

Wish In One Hand  
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99 pages

EXT. PRISON WALLS, HUNTSVILLE, TEXAS-DAY.

FEBRUARY 1894

It is a clear winter day. A light breeze dances through the needles of the nearby pines. It is early morning. Only a few wagons roll across the hardened dirt road adjacent to the prison.

A man, GRADE, fortyish and raw-boned, sits in a buck-board before the two imposing but simple prison doors. The large doors creak. He turns to see JOHN WESLEY HARDIN, forty years old, close cropped hair and a drooping mustache; wearing a crudely made jacket and pants that hang loosely even on his large frame, emerge from the prison.

The door closes behind him and he steps out into the street, tentatively. He squints in the sunlight. He sees Grade in the wagon.

GRADE

Howdy Wes.

HARDIN

Hello Grade.

EXT. A COUNTRY ROAD-DAY.

Hardin and Grade ride silently down the road.

HARDIN THE NARRATOR (V.O.)

I never buckled to any man. Never looked away. I was as constant as the northern star. Firm in a world furnished with men full of fears and follies. A coward dies a thousand times, with each surrender. He's like a tree split in two by lightning yet still growing separate from the roots, each fork ignorant of the other. It's in that ignorance that evil sits and waits. Waits for the undivided man.

Grade sees something in the distance. There is the speck of a lone rider, down the road, coming toward them.

Hardin notices as well. The speck is still not discernible. Hardin is ill at ease. He begins tossing his hat from one hand to another.

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HARDIN THE NARRATOR (CONT'D)

I sent two score men to hell,  
populated the streets with  
deserving citizens. I've no  
regrets nor duties. Just ability.

The speck has gotten closer. It is a YOUNG MAN, in his teens. He is huddled close to his horse, to gather heat from the animal.

Hardin and Grade watch him carefully as he draws closer, Hardin still tossing the hat.

As he passes, the boy glances at the wagon. Hardin stares at the boy, he stops tossing his hat. The boy nods to both men.

Hardin turns in his seat and watches the boy disappear in a cloud of dust from the wagon.

FLASHBACK:FALL,  
1868

EXT. POLK COUNTY TEXAS-DAY.

A YOUNG JOHN WESLEY HARDIN emerges from a cloud of dust. His face is red and his hair and shirt are rumpled and dirty.

He is glowering at a fixed point in the yard before a large farmhouse.

As the dust clears we see MAGE, a young black man, very large for his years, staring angrily back. His already worn clothing is dirty and torn. He is bleeding from a cut on his left cheek.

Hardin launches himself at Mage. The older boy grabs Hardin and hurls him to the ground. Hardin reaches out and pulls Mage's legs from under him. The two twirl in the dirt, pulling and punching, the dust flying.

CLABE, an older man as sturdy as a barrel of nails, pulls the boys apart

CLABE

Y'all break it up. Goddamn little  
wrestling match get y'all so mad.  
Ain't neither one of you could even  
piss hard on the ground.

ANOTHER MAN leaning against the porch laughs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAN

You tell then Clabe.

Hardin continues to burn holes in Mage.

Mage returns the hatred.

CLABE

You two are blowing at each other  
like a pair of bulls. Go on now  
back off.

The boys are unmoved.

The smile fades from Clabe's face.

CLABE (CONT'D)

John Wesley, get your ass in the  
house. Mage you go on home.

Neither one moves.

Hardin lunges for Mage again. Clabe catches him and throws  
him back.

CLABE (CONT'D)

(Bellowing)

Goddamnit! You heard me!

The two boys slowly look at him.

He stares back, as solid as granite.

Both boys slink off.

Hardin retreats only as far as the porch. He watches Mage  
amble off down the dirt road as Clabe ascends the porch.

He lights his pipe, puffs silently then spits angrily on the  
porch.

CLABE (CONT'D)

Damnit boy. You got a temper like  
a philistine. You better get a  
hold of that or the world is going  
to have one long party knocking you  
down.

EXT. A COUNTRY ROAD-DAY.

Horses feet trot briskly in the light sand. Young Hardin is  
riding his horse at a light gait.

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He stops. Walking a few yards ahead, his back to Hardin, is Mage. Hardin smiles.

Mage stares at the ground. As the sound of hooves approach, he turns.

EXT. FARM HOUSE-DAY.

Hardin runs up the steps and knocks furiously on the door.

Clabe comes to the door.

HARDIN

Uncle Clabe! I shot him! I think  
I killed him! I think he's dead!

CLABE

Whoa! Whoa! Hold on boy. Shot  
who? Who'd you shoot?

HARDIN

Mage, I shot Mage!

CLABE

Oh, damn.

HARDIN

He come at me. He come at me with  
a stick. And he grabbed my bridle!

CLABE

Hold on! Now where did you shoot  
him? Where's he at? Can you take  
me there?

Hardin nods.

EXT. THE COUNTRY ROAD-DAY.

Hardin and Clabe stand by their horses.

Hardin points.

Mage lies in the road a few yards ahead. His breathing is labored.

Clabe nods over his shoulder at the other man standing beside a wagon. He walks over to Mage and looks down at the boy.

Mage is a bloody mess. Clabe struggles to maintain composure.

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CLABE

Boy says you come at him with a stick. That so Mage?

MAGE

(Steterously)

Boy lying. He shot me cold. I ain't did nothing.

HARDIN

(Running toward Mage)

Goddamnit! Calling me a liar. I'll shoot you again you son of a bitch!

CLABE

Shut up!

Hardin slinks back to his horse.

MAGE

Am I going to die Mr. Clabe?

CLABE

(Unnerved)

I don't know. I don't think so. No. You ain't going to die.

Mage starts to cry.

Clabe nods to the man by the wagon. The man walks the wagon toward Mage.

Clabe's eyes harden on his nephew. He rises and walks to him.

HARDIN

Lying bastard. He came at me with a stick.

Clabe slaps the boy on the side of his head, sending his hat into the dirt.

CLABE

Goddamnit boy! I can't hide something like this.

He watches as the man lifts Mage into the wagon.

CLABE (CONT'D)

You've killed that boy, John, and I can't hide it. I'm too old to run.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARDIN

What am I going to do?

CLABE

You're going to get the hell out of here is what you're going to do. The Yankee soldiers or the state police are going to find out about this. If they catch you, they're going to hang you.

He digs in his pocket and brings out a gold piece.

CLABE (CONT'D)

Here. You take this, and you ride home and tell your daddy what you've done.

Hardin takes the money and puts it in his pocket.

CLABE (CONT'D)

Do you know what you've done boy? There's people go there whole lives without killing another man. You're just a boy. You're life's a different thing now boy. It's all changed. Do you understand that?

Hardin looks away, unwilling to answer. He mounts his horse.

CLABE (CONT'D)

These are bad times John Wesley, and you've just made them a lot worse. Now you get out of here.

HARDIN

Thank you for your help.

The wagon, with Mage in the back, pulls along beside them. They watch in silence as it goes by. Clabe stares at Mage's bare feet as they jostle from the rough road.

Hardin spurs his horse and he is gone; leaving Clabe alone in the road.

The old man walks around the edge of the road beside the large bloody spot where Mage lay.

He inspects the grass for several yards along the road, then looks off in the direction of the departed Hardin.

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CONTINUED: (3)

CLABE

I see no stick here boy.

EXT. HARDIN'S PARENTS HOME-NIGHT.

A weary Hardin rides up to the house, a modest farmhouse on a small rise above the fields. He leads his horse to the barn then comes back, stopping in the yard looking at the lone light in the house, knowing what waits inside.

INT. THE HARDIN'S PARLOR-NIGHT.

MR. HARDIN, Hardin's father, a greying taciturn preacher with the eyes to channel God's will, stands in front of his son who is seated on a davenport, his head hung.

MR. HARDIN

You come to me with this news John Wesley. How would you have me react. To absolve you, to castigate you, to thrash you, to embrace you?

HARDIN

To understand that it was not intended.

MR. HARDIN

I can't understand that, for I am not seated in your heart. Only God is. At least that is my prayer. If as you say you defended yourself then the taking of a life will be understood in the book of life. However, if this was wanton. Cruel for cruelty's sake for the sake of expressing a cruelty that finds refuge in your heart then you have wounded our God and you have wounded me.

HARDIN

Do you believe me cruel?

MR. HARDIN

I pray that you are not.

HARDIN

But do you think it?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

MR. HARDIN

I do not know. You're headstrong and full of rage, son. Those are not the qualities of the gentle. I tell myself they are merely the symptoms of youth and of these times.

HARDIN

I'm angry at the Yankees.

MR. HARDIN

The Yankees weren't on that road. I fear you would be angry if every Yankee in Texas vanished tomorrow. I pray that you will remember this John and know yourself as capable but not compelled to do evil.

HARDIN

I can never forget this.

MR. HARDIN

Very well. You can spend the night, but I can't have you here. The soldiers will be after you. You best keep moving for a time. There are many who will keep you, for whatever reasons.

INT. HARDIN'S BEDROOM-NIGHT.

Hardin lies in bed. He glances at the window at the dark night sky. He starts to place his hands together to pray, but stops. He rolls over and is asleep in an instant.

EXT. THE OPEN PRARIE-DAY.

Hardin rides over the land at a brisk pace. He stops and looks back.

Faint, in the horizon he sees a raised cloud of dust.

He cuts his horse to the west and doubles back.

EXT. A SMALL RIDGE-DAY.

Hardin sits atop his horse and peer off into the prairie below him. In the distance he can see THREE SOLDIERS, two white, one black, mounted. They are following his trail, checking the ground for sign periodically.

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CONTINUED:

He turns his horse back off the ridge.

EXT. A RIVER-NIGHT.

Hardin rides up to a narrow spot in the river. He looks up and down the water.

HARDIN

Have to cross here.

He spurs his horse back up the bank.

EXT. A RIDGE ABOVE THE RIVER-NIGHT.

Hardin sits waiting, the night is bright and he can see quite well. He is tossing a small stone from one hand to the other. The sound of the soldier's horses approaches. He throws the stone into the brush and slips to the edge of the ridge and looks down at the river.

EXT. A RIVER-NIGHT.

The three soldiers approach the crossing. The first one enters the river and is half-way across it when the second begins to enter.

A shot rings out. The first soldier falls into the water, dead. The remaining two whirl about wildly drawing their guns and searching for their attacker. A second shot and the second soldier falls.

The remaining soldier runs for cover. He is too slow. Hardin slides from the ridge down the steep bank and shoots him as he flees. He is only wounded and as he tries to turn and return fire, Hardin shoots him twice more.

The silence is stunning. Hardin walks along the edge of the river, inspecting the corpses. Satisfied, he retrieves whatever is useful from their saddles and makes his way back to his horse. He halts and turns to the dead, an afterthought of conscious now ringing in his ears.

HARDIN

(To the dead)

You would have killed me. Any one  
of you would have.

The dead men lay silent, frozen in their last moments.

He continues on to his horse.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FLASH FORWARD:  
1894

EXT. A COUNTRY CEMETERY GONZALES COUNTY TEXAS-DAY.

The graves are scattered and the stones are varied in their styles; from crude to ornate.

THE OLDER JOHN WESLEY HARDIN is the only living soul there. He stands before a grave. He holds his hat in one hand and a silver locket in another.

The name on the tombstone reads: Jane Bowen Hardin.

He looks down at the locket. It is open and inside it there is a picture of his late wife. She is a thin pretty dark-haired woman. Her mouth is set with the resolve of a farmer's wife; but, with eyes that could have seen so much more.

HARDIN

You know when they took this from me, I fought like hell. I believed that this would be the only way I could hold onto you; to be with you. After a while, when it became clear they weren't going to return it, I consoled myself with the thought that some day I'd have the real you, in my arms. I would make it all right that I'd missed those years with you; and our children.

He has not taken eyes off her.

HARDIN (CONT'D)

But then they gave it back to me, and I hated them for that, for reminding me of having completely lost you. They never took you away. I did. I wish, I wish, I wish...

He looks up from the locket.

HARDIN (CONT'D)

Oh Jane I'm so sorry. I will use the rest of my time here on earth to make myself into a new man, one that our children will be proud of. That you'd be proud of.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He kneels down closer to the tombstone.

HARDIN (CONT'D)  
You watch me Jane.

He reaches out and touches the tombstone.

EXT. THE STREETS OF GONZALES TEXAS-DAY.

A moderately sized town, Gonzales is the usual bustle of shop keepers and farmers making their way into town for supplies.

On a placard swinging in the breeze in front of a door on a side street are the words: John Wesley Hardin, Attorney at Law.

INT. THE LAW OFFICE OF JOHN WESLEY HARDIN-DAY.

