and from there, the world is wide.
You can go where you choose.
Why should I die in a place other
than the one I made for myself?

- Why are you so anxious that I leave?

- This place is no longer safe.
The authorities know its location.
I'm afraid the noble
chief may not rejoin us.
He inherited that armour from his
grandfather who fought the Conquistadores.

I leap to the conclusion
that you are the authorities.
I was afraid that the little
lady's remark would spill the beans.
Now, Papa, in a very short time,
a company of rangers is
gonna come boiling in here,
and you'll hurry your
end if you don't behave.
Mr McBain, you're introducing
a discordant note here.
He followed these two. They
signalled back and forth.
Ah, what a shame. It looks
like company's not coming.
Mr McBain, would you mind
handing over your pistol?
Monsewer...
charge.
What's your story? Saving bullets?
Couldn't afford the sound of a shot.
- You looked to be doing all right.
- For a while there, it was even money.
- Now, Papa...
- Not quite, Mr McBain.
Gordo!
Well, get him off me!
- Is that a closet?
- Yes.
Keep a lookout on the terrace.
My daughter forgets
that in the eyes of Texas
justice, she may not
be an innocent party.
You know the oath you put so much
faith in, the words men live by?
Make up your mind to this. When we get over
the top o' the rim, we're partin' company.
You can take him north, but
she and I are goin' south.
- Mexico?
- For a start.
There's 1,000 miles of Indian
territory. Apache and Yaqui.

I figure she's worth it.
You made it, Monsewer! That's love.
You're all fools.
But it's fun sometimes,
particularly when you're their age.
You really think you'll make it, huh?
You ordered the wagon.
And now, Papa, we'll
just sit quietly and wait.
He was only 18 years old.
I'm going to take particular
delight in seeing you hang.
Esteban, I ask you to
endure great risk for me.
Esteban, make your choice.
All trussed up like a
pigeon ready for market.
Bring those rifles and cartridges.
Yahoo! Comanchero!
Comanchero! Comanchero!
Charge, Monsewer!
Hand me that lantern!
Look!
Paul!
Yah, it's the rangers!
The best in Texas! Ha-ha!
Load this.
Well, Monsewer.
Looks like I've lost you again.
Mr McBain, or whatever your name is,
we'll miss you.
We've kind of gotten used to you.
Big Jake! Don't forget
to mend those fences.