Hardin's office is sparsely furnished: A stove in the corner with a pot of coffee brewing on top. A small well-worn desk. Some once fetching but never noble curtains adorn the two small windows. A bookcase with a smattering of law books and a thin layer of dust.

Hardin is seated behind his desk, smoking a cigar and intently reading a newspaper.

He doesn't acknowledge SHERIFF JONES entering his office.

Hardin finishes his paragraph and looks up at his visitor.

HARDIN  
Sheriff Jones. What can I do for you today?

JONES  
Can't I simply visit an old friend?

HARDIN  
Well, what do you want to visit about?

JONES  
You might offer me a drink.

HARDIN  
Haven't got one to offer. I don't keep it around. I no longer drink.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JONES

(scoffing)

A lawyer that don't drink, what's  
the world coming to?

He pulls up a chair and sits. He picks up Hardin's paper and  
skims over it briefly.

JONES (CONT'D)

What do you think about this fellow  
Coleman running against me for  
sheriff?

HARDIN

He seems like a good man. I'm  
still making up my mind.

JONES

Seems like I been doing a pretty  
fair job of it all these years,  
don't hear folks complaining. I  
expect you was glad I was the  
sheriff about twenty years ago.

HARDIN

Did you come by to talk politics?

JONES

Why did you come to Gonzales?

HARDIN

My family is here. The governor  
says I have the right to start my  
life over. Gonzales seemed like  
the logical place.

JONES

Turning over a new leaf? That's  
mighty fine. But, look here, that  
lawyer sign outside your door don't  
cut any ice with me. I don't want  
trouble; and, now that it's  
election time, I don't want the  
details of our past friendship  
brought up.

HARDIN

Friendship?

JONES

Association.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARDIN

I have no interest in reliving my past.

Jones gets up, satisfied.

JONES

Mighty fine. We'll get along just fine. With any luck, folks will forget Wes Hardin all together, leave you be. I declare I'm parched, think I'll see what the boys are doing at the saloon. I'll see you around. Don't forget to vote.

Hardin picks up the paper. The headline reads: COLEMAN TO CHALLENGE JONES.

EXT. A MEADOW IN THE COUNTRY-DAY.

A throng of people are gathering around a platform decorated with modest bunting and ribbons. Beside the platform food is being prepared for the crowd.

On the platform, MR. COLEMAN, a wiry man in his forties with cheerful eyes as black as his mustache, is rising to applaud a speaker who has completed his testimonial.

In the crowd Hardin applauds politely.

COLEMAN

Thank you J.R.. Thank you very much. I'd like to have one more speaker come up here and talk to you for a little bit. I know y'all are ready to eat. So am I; but, I'm not so sure how many of you will be around after you've eaten.

The crowd laughs.

COLEMAN (CONT'D)

Besides I think you're going to be interested in what this next speaker has got to say. I know a good many of you remember him for the reputation of his youth;

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COLEMAN (CONT'D)

but, he's a respected lawyer here in Gonzales and the governor saw fit to give him a full pardon for the transgressions of his youth. Well let me get him up here. John.

Hardin climbs up onto the platform.

COLEMAN (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, John Wesley Hardin.

There is a small smattering of applause. Hardin looks around the crowd and reaches into his coat to remove a piece of paper.

HARDIN

Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is John Wesley Hardin. I'm sure a lot of y'all know of me from the exploits of my youth. And I'm not here to deny anything. But, I want to you to know that John Wesley Hardin is not standing before you today. That John Wesley Hardin ceased to be many years ago inside the prison at Huntsville.

He stops for a second, looking the crowd over.

HARDIN (CONT'D)

There was a time when John Wesley Hardin would have been delighted to hear that W.E. Jones was running for sheriff. He'd of voted for him. But, that John Wesley Hardin isn't talking to you right now.

He stops reading from the piece of paper he has, and lets his hand drop to his side.

HARDIN (CONT'D)

The man who's talking to you now is a law-abiding citizen who wants what's best for Gonzales. The people of Gonzales deserve a sheriff with their welfare, not his own in mind. Don't you reckon?

Several crowd members nod to each other.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARDIN (CONT'D)  
 (Nodding to Mr. Coleman)  
 Well you know what you can do about  
 it.

Mr. Coleman rises.

Some in the crowd cheer. The murmur continues.

Mr. Coleman nods at the well-wishers.

COLEMAN  
 Well let's get to eating that food!

Several in the crowd cheer.

Coleman smiles at Hardin, who smiles back.

INT. HARDIN'S DINING ROOM-DAY.

Hardin and his son, WES JR., a teen-age version of himself with his mother's sensitive demeanor, are seated at the large table, having just finished their dinner. His daughter, MOLLY, a young Jane with Hardin's spirit, just below the surface, brings in a pie. She serves the pie to her father and brother then sits down herself. They all begin eating.

WES JR.  
 Looks good, Molly.

HARDIN  
 It sure does.

Molly watches her father eating. He eats heartily, unaware of her attention. He finishes and pushes his plate away.

MOLLY  
 How does it compare?

HARDIN  
 Best pie I've had in a long spell.

MOLLY  
 I mean how does it compare to  
 Mother's.

HARDIN  
 What?

WES JR.  
 Mother made this pie all the time.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

MOLLY

This is her recipe.

Hardin shifts in his seat, uncomfortably.

HARDIN

I'm sorry. I just don't remember it.

Molly begins clearing the table. Hardin watches awkwardly both trying to and avoiding making eye contact.

HARDIN (CONT'D)

I was interviewed by the paper today.

WES JR.

Really?

HARDIN

I expect my involvement in this campaign could lead to a good bit of business.

WES JR.

You may want to run for office yourself.

MOLLY

Wes.

WES JR.

What?

HARDIN

Yes Molly what? Do you think I'd be a poor candidate?

MOLLY

Not at all. It's just. I'm tired of all the attention.

WES JR.

Why?

HARDIN

I know what you're concerned about. But my dear, the only way for folks to know that I'm a different man, is to get out there and show them. If I hide away.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARDIN (CONT'D)  
 All they'll know is history.  
 History's unkind to me.

WES JR.  
 He's right Molly.

MOLLY  
 Yes, but-

HARDIN  
 What? What is it that gives you  
 pause?

WES JR.  
 When does it stop? When is it  
 enough?

Hardin accepts the point. They return to their meal.

EXT. THE STREETS OF GONZALES-DAY

Hardin walks out of his office and peers up and down the streets. He can hear a crowd somewhere in the distance but cannot see it. He walks up the street and turns the corner.

There before him is the Gonzales County courthouse, a large granite building with several live oaks around it. On the lawn of the courthouse, Hardin finds the crowd.

It is a large group. Vendors sell lemonade on the sidewalk adjacent to the lawn. Children run to and fro through the crowd until a mother or father can catch them on the fly and settle them down with a thump on the head.

As Hardin draws nearer, he notices several SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES patrolling the edge of the group.

He makes his way toward the steps of the courthouse to see Sheriff Jones standing on the steps, behind him a sophisticated piece of bunting with the words: JONES FOR SHERIFF embossed upon it.

Jones is enjoying his audience. He watches them all, beaming proudly. Then his eyes find Hardin.

The smile drops from his face.

Hardin can see he has been seen. He steps out from the crowd, visible to all.

JONES  
 You know folks I came to this  
 county many years ago.  
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JONES (CONT'D)

It was a wild and woolly place back then. But now, it is a fine place to live. And I like to think that I'm in some way responsible for that change.

People have begun to notice Hardin in the crowd.

JONES (CONT'D)

It's nice to know that some things change. But, it's important realize that some things don't.

He looks directly at Hardin.

JONES (CONT'D)

Some folks don't. I guess what I'm trying to say, is that before you go to believing stories you hear about a man; consider the source.

Several bystanders look nervously at Hardin for a reaction. He is calm.

JONES (CONT'D)

I mean if my honor can be dragged in the mud by a convicted killer, then I don't know what's become of this county.

HARDIN

I wasn't aware that you ever had any honor.

Several people back away from Hardin.

JONES

Yes, Mr. Hardin, I do have honor. And I cite my good reputation as this county's sheriff for many years in defense of it.

HARDIN

Your reputation is dubious sir.

JONES

Well it doesn't take a lot of nerve to attack a man behind his back.

Hardin steps forward, directly in front of the sheriff.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARDIN

I'm standing right before you and I say: You are not fit to serve as sheriff.

JONES

And I say you're a murdering scum.

HARDIN

Sheriff, the governor of Texas was good enough to give me a full pardon. Any question you have about my former days, I suggest you address to him.

He turns to face the crowd, stepping away from the platform

HARDIN (CONT'D)

I will not deny my past, but neither will I be a slave to it. I live here in Gonzales as a new man. But my memories have not vanished and it is those memories that compel me to declare,  
(Pointing at Jones)  
that man is unfit to be our sheriff.

He walks away from the crowd.

EXT. THE STREETS OF GONZALES-DAY.

It is another day. Hardin is walking down the street.

He is stopped from time to time by others who pause to shake his hand or slap him on the back.

He arrives at a small booth set up on a busy street. He walks behind the booth and stands beside Mr. Coleman.

The two shake hands and chat with those who stop to ask questions.

Hardin is clearly enjoying himself.

INT. A SALOON-NIGHT.

Hardin drags a match across the wooden floor and raises it up to light his cigar.

The saloon is a modest affair a handful of tables and a shallow bar are all the furniture it maintains.

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SEVERAL MEN are scattered around the room. Sitting by the window alone is Mr. Coleman.

TATE, a man in his mid-forties, walks over to Hardin. He offers him a whiskey from the bottle he is carrying.

HARDIN

No. Thanks, Tate. I don't drink.

TATE

Polls have been closed a while.  
What time do you got Wes?

Hardin takes out his pocket watch.

HARDIN

Damn thing's stopped. I keep forgetting to wind it.

TATE

I reckon we're all a might distracted.

(Calling to another man)

Tommy what time is it getting to be?

TOMMY

Quarter to twelve.

TATE

(To Hardin)

We'll know soon enough.

Tate walks over to Mr. Coleman and offers him a drink. He declines as well. Coleman rises and walks over to Hardin's table.

COLEMAN

I'd like to thank you Wes. You've been a big help.

HARDIN

I don't know. I guess we'll see about that, directly.

COLEMAN

I just hope the people heard what I had to say, not just Jones' sorry history. History is like a scorned wife, full of rebukes, but still necessary to define us.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARDIN

(a little unnerved by his  
remark)

I certainly hope I've been a help  
to you.

Coleman nods and walks back to his chair by the window.

A YOUNG MAN walks into the saloon slowly. He goes to the bar  
and pours himself a drink.

Hardin turns and looks at the other men in the saloon.

Coleman rises and slowly walks over to the young man.

The young man is about to down his drink when Coleman reaches  
him.

He turns to Coleman and as apologetically as he can, shakes  
his head from side to side.

Coleman nods in resolution and pats the young man on the  
back. He turns to the room.

COLEMAN

Well that's it boys we can all go  
home now. Sheriff Jones won.

Several of the men shake their heads in disgust. Hardin  
quietly absorbs the news, his eyes drifting from Coleman to  
the bar.

COLEMAN (CONT'D)

I want to say thank you to you all.  
I appreciate it. Now if you'll  
excuse me, I'm going to go home and  
be with my wife.

He walks around the room, shaking hands before leaving the  
saloon.

Hardin walks to the bar and pours himself a drink. He starts  
to drink, but pushes it away, then laughs to himself. Tate  
turns to him.

TATE

What's so funny?

HARDIN

I never knew he was married.

He laughs again then turns and walks out the door.

INT. HARDIN'S GONZALES BEDROOM-NIGHT.

Hardin stands at the bed, an open valise before him. He packs his clothing into the valise, then begins to pack books into a satchel, also on the bed.

From the doorway, Molly watches him silent and scornful.

HARDIN  
I'll send word as soon as I've  
settled someplace.

She remains motionless.

HARDIN (CONT'D)  
I'd appreciate it if you would hold  
any mail I receive and then forward  
it along.

He turns to her.

HARDIN (CONT'D)  
Would you?

She nods, coldly.

HARDIN (CONT'D)  
I'll miss you.

MOLLY  
We're used to missing you.

She leaves him to finish his packing.

EXT. HARDIN'S GONZALES HOUSE-DAY.

It is bright and early. Hardin sits mounted on his horse before the house. His children stand on the porch, even with him.

WES JR.  
Do you have any idea where you're  
heading?

HARDIN  
Most of my memories are in the  
East. I expect I'll head west.

WES JR.  
I wish you weren't leaving.

CONTINUED:

HARDIN

It's for the best. Folks just can't see I've changed.

MOLLY

That's not it.

HARDIN

What is it then, Molly?

MOLLY

Folks just can't see that you're sorry.

She leaves the porch, returning inside.

Hardin is shaken by her words. He looks at his son for a moment, uneasy at meeting his eyes. Then, with a nod, he spurs his horse and is off into the west.

Hardin is standing, hat in hand, beside his wife's grave.

His horse is tied to a nearby tree. It is loaded down with his belongings. There is a rifle in the scabbard on the side.

He walks over to the tombstone and touches it.

HARDIN

Goodbye.

He walks over to his horse and climbs up. He puts on his hat and looks around. He reaches into his coat and takes out the locket. He opens it and gazes down at the picture of his wife. She was a pretty girl. If she had smiled it could almost make this moment hopeful.

HARDIN THE NARRATOR (V.O.)

My heart lies in the coffin there with you. I must pause until it returns. The evil deeds live on after the dead have gone. But the good; the good is buried with the bones. I have loved and dreamed and felt and grieved. Is it all dust? Kept as dust? Can I reclaim it someday?

He closes the locket and replaces it inside his coat; then spurs his horse away from the grave and into the horizon.

FLASHBACK: 1869



EXT. TOWASH, TEXAS-NIGHT.

It is a wide spot in the road, scarcely a quarter mile long. Small stores and a makeshift saloon line the rutted road cutting through its middle. A cold wind blows through the clapboard buildings and smoke seeps from several stacks that jut from the buildings. Through the smoky and stained windows of a grocery store, a card game can be seen in progress.

INT. THE GROCERY STORE-NIGHT.

In the back of the store on a crate-like table; FIVE MEN scratch and sweat in the smoky air, playing poker.

Hardin studiously counts his chips. He looks around the table and awaits his cards. The other men around the table are all considerably older, save one.

COLLINS, a boy close to Hardin's age sits on a crate away from the table. Hardin turns to him.

HARDIN

Sure you don't want to sit one in,  
Collins.

The boy shakes his head.

Hardin shrugs and turns back to the cards.

BRADLEY, a large brutish man, seated across the table, stares, transfixed on Hardin's stacks.

EXT. THE TOWN OF TOWASH-NIGHT.

It is later in the night. The lights from the various buildings have died down to only one, a party at the opposite end of the street from the grocery store window.

Outside the grocery store, Collins is urinating alongside a tree. He is agitated, perhaps tired; but, definitely worried. He buttons up and goes inside.

INT. THE GROCERY STORE-NIGHT.

All eyes are on Hardin as he decides how to bet the three jacks he holds in his hand.

Bradley stares at Hardin. He is chewing a crude, green cigar, the smoke gathering under the brim of his hat and settling around his unblinking eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARDIN

Well Bradley, I'll see your twenty  
and up you twenty more.

BRADLEY

Call.

Hardin lays down his hand. The other men around the table  
throw their hands down. Bradley turns his hand face down,  
and sits scowling at Hardin.

Hardin smugly rakes in his winnings. He begins stacking the  
money and places some of it in his pockets. He bends down to  
scratch his foot, revealing that he has been playing without  
boots.

He glances at the corner. His boots along with some others  
are laying by the stove.

The other players have all gotten up to stretch their legs.  
All except for Bradley.

The other men return to their seats and Bradley looks at  
HAMP, a thin scraggly man who is shuffling the cards.

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

What are we playing Hamp?

HAMP

(Dealing)

Five draw.

MOORE, a well-heeled man, yawns and turns to Hardin.

MOORE

Look's like we've all been losing  
to you, Wes.

The cards are out and Hardin has been dealt three aces.

The well heeled man opens the betting with a check.

HARDIN

Well, I'm going to have to bet five  
dollars.

All the men throw in five dollars except for Bradley, who  
pulls out light.

BRADLEY

Going light.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HAMP  
Cards gentlemen?

He turns to Moore.

HAMP (CONT'D)  
Mr. Moore?

MOORE  
Three.

HAMP  
Wes?

HARDIN  
Two.

HAMP  
Bob?

BOB, an older man, bleary eyed and grey, shakes his head and tosses his cards down.

HAMP (CONT'D)  
Mr. Bradley?

BRADLEY  
Two.

Bradley has drawn to three tens.

Mr. Moore has apparently gotten no help. He tosses his cards as well.

Hardin has picked up no help either, but pulls five more dollars out of his stacks.

HAMP  
Betting's to you Wes.

HARDIN  
I'll go another five dollars.

Hamp throws in his five, while Bradley pulls another five out light.

BRADLEY  
Call.

Hardin lays his aces down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Hamp pushes his chair back and tosses his cards into the center of the table. Bradley throws his three tens on top of Hamp's cards.

HARDIN

You owe me ten dollars. Pay up or get out of the game.

All heads turn. Collins is out of his seat, but he is too late.

Bradley bursts over the table top, knocking Hardin to ground.

Hamp rushes to the corner and pulls a gun, holding it on Hardin.

Bradley pulls a knife and advances on the boy.

Collins rushes to intercept him.

BRADLEY

Get the hell out of my way boy!

COLLINS

Wait! Will you just wait!

Hardin is beginning to pull himself up.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

Stay down Wes.

BRADLEY

(Pushing against Collins)  
Goddamn you. Give me that five hundred you got or I will kill you; you son of a bitch!

Hardin rushes to the corner and retrieves his holster. It is empty.

He looks around frantically, finally seeing it; in Hamp's hand, aimed at him.

COLLINS

Run for it Wes!

Hardin looks around desperately for a way out.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

The window Goddamnit.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Hardin jumps to his feet and runs to the stove. He tears the crudely fashioned chimney from its mooring in the window, sending a cloud of soot and smoke into the room, then shoves his body through the brittle glass and sash, into the night.

EXT. THE STREET-NIGHT.

Hardin falls onto the frosty ground. He looks around quickly. Down the street the party is still going on. He can hear Bradley and Hamp cursing loudly from inside the store.

He runs to his horse, hiding behind the animal. The door to the store crashes open and Collins runs out into the street.

A few people have begun to file out into the street from the party down the road. Collins looks around for Hardin. He sees him and runs to the horses.

COLLINS

Wes, let's get out of here.  
Bradley's set on killing you now.

HARDIN

(angry, but focussed)  
Give me your gun.

COLLINS

I don't have it. They wouldn't let  
me have it.

HARDIN

Damn!

COLLINS

To hell with it. Let's just get  
out of here!

HARDIN

No! I'm not leaving like this.

Hamp comes out on the porch of the store, covered in ashes.

HAMP

Goddamn you boy come on out here!  
I'll fill you full of holes!

Bradley rambles out onto the porch, laughing, his fist full of Hardin's money. Several of the party-goers come over and begin to talk to the two men. Several begin to laugh and look in Hardin's direction.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARDIN

Damnit! I want my boots and my gun  
and my goddamn money!

COLLINS

Well hang on a minute! Let me see  
if I can talk to them any more.

Collins walks out into the street.

Bradley is pulling freely from a bottle of whiskey. He spies Collins and laughs. Hardin watches intently as Collins and Bradley talk. Hamp throws up his hands and walks away in disgust.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

All we want is his boots back.  
Come on. You got his money. Just  
let me get his boots and we'll be  
on our way. I can't bring him back  
to his daddy with out his boots.

BRADLEY

Okay! Okay! Go in and get his  
goddamn boots. Tell him I don't  
ever want to see his cheatin' hide  
again.

Collins rushes inside.

Hardin watches from behind the horse as his friend emerges from the store with his boots. He walks through the street and hands the boots to Hardin.

HARDIN

Boots! Is that all he would give  
you?

COLLINS

Wes, just shut up and put them on.

Hardin leans over to put his boot on then jerks his foot out.

HARDIN

What the hell?

He reaches inside his boot and pulls out a pistol.

COLLINS

There's extra bullets in the other  
one. That stupid son of a bitch  
Hamp forgot about his own gun.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Bradley and the throng in the street stumble back to the party. Hardin and Collins dash into the woods.

Bradley and the group draw nearer the party.

Hardin and Collins appear out of the darkness from behind a building, cutting them off. Bradley and his party stop dead in their tracks.

BRADLEY

You come back for another thump on  
your head boy?

In an instant, Hardin raises his pistol and fires.

The crowd scatters, leaving Bradley standing alone in the middle of the street, rocking back and forth on his boot heels. He looks down at the hole in his chest and then at the boy who put it there.

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

Oh Lordy, don't shoot me any more.

HARDIN THE NARRATOR (V.O.)

The whole wide ringing world  
precedes a death. It leads you  
into it and follows you out,  
comforting you, burnishing the  
lines you've crossed so well you  
scarcely notice. The air and sun  
and water roiling in your bones,  
denied him you've sent across.  
When did you know you were there to  
deny him? Your perceptions quickly  
couch you and spirit you away.  
Across the river, away from the  
echoes and the wake.

Hardin fires again. Bradley falls to the ground. Hardin walks calmly over to him.

Bradley's breathing is labored. He looks up at the boy standing over him.

Hardin is a cipher. His cold grey eyes reveal nothing. He begins to shift his gun from hand to hand. The shifting stops.

He fires another shot into his chest. The big body lurches for a minute, in the dust, then is still.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The people still linger in the shadows watching in horror as Hardin paces around the corpse. He kneels down by the body, cocks his pistol, places it next to the dead man's temple and pulls the trigger; spraying gore out onto the dirt street.

He walks back and climbs up on his horse. He trots his horse away from the town of Towash, disappearing into the night.

FLASH FORWARD:

EXT. A PRAIRIE TOWN-NIGHT.

Hardin rides his horse slowly into the small town, its meager buildings silhouetted against the desert night. A faint light from a makeshift saloon is the only sign of life. He tethers his horse and goes inside.

INT. MAKESHIFT SALOON-NIGHT.

The place is the product of slipshod carpenters more interested in a place to drink than a job well-done. Behind the crude bar, THE BARKEEP, a man in his fifties, greasy and wizened before his time, looks up at Hardin suspiciously. He shares a look with the only other person in the place, a PATRON, in similar shape as the Barkeep.

HARDIN

Evening.

BARKEEP

Evening to you. You want a drink?

HARDIN

I thought I smelled coffee.

The Barkeep nods toward a relic of a stove.

BARKEEP

Yeah, I got some coffee on.

He fetches a cup, as Hardin sits at table, his back to the wall.

HARDIN

What's this town called?

BARKEEP

I don't rightly know. Ain't much of a town. Not too many folks light here.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

HARDIN  
What's nearby?

PATRON  
We're halfway between nowhere, and  
the middle of nowhere.

The Barkeep laughs along with the Patron.

HARDIN  
Is there a town of some size? I'm  
looking to set up my business.

PATRON  
What do you do?

HARDIN  
I'm a lawyer. My name is John  
Wesley Hardin.

Neither men react. Hardin is surprised, but masks it.

HARDIN (CONT'D)  
A good many people have heard of  
me.

BARKEEP  
Sorry friend. We're kindly cut off  
from the world.

Hardin is stung, but continues to keep a poker face.

PATRON  
If it's a town you're looking for,  
I'd say, keep on a riding.

HARDIN  
Thanks. And thanks for the coffee.

The Barkeep and Patron return to their conversation, leaving  
Hardin to take stock over his coffee.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. THE MAIN STREET OF A WESTERN TOWN-DAY.

It is a quiet day in town the street are all but empty and a  
handful of horses are tied up in front of a modest saloon.

The swinging doors of the saloon burst open and Hardin and A  
COWBOY repair to opposite ends of the street.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hardin drains a glass and sets it down before opening his coat to reveal two pistols.

The cowboy marks his ground with his boots and lowers his hand to linger near his own pistol.

In a flash, Hardin has pulled both guns and shot the man. He lies dead in the dirt. The dust has not settled around him before Hardin has retrieved his glass and re-entered the saloon.

FLASH FORWARD:

EXT. THE PRAIRIE-NIGHT.

Hardin rides on through the night. He navigates by the stars, riding well into the night, restless. Coyotes howl in the distance, but he rides on, lost in his thoughts.

In the distance he sees the lights from another small town. He pulls his horse up and climbs down. He stares at the lights only briefly, before unpacking his role and tethering his horse to a nearby mesquite tree. He lays out his role and begins unbuckling his saddle, preferring anonymity on his own terms.

HARDIN

(to horse)

I believe I'd rather sleep under  
the stars tonight.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. STREETS OF ABILENE, KANSAS-DAY.

Hardin rides into town, dusty and trail beaten. A MAN looks up at him and recognizes him. He takes to his feet and scampers down the planked sidewalk, disappearing around a corner.

Hardin climbs down off his saddle and surveys the town. It is bustling with activity. WHORES and GAMBLERS congregate outside a nearby saloon. Hardin is making his way toward them.

HICKOCK (O.S.)

You. Saddle tramp.

Hardin turns to see WILD BILL HICKOCK, long hair flowing in all his archetypal glory, beating a path directly to him.

HICKOCK (CONT'D)

I'll have your name son.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARDIN  
My name's Hardin, Wes Hardin.

HICKOCK  
I've heard of you. I'm Bill  
Hickock.

HARDIN  
I know.

HICKOCK  
I'll have those guns son. Town  
ordinance.

HARDIN  
(testing)  
I fear trouble if I do.

HICKOCK  
(absolute)  
I can promise you trouble if you  
don't.

Hardin concedes. He crosses his arms and removes his pistols, extending them butts first, upside down to Hickock. Hickock moves to receive them when quick as lightning, Hardin spins them in his hands and points them directly into Hickock's chest. Hickock stops short, uncertain of his next move.

HARDIN  
Here you go.

He hands the pistols to Hickock, who takes them and hands them to A DEPUTY who spirits them away. Hickock looks Hardin over. Should he kill him now and save time? He decides against it.

HICKOCK  
Boy. Let's get drunk.

Hardin nods, relieved, and they disappear into the bar.

MONTAGE:

EXT. STREETS OF ABILENE, KANSAS-NIGHT.

Hardin and Hickock carouse in the saloons. They guffaw at each other's stories. They play poker. They pair off and separate with whores. Then they do it all over again.

INT. A SALOON-NIGHT.

Hardin and Wild Bill sit, their backs to the wall, at a table in the rear of the raucous saloon. They've settled in for the night and nurse their whiskeys, content with each others' company.

HARDIN

You got a family somewhere, Bill?

HICKOCK

I 'spect I do, somewhere.

HARDIN

You don't keep up with them?

HICKOCK

I've learned that my nature ain't suited to long spells of company.

HARDIN

Family's different. It's blood.

HICKOCK

There's blood all around.

HARDIN

That's a mighty lonesome way to look at life, Bill.

HICKOCK

Life's a mighty lonesome thing to look at, kid.

Hardin returns to his whiskey, mulling over the older gunman's words.

INT. HARDIN'S HOTEL ROOM IN ABILENE-NIGHT.

It is dark. Hardin lies in bed, trying to sleep. Through the walls comes the most hellish snoring ever heard by man or beast. Hardin tosses and turns to no avail. He tries to muffle the sound with blankets and pillows again to no success.

HARDIN

Goddamnit.

He reaches for his jacket, draped over a nearby chair and removes a small pistol from an interior pocket. He takes aim at the offending wall and fires a shot, then another. The snoring stops followed by the sound of a thud.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

There is a scream and he hears the adjacent room's door being flung open.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)  
He's dead! Someone's shot him!  
Send for Marshall Hickock!

Hardin scrambles out of bed. He dresses quickly and gathers his things. He rushes to the window and looks out.

EXT. THE STREET BELOW THE HOTEL-NIGHT.

Hickock and his deputy are marching up the street already.

INT. HARDIN'S HOTEL ROOM IN ABILENE-NIGHT.

Hardin throws open the sash and climbs out onto the roof, his things in his hand.

EXT. HOTEL ROOF-NIGHT.

Hardin works his way to the edge of the roof and climbs down.

EXT. STREETS OF ABILENE, KANSAS-DAY.

Hardin rushes to his horse and quickly climbs up. He kicks the animal forward and thunders out of town.

EXT. A CAMPSITE-NIGHT.

Beside a meager fire Hardin, now satisfied that he has escaped Abilene, lies down to peer into the starry sky.

HARDIN  
Doubt thou the stars are fire,  
Doubt that the sun doth move,  
Doubt truth to be a liar,  
But never doubt I love.

With a sigh, he rolls over for much-needed sleep.

FLASH FORWARD:

EXT. THE PRAIRIE-DAY.

Hardin rides over the ridge of a hill. Below him is the town of El Paso. He stops for a moment, letting the breeze cool him as he takes in the town. He wipes his brow, straightens his clothing, then spurs his horse forward, down the hill toward El Paso.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. A HOUSE IN THE COUNTRY-DAY.

It is a farmhouse. A large group of people mill about the tables that have been brought outside. Food is set out for the large dinner that is winding down. Hardin is between two OLDER GENTLEMEN. They are both talking to him as he nods politely and looks around the party. At the corner of the large porch, he sees JANE.

FIRST OLDER MAN

I'se wondering when you'd make it out our way John Wesley. Jane yonder's done sat on the porch with about every boy in the county 'cept you.

She is young and beautiful with raven hair and piercing eyes. She has been looking at Hardin and only looks away briefly when he meets her gaze. She returns back to his eyes and smiles. He smiles back.

EXT. A FIELD BESIDE THE HOUSE-DUSK.

Hardin and Jane walk along a crude fence row. The house and people are in the distant background. A few guests leave, their buggies and wagons sending dust upward like forming clouds.

JANE

I don't know if it's such a good idea, me walking out here with you.

HARDIN

(Looking up)  
Why is that?

JANE

You must be aware of your reputation.

HARDIN

There's reputation and there's the truth. Most folks see the reputation and stop looking. What do you see?

JANE

I see someone I'd like to get to know better.

He smiles and they continue their walk.

EXT. THE HOUSE IN THE COUNTRY-NIGHT.

Hardin and Jane stand at the edge of the yard. A few lights scattered about dance in the background, casting long shadows that mix with the moonlight over the two young people. Jane is starting toward the house when Hardin reaches for her hand, stopping her.

HARDIN

I just want you to know that the things I've done I did because I had no choice, at the time.

JANE

I understand that.

HARDIN

I'm not just a collection of the things I've done. I have plans, ideas, dreams, wishes.

JANE

That's what I'm interested in.

She walks back to the house and its twinkling lights.

EXT. THE HOUSE IN THE COUNTRY-NIGHT.

Hardin walks to his horse. His brother, JOE, older and more somber is waiting for him.

JOE

You glad I brought you now, little brother?

HARDIN

(smitten)

I am.

Joe mounts his horse.

JOE

Let's get on home.

Joe rides off. Hardin turns to untie his horse when he sees MRS. BOWEN, Jane's mother, a stern matronly woman with piercing eyes.

HARDIN

Evening Mrs. BOWEN.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. BOWEN

I want to explain something to you  
John Wesley Hardin.

HARDIN

Yes ma'am.

MRS. BOWEN

I won't be able to stop you if  
you're a mind to marry my Jane;  
but, I can still make sure you do  
right by her.

HARDIN

Mrs. Bowen I can assure you-

MRS. BOWEN

I'm sure you can. I married a man  
like you, full of assurances. I've  
studied them all I care to. You  
best put your words into action.

She fades away into the darkness between the horses and the  
house. Hardin mounts up and leaves, hurrying to catch up to  
his brother.

EXT. A SMALL CREEK-DAY.

Jane and Hardin are seated on a small bank next to a thin  
stream. Hardin reaches to the ground and picks up a stone.  
He rises and places his hands behind him.

JANE

What are you doing?

HARDIN

It's a game. You have to guess  
which hand.

JANE

What do I get if I do?

HARDIN

My heart.

JANE

What would I do with that?

HARDIN

Make a home for it. It would be  
yours forever.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

JANE

What if I'm wrong, what do I get?

HARDIN

A stone.

JANE

Your heart or a stone?

He holds his hands out. She considers them both for a moment then points.

He opens his hand. It is empty.

HARDIN

You win.

JANE

(slightly confused)

It's empty.

HARDIN

No, it's full. You made it so.

She smiles, and he sits down beside her.

FLASH FORWARD:

INT. HARDIN'S LAW OFFICE. EL PASO, TEXAS-DAY.

Hardin sits behind his spindly desk in a ramshackle office. His furnishings are meager and dust dances in the sunlight blazing in through the undraped windows.

JIM MILLER, tall, lean, and fierce, with piercing eyes and a drooping mustache, enters the office.

MILLER

Wes.

HARDIN

Jim? Jim Miller?

MILLER

How are you, cousin?

Hardin rises and they shake.

HARDIN

What are you doing in El Paso?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MILLER

I come looking for you.

HARDIN

Why.

MILLER

I need me a lawyer. I got a lawman out my way, Bud Frazer. We ain't seeing eye to eye. And, I figured I better try and handle it in the courts before I shoot him to pieces.

HARDIN

I don't know. Jim, your reputation-

MILLER

You're going to talk to me about reputation?

HARDIN

I don't know.

MILLER

Wes, you're family, and it appears you need the money. That's why I'm here. I don't know if you're any count as a lawyer. Make up your mind. Are you a lawyer or not?

Hardin returns to his desk, and takes out pen and paper.

HARDIN

Have a seat.

MILLER

Thanks.

Miller sits down at the desk.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. A FARM HOUSE IN GONZALES COUNTY-DAY.

It is Jane and Hardin's wedding day. The sun is shining bright. There is not a cloud in the sky.

A small group of family and friends are gathered around the front porch of the house.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

In the fields surrounding the house young men walk, rifles and shotguns slung over their shoulders.

PREACHER (O.S.)  
Dearly beloved we are gathered here  
today to join this man and this  
woman in holy wedlock.

At the rear of the house young men, also armed with rifles, sit perched on wagons; watching the woods.

PREACHER (CONT'D)(O.S.)  
John, do you take Jane to be your  
lawful wedded wife?

HARDIN (O.S.)  
I do.

PREACHER (O.S.)  
Jane, do you take John to be your  
lawful wedded husband?

JANE (O.S.)  
I do.

PREACHER (O.S.)  
Then by the power invested in me by  
the state of Texas, I now pronounce  
you man and wife. You may now kiss  
your bride.

The men on guard look toward the house, as they hear the crowd cheer.

Hardin and Jane kiss.

Mrs. Bowen watches the couple. As Hardin turns toward the guests, she notices the two pistols he has strapped to his waist.

JANE'S FATHER pats his son in law on the shoulder. He is a large cheery man, a little lost behind his eyes. His daughter beams at him.

Hardin's brother Joe and his parents are next to wish the couple the best. The guests move in, circling the happy couple.

The young men on guard resume their patrol.

EXT. THE FARM HOUSE-NIGHT.

The last of the guests are leaving.

Hardin and Jane stand on the front porch, waving their last fare-wells. They watch for a moment, then Jane goes inside.

Hardin is about to go indoors when a wagon pulls before the porch. Mrs. Bowen is driving. Mr. Bowen is asleep in the rear.

MRS. BOWEN

How are your assurances tonight?

HARDIN

As strong as you can imagine Mother BOWEN.

MRS. BOWEN

I can imagine a great deal. Mark me. I need a promise from you, that you'll provide and care for my daughter and never cause her pain.

HARDIN

You have my promise.

MRS. BOWEN

I hope that it is kept.

HARDIN

I wouldn't want to disappoint you.

MRS. BOWEN

You should worry about disappointing her.

She thrashes her horses and rides away.

INT. THE BEDROOM-NIGHT.

Hardin enters the bedroom and closes the door behind him.

Jane is already in the room.

She has removed her dress and stands before her husband in only her petticoats.

Hardin walks to her. He lifts her chin and gently kisses her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JANE

You're a good man, John.

HARDIN

Thank you for seeing that.

EXT. THE FARM HOUSE-NIGHT.

The light still shines in the bedroom.

One of the guards stares up at the window for a moment.

The light vanishes and the guard turns back to the dark fields.

FLASH FORWARD:

INT. COURTROOM, EL PASO-DAY.

The room is large, ambitious. Two tables are before the bench. At one, FRAZER, a hatchet faced man with cold eyes, and HIS ATTORNEY, a corpulent man with pinkish skin and eyes to match, stand haughtily. At the other, Hardin and Miller stand uneasily before a stern faced elderly, JUDGE.

JUDGE

Mr. Miller, I'm appreciative to your evidence and your character witnesses, but, you've got to realize that your history precedes you. This being a civil case, I'm allowed to use my better judgement; and, given your reputation and, I might add, your choice of attorneys, I'm going to find in favor of Mr. Frazer.

He slams the gavel down, rises and leaves the room. Frazer turns to Miller, smirking. Miller returns with a cold, dead gaze.

Hardin is furious, he stares at the now empty bench, letting the judge's words sink into him, before turning and collecting his things.

Miller watches as Frazer and his lawyer depart.

MILLER

I expect I'll be seeing Bud Frazer soon enough.

(Turning to Hardin)

Thank you Wes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARDIN  
(fuming)  
For what. I lost.

MILLER  
You didn't lose. We lost. The  
judge said it, our history precedes  
us.

HARDIN  
I've got a pardon!

MILLER  
A piece of paper won't change how  
people think. Come on, let's go  
get drunk.

Hardin pauses a moment longer. Then, with one last look at  
the bench-

HARDIN  
Yeah, let's get drunk.

INT. A CAFE. EL PASO, TEXAS-DAY.

Hardin sits at a table eating a large breakfast, a paper  
splayed on the table in front of him.

JEFF MILTON, a large bear of a man, sits down at the table.  
He sits back the large badge on his lapel shining brightly in  
the light.

HARDIN  
Marshal Milton isn't it.

MILTON  
Mr. Hardin. How are you this fine  
morning?

HARDIN  
Fair sir, and you?

MILTON  
Fine thanks. I was wondering if  
you had a chance to read about the  
late sheriff Frazer in your paper  
this morning.

HARDIN  
The late sheriff Frazer?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MILTON

Yes. It seems your cousin, Jim Miller shot him with a shotgun several days ago.

HARDIN

I had no idea.

MILTON

I'm sure. It looks like a simple case of self defense. You know as well as anyone about the bad blood between them.

HARDIN

I attempted to bring the late sheriff to justice after he shot my cousin; but, the judge threw it out of court.

MILTON

Well your cousin it appears has settled it. I wonder, Mr. Hardin if he ever spoke to you about any plans he had for sheriff Frazer.

HARDIN

No Marshall he didn't.

Milton leans forward.

MILTON

Look here. I don't give a damn about Bud Frazer. He was a sorry piece of shit, just like your cousin. You concern me more.

HARDIN

Sir, I can assure you.

MILTON

You live in my town. My town. I don't care how many law books you stack on the shelves in that rat trap of an office you got. I am never going to quit looking at you. Do you understand me.

HARDIN

I can assure you Marshall. You have nothing to fear from me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MILTON

I never said I was scared of you.

With that he rises and leaves Hardin to his breakfast.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. A CORRAL CLOSE TO THE FARM HOUSE-TWILIGHT.

Hardin and the others are rounding up the last few of the herd into the corral. As they shut the gate, the men begin leading their horses to the barn.

Jane has come down from the house. Hardin, filthy from the days work, opens his arms to hug her.

JANE

Oh! John! Get away from me you're filthy!

HARDIN

(Laughing)

Oh come on. You won't give your husband a little hug?

JANE

No.

He makes a dash for her, but she is too quick. She walks with him to the barn, staying out of his reach the whole time.

INT. THE DINING ROOM-NIGHT.

Jane and Hardin are sitting at their dining table, relaxing after supper.

HARDIN

I'm pretty much where I want to be with the horses. I think if I leave in a day or two I can be in Louisiana a lot sooner than I had planned.

She looks away.

HARDIN (CONT'D)

Oh honey. Don't worry. It won't be so bad. You know you'll be safe while I'm away, don't you?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

JANE  
It's not that.

HARDIN  
What then?

JANE  
I want to trust you.

HARDIN  
Then trust me.

JANE  
It's just when you're gone, you're gone so long. And I hear stories.

HARDIN  
Jane, you're always going to hear stories about me. But stories is all they are. There are a lot of folks out there who will lie about me. It's always been that way. It may always be that way. What's important is when I'm with you.

JANE  
You're always with me.

HARDIN  
And you with me.

She leaves him at the table with his coffee.

Hardin stops sipping his coffee for a moment. He sets his cup down and looks into the kitchen.

He can see Jane washing the dishes.

He finishes his coffee; and looks down at his new wedding ring as he twists it around his finger.

FLASH FORWARD:

EXT. THE ACME SALOON. EL PASO, TEXAS-NIGHT.

Bright lights and rollicking music cascade out of the Acme. It is a busy night in El Paso. People line the sidewalks and fill the windows.

INT. THE ACME SALOON-NIGHT.

Hardin sits at a large table, a whiskey in front of him. Several men surround him, listening intently to the story he is telling. The men laugh uproariously and one or two women of the night circle the table with watchful eyes.

Hardin takes out his pistol and reaches inside his coat for another. He hands the two guns, butt first, to a young man seated at the table. The young man looks down and smiles drunkenly at the guns.

HARDIN

All right so there I am. Wild Bill wanted my guns, but I didn't want to give them to him. Abilene was a wild town in those days.

The young man looks around wide-eyed at his colleagues at the table.

HARDIN (CONT'D)

But, he was the law and I didn't want to antagonize him you understand. So I pulled them out and handed them to him just like this.

Hardin's eyes harden on the young man.

HARDIN (CONT'D)

Go ahead. Take them.

The boy looks around the table nervously.

Hardin's eyes grow even more fierce.

HARDIN (CONT'D)

Go on.

A couple of the men at the table nod encouragement to the boy.

Laughing, the boy reaches for the guns.

Hardin spins both of the pistols around. The butts fall into his palms, his fingers settle into the trigger guards and he cocks back the hammers with his thumbs; all in the beat of a heart.

The young man jumps backward, raking his chair across the hard floor and bumping into a man seated at another table.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The men surrounding the table erupt in laughter.

One OLDER MAN seizes the boy's shoulders to calm him down.

The boy looks back at Hardin, who is also laughing as he puts his guns away.

The boy slowly begins laughing at himself.

BOY

That really happen?

Hardin's face snaps back into his fierce glare.

HARDIN

You calling me a liar?

The boy's face drops. He gulps and backs away again; sending the table into new peals of laughter.

Hardin is laughing again. He reaches over and slaps the boy good-naturedly on the boot.

The two men, Milton and DEPUTY GEORGE SCARBOROUGH, younger and more refined than the sheriff, sit at the bar, staring at Hardin's table.

SCARBOROUGH

It's the same damn thing every night. Bullshit and stories.

MILTON

And drinks.

Hardin is immersed in another story.

HARDIN

I didn't mean to kill the fellow. I just meant to stop that goddamn snoring. But I knew Wild Bill would take one look at that dead man, then he'd plug me sure as hell, just to add to his reputation. So what could I do?

A tall man enters the saloon. He is around fifty with a well groomed mustache and pale grey eyes that look as if they could bore through stone. There is a badge upon his chest. He is JOHN SELMAN.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Selman surveys the bar briefly. He locates Milton and Scarborough and makes a beeline straight for them. He looks at Hardin as he passes the table. The two nod to each other.

The three men sit closely together. Selman has some bit of news that the other two men appear very interested in.

Hardin rises from his table and goes to the bar. He pours himself a drink and watches the three men talk in the reflection of the large mirror before him.

SELMAN

It appears they're headed this way.

MILTON

Any chance we can catch them before they cross?

SCARBOROUGH

Rio Grande's a mighty big river.

MILTON

Yeah. Well, we're not doing any good here.

The three lawmen have risen and are on their way out.

Hardin notices this and raises his glass in salutation.

EXT. THE STREETS OF EL PASO-NIGHT.

Hardin is walking alone along the lonely side streets. He reaches a flight of stairs leading up to a darkened room. He climbs the stairs, taking care to navigate as he sways from time to time.

EXT. THE RIO GRANDE RIVER-NIGHT.

It is a narrow part of the river between the outskirts of both El Paso and Juarez.

Two men on horses splash into the river, furiously spurring their animals across. In the distance several men on horseback follow. The two men look nervously over their shoulders as the others draw closer. They flail their horses maniacally, sending water all around them into the night air. Their pursuers have almost reached the river. The two men finally reach Mexican soil. They pause for a moment, out of breath, watching their would be captors on the opposite bank.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The two men are MARTIN MOROSE, a tall curious looking fellow, with Nordic features and the clothes of the basest type of dirt farmer; and VIC QUEEN. What Morose is, Queen is not, hard and lean, a cowboy from head to toe.

As they catch their breath they watch as their pursuers shake their fists and swear at them from across the river. Morose and Queen spur their horses into the Mexican night, disappearing quickly into the distant lights of Juarez.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. GONZALES, TEXAS-DAY.

It is a bright dry day as a wagon carrying a wounded Hardin pulls into town.

The wagon comes to a stop in front of the jail and a YOUNG SHERIFF JONES walks out onto the sidewalk to inspect his charge. The deputies drag Hardin from the wagon and stand him up in front of the sheriff.

JONES

Howdy Wes. I've heard a lot about you.

HARDIN

Sheriff. What have you heard?

JONES

You'd be a good friend to those who would help you. Fellow can't have too many good friends.

A crowd begins to gather in front of the jail.

JONES (CONT'D)

Go on and take him inside.

The deputies whisk Hardin indoors. Jones walks leisurely across the street, while the townsfolk throng around the jail.

INT. HARDIN'S DINING ROOM-NIGHT.

Jane, seated at the dining table is weeping. Her mother hovers nearby attempting to comfort her.

JANE

Is he hurt badly?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. BOWEN

They didn't say, just that he's shot.

JANE

I'm going to him.

MRS. BOWEN

No. You're not. You're staying right here. There's no telling what might happen. No telling what he's done.

JANE

He's my husband.

MRS. BOWEN

He's not worth it.

JANE

What would you have me do then? Leave him. I love him. And I'm carrying his child.

MRS. BOWEN

Oh Lord.

JANE

Yes. You don't see him as I do. I've seen into his heart and I know the man I love is there.

MRS. BOWEN

Something else is there too. You don't see that.

JANE

I believe the part I love will prevail.

MRS. BOWEN

I believed that once too.

JANE

I don't believe it. I know it. If I didn't I wouldn't stay. I won't end up like you.

MRS. BOWEN

What do you mean?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JANE

Bitter. Hating daddy for not changing, not bowing to your will.

MRS. BOWEN

Your daddy is weak.

JANE

No it's weak to endure what you can change.

MRS. BOWEN

You can't change another's heart.

JANE

It appears I can't change yours.

MRS. BOWEN

(starting to leave)

I've nothing more to say.

JANE

(trying to stop her)

Mama. I'm sorry. Can't you just accept that this is the way it is.

MRS. BOWEN

No. I can't, but I'll stay.

She draws closer and embraces her daughter.

FLASH FORWARD:

EXT. THE STREETS OF EL PASO-DAY.

It is a bright pleasant day. Many people are out on the street. Store keepers stop to chat to people on their way to work.

Hardin, hungover, weaves around the townsfolk as he makes his way up the sidewalk. He reaches his office, a modest affair on a side street. He fumbles for his keys and lets himself in.

INT. HARDIN'S LAW OFFICE-DAY.

Hardin sets the morning paper down on his desk. His furnishings have, if anything gotten worse; the desk is more ancient, the stove more rust worn. He walks into a back room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Enter BEULAH MOROSE; young, blond, buxom, with alluring black eyes. She looks around the office for a second, reading the spines on the few law books exposed.

Hardin returns from the rear. He is surprised to find a customer.

HARDIN

(flirting)

Oh my dear you startled me. How may I be of service to you on such a lovely morning?

BEULAH

My name is Mrs. Beulah Morose. You were recommended to me, Mr. Hardin, by an associate of my husband's. He recognized your name. I'm here about my husband, Martin.

HARDIN

Please sit down.

BEULAH

Recently my husband has been forced to flee to Mexico to avoid prosecution on cattle rustling charges in New Mexico.

He gets up from the desk and walks over to his stove.

HARDIN

Some coffee?

BEULAH

Why yes that would be nice.

He pours her a cup and sets it gently by her elbow.

BEULAH (CONT'D)

You're so sweet.

He sits back down on the edge of the desk.

BEULAH (CONT'D)

Well, you see, there is a sizable reward for both him and his partner, Vic Queen. I'm fearful that greedy lawmen will seek to collect the reward and bring him over to stand trial without proper extradition processes.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

HARDIN

Mexico protects those who would  
break the law, even if they wear a  
badge.

BEULAH

I pray that you can help me. I  
know from the papers, that you know  
first hand how formidable the law  
can be in seeking capture of a man.  
And I also know that you are a  
lawyer with some reputation.

HARDIN

I hope that's a good thing.

She smiles at him, batting her large eyes as she raises the  
coffee cup to her lips.

BEULAH

Please Mr. Hardin, can you help me,  
and my husband?

HARDIN

My dear, have no worry. You are in  
capable hands.

FLASHBACK:

INT. HARDIN'S JAIL CELL-NIGHT.

Hardin is laying on his cot, not asleep; just listening to  
the sound of the town that spill into his cell like the glow  
from the streetlight.

He hears a door open and boots approach, but continues  
staring at the ceiling.

JONES (O.S.)

How're you holding up Wes?

Hardin rases up to see the Sheriff standing outside his cell,  
carrying a crude valise.

HARDIN

Oh I can't complain.

JONES

(taking a seat)

Good. State police left today.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JONES (CONT'D)

You know you're going to have to wait awhile before that circuit judge can make it back this way.

HARDIN

That so?

JONES

Yep. I had a nice visit from your cousin this morning.

HARDIN

Did you? I hope he was a gentleman.

JONES

He was excellent company, much like yourself. I'll be sorry to see you go.

The sheriff rises and leaves the valise beside Hardin's cell. With his boot, he shoves it closer.

Hardin pulls it into his cell and opens it. It contains a saw, hammer and a pair of files. He looks up earnestly at the Sheriff.

JONES (CONT'D)

It should look like a jailbreak. Give my regards to your cousin and-  
(nodding at the tools)  
Don't forget to take those with you.

He walks away, leaving Hardin to get to work.

FLASHBACK:

INT. A SHABBY HOTEL ROOM-NIGHT.

Hardin lays on a ramshackle bed. The dreary sallow light and peeling wallpaper flutter is the faint breeze from the open window. Raucous laughter and music seep inside from below.

There is a faint knock. He clutches a pistol at his side.

HARDIN

Who is it?

JANE (O.S.)

Jane.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He struggles to his feet, still wounded and unlocks the door.  
Jane enters, uneasy at the surroundings.

HARDIN  
My God. I'm glad you're hear.

JANE  
Are you hurt?

HARDIN  
I'll be alright.

JANE  
Sit. Don't tire yourself.

HARDIN  
Did you bring the money?

JANE  
Yes.

She hands it to him.

JANE (CONT'D)  
John, how are we going to get you  
home?

HARDIN  
We aren't. At least not right now.  
I've got to lay low for a while and  
home's not the place for that.  
Besides. I lost a lot of money. I  
intend to get it back.

JANE  
Can't you just let it go?

HARDIN  
No I can't. I had plans for that  
money Jane. Plans for us. Do you  
know how this makes me feel? You  
being here? Seeing me like this?  
You deserve better, a man you can  
respect. Folks have got their  
minds made up about me.

JANE  
I respect you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARDIN

Well you may be the only one.  
Money may not buy everything but  
here and now it buys respect and I  
plan to get it. You can change a  
lot more opinions with money than  
with good deeds.

JANE

I'm worried you'll end up in jail  
again, or worse.

HARDIN

I don't ever want to see another  
jail cell again. I will see us in  
a life we can hold to. Despite  
what my enemies would see.

JANE

You sound like a man bent on  
revenge not on success.

HARDIN

How would you know? Have you lived  
my life, know what it is to be  
hunted and persecuted?

She recoils from his anger.

HARDIN (CONT'D)

Oh Jane I'm sorry. I'm sorry.  
Please forgive me. I just want  
what's best for us. I assure you,  
it's no revenge. Not at all.

She approaches him again, embracing him, comforting him.

MONTAGE:

EXT. HARDIN'S RANCH-DAY.

Jane busy's herself with the maintenance of the ranch in her  
husband's absence. As she grows with child her duties become  
more tasking. Her mother helps her feed chickens. She cooks  
and cleans. She feeds the remaining horses. She sweeps the  
large porch.

Always with an eyes to the horizon, looking for her man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She goes into labor and delivers her daughter, surrounded by old women and her mother. Alone with her child, she gazes out the windows. Still no Hardin.

FLASH FORWARD:

EXT. THE STREETS OF EL PASO, 1895-DAY.

Hardin and Beulah walk down the street, arm in arm alongside the picket fences of houses and respectable yards.

Hardin leans over and attempts to kiss his client.

Beulah taps him, giggling.

BEULAH  
Stop. Folks're looking.

HARDIN  
Let them look. Who cares?

BEULAH  
I'm a married woman.

HARDIN  
Perhaps you're right.

BEULAH  
Well don't give up so easy.

He pats her bottom as they continue their stroll, letting his palm rest a moment to appraise her.

From across the street, Milton and Scarborough have watched the two love birds.

MILTON (O.S.)  
Ain't love a thing of beauty?

SCARBOROUGH (O.S.)  
Yes indeed.

They turn, repairing to a saloon.

EXT. THE STREETS OF JUAREZ-NIGHT.

Hardin and MILLS, a young man too small for the large gun he carries on his hip, are walking down the street. Mills listens eagerly to the tale Hardin is spinning.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARDIN

Most of what you hear about me is myth. I never killed anyone who wasn't trying to kill me or who didn't deserve it. There were a lot of bad men back then on both sides of the law. Bill Sutton was a bad one, and he wore a badge.

The two stop for Hardin to light his cigar.

MILTON (O.S.)

Well, well, well, look who we have here.

Hardin looks up to see Milton and Scarborough walking up the sidewalk to greet him.

MILTON (CONT'D)

Well Mr. Hardin, Mr. Mills, what brings you to Mexico.

HARDIN

A change of scenery, you?

MILTON

George and I were just saying how good a drink would go long about now. Care to join us?

HARDIN

Oh hell, why not?

The four men amble down the side-walk and disappear into the back of a saloon.

INT. THE SALOON-NIGHT.

It is darker and more crudely built Texas saloons. The front part of the place is occupied, so Hardin and the others settle in the rear.

Hardin and Milton return to the front for drinks. As they reach the bar, they bristle, seeing who is in the party in the front.

There seated next to Vic Queen, is Beulah Morose.

Seated next to Queen is TOM FINNESY, a burly man with a very red face. Next to Finnesy is LIGHTFOOT, a tall raw-boned man. Finnesy and Lightfoot both eye Hardin intensely.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Queen sits the furthest away from the men, nursing his drink. He politely nods to Hardin and Milton.

FINNESY

I'se you Beulah, I'd watch the company I kept.

Milton tips his hat to Beulah. Hardin turns to the bar, checking the table in the mirror. Milton looks over his shoulder at Scarborough who has not missed any of this.

LIGHTFOOT

That man's as sorry as the day is long. You got a good man over here. Remember that.

The BARTENDER nervously slides a bottle and four glasses to Hardin.

He and Milton return to the rear of their table.

SCARBOROUGH

Should we leave?

HARDIN

Hell no we're not leaving.

MILTON

(to Scarborough)  
I think it will be all right.

FINNESY (O.S.)

Goddamn they'll let anyone come into this bar won't they.

LIGHTFOOT (O.S.)

You got that right. I guess it's hard to be choosy when you're trying to make a living. Liable to let anything in the door.

Hardin fingers his glass tensely as laughter drifts in from the front.

FINNESY (O.S.)

Course that son of a bitch'll take a drink wherever he can get it. It'd be hard to keep him out the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LIGHTFOOT (O.S.)

Not a bit of shame. No pride in  
hissself. Not much to be proud of,  
I reckon.

FINNESY (O.S)

Sorry, just sorry. Calls himself a  
lawyer. "Yeah I'll take your money  
and bed your wife while I'm at it."

The laughter is even louder.

Hardin slams his glass down on the table.

HARDIN

You boys got something to say to  
me, come on in here and say it to  
me. To my face.

Finnesy shoots up from his chair and storms over. Lightfoot  
and Queen are quick to follow.

Hardin's table spring to their feet.

FINNESY

Yeah I got something to say to you.  
What you done to Martin is a low  
down dirty thing, and someone ought  
to teach you a lesson.

HARDIN

You think you're up to the job?

FINNESY

You're Goddamn right I am. You  
don't scare me. You're just a  
bunch old stories, acting tough  
with the drunks and the whores, but  
you don't mean a hill of beans to  
me. You're pathetic, living in the  
past, five years away from shitting  
yourself in the gutter and begging  
for a drink from anybody who might  
remember you.

HARDIN

That so?

FINNESY

Yes it's so.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (3)

In a flash, Hardin backhands Finnesy into Lightfoot and Queen. As Finnesy straightens up and advances, Hardin pulls his pistol and sticks it into Finnesy's stomach.

HARDIN

Sorry you won't live to see that.

Milton bursts forward. He latches onto Hardin's hand. Scarborough and Mills both draw their pistols and hold the others at bay.

MILTON

Hardin! Goddamnit, look at me!  
Hardin, just let it go.

Hardin doesn't move.

MILTON (CONT'D)

Not in front of the woman! Let's  
let the woman leave. Do you want  
her to see this, you like this?

Hardin looks at Beulah. He relents

The others follow suit. The men fan out to give each other space. None return to their seats.

Beulah rises and walks toward the door. She turns and looks at Hardin who is looking at her. She walks out the door.

A cautious Milton checks with Scarborough.

Scarborough nods to his friend.

FINNESY

Well?

Hardin looks at him coldly.

FINNESY (CONT'D)

Woman's gone. You want to do  
anything now?

Hardin lunges at him.

MILTON

Goddamnit! Will you two put a stop  
to this!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

FINNESY

Oh come off it Jeff. This is Mexico. You don't have any say over here.

LIGHTFOOT

You won't get in trouble, if that's what's scaring you.

MILTON

Ain't nobody talking to you!

LIGHTFOOT

No, I'm talking to you. Just back off and we'll settle it.

MILTON

Fine. If y'all are bound and determined to kill each other, go right ahead. Just let me get out of the way.

He turns and locks the door.

MILTON (CONT'D)

So some poor bastard doesn't walk in and get shot to shit by you dumb sons of bitches.

The men look each other over anxiously.

Hardin slowly shifts his attention between Lightfoot and Finnesy.

In the rear of the place, Mill's hand twitches on his gun. He looks quickly from each man to the next.

Queen has been standing further back from the action than anyone. After a moment of assessing each man's readiness to fight, he turns and walks back to his table. He takes up his glass and empties it.

QUEEN

Well I didn't come in here tonight to get shot up.

FINNESY

Vic. Where the hell are you going?

QUEEN

Mexico is it for me. There's no place left for me after Mexico.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

He sets his glass down and walks past Milton to the door.

He unlocks it and, with one last glance, walks out of the saloon.

The men all turn back to each other.

Finnesy inches away from Hardin. The rest of his party meet him at the door.

FINNESY

Y'all can all go to hell.

They leave.

SCARBOROUGH

Mills, we're going to stay on and talk to Mr. Hardin about some things, police business. You may want to get on home.

MILLS

Surely.

He finishes his drink and gets up, passing Hardin, who is staring intently at his reflection in the crude mirror behind the bar.

MILLS (CONT'D)

I'll...be seeing you.

The young man turns and walks quickly out of the saloon.

He is barely out the door before Milton and Scarborough close around Hardin at the bar.

MILTON

We have a proposition for you.

HARDIN

It would seem so.

SCARBOROUGH

Folks around here think they know you. You can use that to your advantage.

Hardin puts a cigar between his teeth and begins fumbling in his coat for a match. He takes his hand out of his coat to find he is holding his locket. He is just about to open it, when Milton offers a lit match. Hardin shoves the locket back into his coat and leans forward to light his cigar.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET IN JUAREZ-NIGHT.

Through the window of a ramshackle house, Queen, Finnesy, and Lightfoot are seen talking to Martin Morose. Finnesy is very agitated.

As he talks, Morose becomes very angry. He grabs Finnesy and begins shaking him; finally throwing him across the room. Queen steps in and tries to calm Morose.

Morose will hear none of it. He shouts Queen down, and rants at the three men. Hysterical, he throws the men out.

Alone, Morose seethes, stamping the floor, pacing around room. Finally he settles and sits at a crude table.

There alone with himself, he slowly breaks down and sobs into his hands.

INT. THE REAR OF THE SALOON-NIGHT.

Hardin, Milton and Scarborough are alone in the darkened saloon.

MILTON

It's pretty cut and dry. You want the woman, with out any trouble from her husband; and we want the reward money that's on his head.

SCARBOROUGH

You could have kept him here in Mexico forever; stringing him along as his lawyer, always making sure there was the freedom for you and the woman to do what you wanted to, you can't do that now. Not after tonight.

MILTON

So by pulling together, we can all be better off. That reward has room for you.

SCARBOROUGH

Certainly, legal services can't go unpaid.

Hardin looks at the two lawmen. There is no facade of friendship about them. Their faces are blank.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARDIN

I think we can do business.

The three shake hands in the darkened room.

EXT. THE STREETS OF EL PASO, -DAY.

It is midday in El Paso. There are many people on the street. John Selman walks briskly down the sidewalk. He bounds across the street and into his destination: George Look's Saloon.

INT. LOOK'S SALOON-DAY.

Through the window, Selman confronts GEORGE LOOK, a meek looking middle aged man. Selman inquires. Look is reluctant. Selman quickly bullies Look against the bar, securing an agreement, before turning and leaving.

EXT. THE STREETS OF EL PASO-DAY.

Selman walks out of Look's saloon and is on the street again, walking quickly through the throngs. He crosses the street and walks down a deserted alley, emerging on another, less busy street. He spies Milton and Scarborough on the corner and walks over swiftly.

SELMAN

Sunday at Look's saloon.

MILTON

Good.

SCARBOROUGH

Thanks John.

MILTON

(To Selman)

You'll tell Hardin?

Selman nods. He turns and is on his way. He walks down the street for several yards, then turns and makes his way down another alley.

He comes out of this alley onto a narrow street lined with many threadbare shops. He walks into a meager cafe on the corner.

INT. CAFE-DAY.

Inside the cafe, Hardin is sitting reading a newspaper. Selman walks up to him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARDIN  
Ah, Mr. Selman.

SELMAN  
Have her at Look's saloon Sunday,  
late about one o'clock.

HARDIN  
We'll be there.

SELMAN  
Don't make me go looking for you.  
You don't want that.

Hardin nods, annoyed at the threat. Selman turns and walks out of the cafe, his boots echoing spryly over the wooden floor.

EXT. THE STREET OUTSIDE LOOK'S SALOON-NIGHT.

It is late the night-life is beginning to wane.

Hardin and Beulah are walking down the street.

They stop in front of Look's saloon.

The doors are shut and the shutters pulled. A faint glow seeps out from the shutters.

Beulah looks up at Hardin. She is nervous.

He smiles at her and gives her a squeeze on the arm.

He knocks on the door of the saloon.

John Selman answers.

He opens the door wide and lets them inside.

INT. LOOK'S SALOON-NIGHT.

It is dark inside the saloon. A single oil lamp on the bar provides light for the whole room.

Light spills out from under the door of a back room.

Hardin and Beulah wait for Selman to lock the door.

He turns to Hardin.

SELMAN  
You'll wait in here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hardin nods.

Selman takes Beulah by the arm. She shakes him loose and walks ahead of his to the back room.

She looks over her shoulder at Hardin.

He nods encouragement to her.

She and Selman disappear inside.

Alone in the bar, Hardin pulls up a chair and sits down.

On the table is a single glass.

He picks up the glass and looks through it at the door to the back room.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. HARDIN'S RANCH-DAY.

Jane, more weary from the labors of single parenthood, sits on the porch, her apron filled with fresh picked beans. She methodically shells the beans, tossing them into a bowl by her side. Her daughter, MOLLY, now a toddler plays amiably on the porch. Jane cast a sidelong glance toward the child, minding her.

The sound of a horse startles her. She raises her head and is shocked to see Hardin, horseback and before her.

JANE

I didn't hear you ride up.

HARDIN

(smiling)

How are you?

She doesn't smile back, the situation is still too strange to her. Hardin seems to understand. He looks at his daughter.

HARDIN (CONT'D)

This is Molly, our baby?

He dismounts and climbs slowly onto the porch. Jane still tries to fold all this into her mind.

JANE

That's her, yes. She's not a baby anymore.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hardin bends down to kiss his wife. It's brief, a kiss one might bestow on some aged auntie. He moves on to his daughter.

HARDIN  
(to the child)  
Are you Molly?

He kneels down to take her hands.

Jane, still seated, watches from the edge of it all, her long lost husband with his unknown daughter, kneeling and smiling with his pistols flaring out from his sides. Horrified, she returns to her beans.

INT. LOOK'S SALOON, 1895-NIGHT.

Hardin is shaken from his memories by the sound of muffled sounds coming from the back room.

Selman opens the door to the back room suddenly, startling Hardin.

Inside the room, Hardin can see Beulah rise from the table.

For an instant he sees Martin Morose sitting at the table, staring anxiously at his wife. George Scarborough is seated next to him.

Hardin ducks back into the darkness to avoid being seen.

Selman walks Beulah out of the back room, closing the door behind him.

Hardin stands in the shadows as they approach.

Beulah is upset. She looks down at the floor, preoccupied.

Selman abruptly extends his hand to Hardin, who shakes it awkwardly.

SELMAN  
See you later.

Selman manages what might pass for a smile.

Hardin nods.

Selman turns and walks away.

Hardin puts his arm around Beulah and walks her to the door.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

He unlocks it and shows Beulah outside then turns and looks back.

Selman is standing beside the door to the back room, watching him.

INT. BEULAH'S ROOM-NIGHT.

Hardin puts Beulah to bed. She is still upset. He smooths her brow, attempting feebly to comfort her, before rising to go. He pauses at the door and removes the locket from his pocket. He sets it on the dresser and is about to go, when he sees his reflection in the small mirror above the dresser. He stands transfixed for a moment, unsure if he recognizes himself. He reaches for the locket, putting it back in his pocket and then leaving.

INT. THE BACK ROOM AT LOOK'S SALOON-NIGHT.

Hardin, Milton, Scarborough, and Selman sit around the table. It is very late. No sounds invade from outside.

SCARBOROUGH

He says he's got a big wad of money with him in Mexico. He says it's enough to take him and Beulah away and pay off whoever would help him. Namely me.

MILTON

So he trusts you?

SCARBOROUGH

Yeah.

MILTON

And he believes her?

SCARBOROUGH

Yeah.

(Pointing to Hardin)

But he almost finished it before it started by coming along with her.

HARDIN

She wouldn't do it unless I came along.

SCARBOROUGH

What would've happened if he'd a seen you? The whole deal would've been blown that's what.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARDIN

What was I supposed to do?

MILTON

Shut up. The both of you. What's important is that he's bought it.

He holds up a piece of paper.

MILTON (CONT'D)

The New Mexico cattlemen's association have just raised the reward on our friend by a thousand dollars.

SELMAN

So when do we go to see Mr. Morose?

SCARBOROUGH

Better be soon. He's a real suspicious son of a bitch.

MILTON

We don't go see him. We get him to come see us. Mr. Hardin, do you think you can get your lady fair to write an enticing letter inviting her husband to a meeting. Say, two nights from now?

HARDIN

I suppose.

MILTON

Good.

Hardin looks down at the table. He has been toying with the same empty glass from earlier in the evening, shifting between his hands

FLASHBACK:

EXT. HARDIN'S RANCH-DAY.

Jane with the two HARDIN CHILDREN, stands on the porch. She watches her husband ruefully. Hardin sits in the saddle in front of the house. He is leading a brace of horses.

HARDIN

I'm just taking them into Comanche to race. I'll be back tonight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JANE  
(scoffing)  
Or tomorrow.

HARDIN  
(bristling)  
Or tomorrow.

JANE  
Why not say tomorrow?

HARDIN  
Because I don't know.

JANE  
Why get our hopes up?

HARDIN  
Are they up?

She turns from him, gathering her children.

JANE  
Say good-bye to your daddy children

CHILDREN  
Bye Daddy.

HARDIN  
Bye sweetpeas.

He spurs his horse and rides off, leaving Jane to watch him disappear again.

EXT. COMANCHE TEXAS, 1874-DAY.

Hardin walks by a horse corral. A MAN rushes up to him. He touches his gun reflexively, then relaxes, almost as quickly.

MAN  
Wes. I got your money. Serves me right to bet against you.

HARDIN  
When are you going to learn, I got the fastest horses in five counties.

MAN  
You got any more horses running today?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARDIN  
Sorry, not a one.

He pockets the money and turns toward the courthouse.

He bounds up on the sidewalk in front of a saloon cater-cornered from the courthouse. He throws open the door with a flourish and steps inside.

INT. THE SALOON-DAY.

Hardin bellies up to the bar.

HARDIN  
Give me a beer.

The BARTENDER fills a mug and slides it to him, leaning over the bar.

BARTENDER  
Watch out today Wes. That sheriff Webb from Brown County is looking for you.

HARDIN  
What's he want?

BARTENDER  
I believe he wishes to take you in.

HARDIN  
Well he can wish in one hand and shit in the other and see which one fills up first.

BARTENDER  
I don't want trouble in here. I appreciate your business but I don't need to dig any mementos out of my walls.

HARDIN  
Look, he ain't got one bit of authority here. He's off his graze. Give me another beer.

JIM TAYLOR, young- a Hardin waiting to bloom walks in. He spots Hardin and heads for the bar.

JIM  
There's a sheriff in town looking for you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARDIN  
(Laughing)  
So I hear, Jim, so I hear.

JIM  
What's so funny?

Hardin motions to the bartender and gets his friend a beer.

HARDIN  
Here, drink up. You collect the  
rest of my money?

EXT. THE STREETS OF COMANCHE-NIGHT.

People drift from bar to bar. Music drifts on the evening breeze. The sun has gone down completely leaving only a thread of orange on the horizon.

INT. THE SALOON-NIGHT.

Hardin is rolling dice with A MIDDLE AGED MAN at the bar.

HARDIN  
Damn!

The middle aged man laughs and rakes a small stack of money into his pocket. Hardin begrudgingly shakes hands with the man. He takes his beer and whiskey now and sits down at a table in the rear, unhappy and a few dollars lighter.

Jim Taylor is talking to A YOUNG FARM BOY by the window. He is distracted by something outside and cranes his head to get a better look. He turns from the farm boy. He spies Hardin in the back and weaves his way through the crowd to him.

JIM  
That sheriff is coming this way.

HARDIN  
Damnit! How many times do you have  
to hear it? He can't arrest nobody  
outside of his county.

JIM  
What if he doesn't mean to arrest  
you? What if he means to shoot  
you?

HARDIN  
Well then he's a fool.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jim leaves Hardin alone. He finishes his beer and sits back, watching the door.

SHERIFF WEBB, a serious man in his middle thirties, enters the saloon. He looks around the bar.

Hardin sees him and gets up from the table. He meanders his way through the people and walks directly to Webb, who starts a bit at his abruptness.

WEBB

Do you know me?

HARDIN

Yes I do. Do you have papers on me?

WEBB

I don't know. Who are you?

HARDIN

I am John Wesley Hardin.

Jim Taylor has come from out of the crowd and stands a few feet behind Hardin.

WEBB

Now I know who you are, but I have no papers for you with me.

HARDIN

I understood that the Sheriff of Brown county was asking about me. I assumed with papers on me.

WEBB

I wouldn't know about that. You see I'm the deputy sheriff of Brown county.

HARDIN

Deputy Sheriff?

WEBB

But I would like to speak to you about something.

HARDIN

Go right ahead.

Webb looks around uneasily.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WEBB

I've heard that you're a man that a  
lawman might do well to know.

HARDIN

(intrigued)  
Where did you hear this?

WEBB

(lowly)  
Sheriff Jones in Gonzales.

Hardin smiles, understanding the man.

HARDIN

Would you like to step outside.

WEBB

Yes. Do you mind?

HARDIN

Not at all.

He walks to the door, with Webb following.

Jim Taylor walks to the edge of the door and watches them.

EXT. THE SIDEWALK IN FRONT OF THE SALOON-NIGHT.

As soon as they are outside, Webb's hand slides down to his  
holster. Hardin's back is still to him. Webb trains his gun  
on the outlaw. Jim Taylor's eyes widen as he sees the gun.

JIM

Wes, look out!

Hardin spins around. His gun is drawn in the blink of an  
eye. He fires into Webb's ribs. Webb crashes to the ground.

Jim Taylor explodes through the door and fires a shot into  
Webb. The two men look around wildly. People are beginning  
to pour into the street.

VOICE (O.S.)

It's Hardin. He's killed a man in  
front of the saloon!

ANOTHER VOICE (O.S.)

Hardin's killed a lawman!

Hardin and Jim quickly run to their mounts.

EXT. THE STREETS OF COMANCHE-NIGHT.

Hardin and Jim thunder down the main street. At the end of the street, an angry mob has formed. The two men turn their horses around frantically and rush off in the opposite direction. At the other end of the street a mob is beginning form. People are streaming out of their homes, angry. Hardin and Jim spur their horses and weave through the town's folk. Shots are fired after them as they disappear into the night.

FLASH FORWARD:

EXT. A BRIDGE BETWEEN EL PASO AND JUAREZ, 1895-NIGHT.

Hardin and John Selman are standing beside a large patch of tall grass at the foot of the bridge.

Hardin is watching the dirt road leading up to the bridge. He turns back, looking at Selman. Selman is watching the bridge like a hawk. Hardin turns back to the road.

Milton emerges from the grass.

MILTON

Okay. Everything's going to plan. He's got the money and he should be coming over any minute. You clear on your job John?

SELMAN

Yeah.

MILTON

Good. You go on up. I'll stay here.

Selman nods and walks off onto the bridge, quickly vanishing in the night.

MILTON (CONT'D)

You bring your guns?

HARDIN

What?

MILTON

Did you bring your guns?

HARDIN

Yes.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

MILTON

Good.

Hardin turns back to the road.

EXT. THE MEXICO SIDE OF THE BRIDGE-NIGHT.

Morose and Scarborough emerge from the darkness. Morose stops looking around.

SCARBOROUGH

Let's go. I told you this way was safe.

MOROSE

I'm just cautious.

SCARBOROUGH

Pay me now and you can be as cautious as you want to be.

MOROSE

You'll get your money when I'm safe with Beulah.

SCARBOROUGH

Well, let's go then.

They walk onto the bridge.

EXT. THE RIO GRAND RIVER, BESIDE THE BRIDGE-NIGHT.

TWO MEXICAN SMUGGLERS, are crossing the river. It is shallow and they can walk across. They pull a small boat, loaded with goods. They are nervous and wince at every splash they make. A few yards in the distance is the bridge. They look at it often.

They are about halfway across the river, when they stop. Motionless. On the bridge, they can see Scarborough and Morose crossing the bridge. They look at each other and slowly lower their clothes into the water. They sink so that only their heads remain above the water.

Scarborough is in front of Morose, who appears still cautious. Scarborough turns and waits for Morose to pass him. He stays standing, allowing Morose to walk several feet past him. When Morose is almost half way across the bridge, Scarborough takes out a handkerchief and coughs loudly into it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

From out of the darkness, a shot rings out. Morose falls to his knees. He struggles to get up. Scarborough walks over and calmly fires into his side. The large man topples, but only for a moment. He is immediately trying to get up. From out of the darkness, Selman comes, his gun in his hand.

The smugglers' eyes are wild with terror. They sink even further into the river.

Selman fires another shot into Morose. From the Texas side, Milton and Hardin come running.

The Smugglers see their chance. They quickly swim to the shore, pulling the boat behind them, and hide in the tall grass at the waters edge.

EXT. THE BRIDGE-NIGHT.

Hardin is horrified at what he sees.

MILTON

Goddamnit! What's all this goddamn noise.

SCARBOROUGH

He won't die.

SELMAN

He's moving.

MILTON

Jesus Christ! Just shoot him in the head?

Hardin has backed away from the rest of the men on the bridge, steadying himself along the edge.

MILTON (CONT'D)

What's wrong with you Hardin?

HARDIN

I thought you were going to take his money and arrest him!

MILTON

He would have run his mouth about money we stole from him. Do you think the cattlemen would let that go? This way we get the reward, the money, all of it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARDIN

You had me set that poor bastard  
up!

MILTON

You're John Wesley Hardin.

HARDIN

I'm not that man anymore.

MILTON

Same name, same face, same hands.  
There's blood on those hands. Old  
blood new blood, what difference  
does it make?

HARDIN

I didn't put it there.

MILTON

Yes you did.

HARDIN

All I wanted was the money.

MILTON

Why so you could paint yourself as  
a new man? A different man?  
Different from what? We're all the  
same. We just know it is all.

Morose begins to struggle again. Milton turns away.

SELMAN

He's moving again.

He draws his gun.

MILTON

No! You've made enough noise  
already.

He walks over to Morose and puts his foot down on his chest.  
He stands there holding him down with his boot. The wounded  
man struggles weakly, until all his life has played out.

MILTON (CONT'D)

(To Scarborough)

Get the money off him before he  
bleeds all over it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Scarborough rushes over and begins digging in Morose's pockets. He digs for several seconds but can find nothing.

SCARBOROUGH

It's not on him.

Selman rushes over.

SELMAN

What do you mean it's not on him?

He begins to rummage in Morose's pockets. He too comes up empty handed.

MILTON

(Furious)

I thought you said he had the money.

SCARBOROUGH

He said he did. He said...

Scarborough looks up at Milton.

SCARBOROUGH (CONT'D)

He said he'd pay me when he was safe with Beulah.

Milton wheels around to confront Hardin, but he has vanished.

Selman and Scarborough look to one another then rush to the end of the bridge, leaving Milton to gaze angrily into the night.

From the tall grass the smugglers lie motionless, eyeing the furious lawman as he seethes, pondering his recourse.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. A SMALL CLEARING IN THE WOODS-NIGHT.

Hardin sits before a small fire. The sound of a twig snapping breaks his fusion with the fire. He turns to the sound in a flash, his pistols drawn.

LEON, a large burly farmhand emerges from the brush, his hands raised. Sulking behind him, Jane comes from the darkness into the faint light of the fire.

LEON

Don't shoot it's me, Leon. I brung your wife.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hardin returns his pistols and comes toward Jane.

LEON (CONT'D)  
I'll be with the horses.

He disappears back into the brush.

Hardin approaches his wife cautiously. She glares at him.

JANE  
How does this all fit into your  
plans Wes?

HARDIN  
Can't you call me John?

JANE  
No. I can't. Tell me, Wes, how  
does this fit in with your plans,  
your plans for us?

HARDIN  
My God Jane you can't think that I  
saw this coming. I had no choice.  
He pulled his gun on me.

JANE  
Did he?

HARDIN  
Yes.

JANE  
It funny how things seem to find  
you. Isn't it?

HARDIN  
I didn't go looking for this

JANE  
You don't look away from it either.

HARDIN  
What do you mean?

JANE  
I mean you chose to go into that  
bar, knowing that there was someone  
looking for you in town. You  
didn't choose to call it a night  
and come home to me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HARDIN

Look Jane-

JANE

Don't tell me you had no choice.

HARDIN

Look. I've got to get out of here. I have to leave the state, tonight. I'll send for you and the children when I think it's safe. Jane, I know I've disappointed you. But listen to me. I need you. I need you for my children and I need you for my soul. I'll make this up to you. I swear to God. I still have dreams for us.

He moves to her but she draws away, across the fire from him.

JANE

They caught your brother, Joe. They hung him, just outside of town.

Hardin slumps to the ground, alternately tearful and consumed with rage.

JANE (CONT'D)

Do you reckon he had dreams for himself, and his wife, and his children?

He looks up at her, hurt, but unable to argue. Struggling, he rises to his feet.

HARDIN

I reject myself, my name. My names has condemned me. I'll go where I am unknown and can re-make myself. Allow me the chance to show you what I'm capable of. You have the power.

JANE

What power do we have?

They stand opposite each other, across the fire, which struggles in the night wind.

INT. HARDIN'S PARENTS HOME-NIGHT.

Hardin's Father opens the door to find his fugitive son standing on the porch.

HARDIN

May I come in.

MR. HARDIN

Yes.

HARDIN

I'm forced to flee.

MR. HARDIN

I know.

HARDIN

I thought I'd pay you a visit before I left. To say I'm sorry for Joe.

MR. HARDIN

Did you pay a visit to his wife, to his children?

HARDIN

No.

MR. HARDIN

It's a thin regret you show then. They are the flesh of your brother, your flesh, your mother's and mine.

HARDIN

I don't know what to say. I'll carry his death as a weight on my heart for the rest of my life.

MR. HARDIN

I can't help you with that. You seem to have two hearts, bourne in the same frame, like a pen holding two disparate horses or a house two conflicted souls or a family two divergent brothers. Our family. No our family no longer has that distinction.

HARDIN

Father.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MR. HARDIN

Do not see me again John Wesley. I  
cannot abide you.

He opens the door to the night, waiting there until Hardin  
walks out, then closing it, forever.

FLASH FORWARD:

INT. HARDIN'S BOARDING HOUSE ROOM EL PASO, 1895-NIGHT.

Hardin and Beulah lay asleep in bed.

He jolts awake and looks around frantically. He sees Beulah  
asleep on his shoulder. He lays there then slowly, so as not  
to wake Beulah, he gets out of bed. He walks to his window  
and looks outside at the night sky.

It is a clear night. There are many stars.

He looks back at Beulah. She is sleeping peacefully. He  
walks over to his dresser and picks up a small bundle. He  
opens it and peers inside. It is full of money.

He turns slowly to see himself in a mirror. He walks closer  
to the mirror. He touches his face, his hair his mustache.

HARDIN THE NARRATOR (V.O.)

This was not in my wishes.  
This was not in my plans.  
To make the stain go deeper,  
this is not what I meant for my  
hands.

Beulah stirs in the background.

He turns from the mirror and walks out the door.

INT. A YOUNG BOY'S ROOM-NIGHT.

The YOUNG BOY, ten years old, lays under his covers staring  
at his ceiling. He hears a noise and crouches on his bed to  
look out his window.

EXT. THE STREET BELOW-NIGHT.

Through his window, the boy sees Hardin sitting on the edge  
of the sidewalk. His head is down. He is emptying his  
pockets, his money, his watch, the locket. Lastly, he  
removes his pistols. He stares down at it, as if looking for  
some kind of reply.



INT. THE BOY'S ROOM-NIGHT.

The boy slides out of bed.

EXT. THE STREET-NIGHT.

From beside his house the boy can see the old gunfighter.

Hardin lays his pistol beside all his belongings. He looks up to the stars, searching them for some answer.

HARDIN

My God.

INT. THE BOY'S ROOM-NIGHT.

The boy cranes his head to get a better view. He cannot. He raises himself on his elbows, knocking over a crude toy. The sound fills the night.

EXT. THE STREET-NIGHT.

Hardin jumps to his feet, his gun in his hand. Instinctively he surveys the shadows and ambush points in the street, only when he is sure he is alone does he notice the gun in his hand and the rest of his possessions laying at his feet.

He half smiles, half winces at his nature. He twirls the gun impressively; stopping and reversing the twirls as his hand careens through the air, reverting to the gunfighter inside him all along.

INT. THE BOY'S ROOM-NIGHT.

The boy is riveted, hunkering down at the window to not be seen.

EXT. THE STREET-NIGHT.

Hardin points the gun at the house on the far end of the block and makes a firing noise in his mouth. He "kills" all the houses on the street, then points the gun to the sky.

Hardin looks down the long black barrel at the sky. He lowers the gun slowly, laughing at himself anew.

HARDIN

You're a fool, John Wesley Hardin.

His smile soon fades. He regards himself now as he did so many enemies, the hard look. He holsters his gun and bends down to retrieve his things.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He pauses for a moment, considering opening the locket. He doesn't and returns it to his coat. He rises and gives a farewell look to the stars before wandering off into the night.

INT. THE BOY'S ROOM-NIGHT.

The boy remains at the window, watching the old gunfighter fade into the night, wondering at what he has seen.

INT. A CROWDED SALOON-NIGHT.

Hardin is seated alone at a table, holding a glass of whiskey, not drunk, calculating.

He looks up to see John Selman walking into the saloon. Hardin drains his glass and rises from the table. He walks to the bar, keeping an eye on Selman.

Selman weaves his way to the bar as well.

Hardin motions for the bartender to fill his glass. Selman is at the other end of the bar. He motions for a beer. He never takes his eyes off Hardin.

Hardin reaches into his coat and removes his wallet. He takes out a large stack of bills and peels one off to pay the bartender.

Selman's eyes flare at the sight of the money.

Hardin raises his glass to Selman.

Selman drains his own glass and sets it down with a thud. He turns and pushes his way to the door.

Hardin watches Selman leave. He turns back to the bar to discover the bartender has refilled his glass.

He picks it up and sees himself in the mirror behind the bar. He shifts the glass between his two hands once then turns away quickly and drains his glass.

EXT. THE STREETS OF EL PASO-NIGHT.

John Selman is walking hurriedly through the streets. He turns the corner and heads for the light coming from a small cafe. Through the window Jeff Milton and George Scarborough can be seen sitting at a table. Selman walks to their table. He is wildly agitated, unable to stand still as he tells them what he has just seen.

Milton and Scarborough turn and look out the window, gravely.

INT. ANOTHER SALOON-NIGHT.

In a smaller, less crowded saloon, Hardin is standing at the bar. His glass is raised in a toast.

A FEW MEN pay him meager attention.

HARDIN

Gentlemen, a toast: To two men who have served us all well in their tenures. U.S. Deputy marshals Jeff Milton and George Scarborough. Would that there were more lawmen like them.

He drains his glass.

There is laughter and some scattered feigned applause.

Hardin turns around to the bar to refill his glass.

Through the swinging doors leading into the saloon, on the sidewalk outside, in the shadows; is John Selman.

Hardin, drains his glass once more.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. THE COMANCHE COUNTY COURTHOUSE-DAY.

A crowd of people have gathered on the grass surrounding the courthouse. As a wagon enters the square they throng to the side-walk. In the back of the wagon, chained and manacled is Hardin.

He looks out at the crowd something catches his eye. There among the many people, dressed in black, is his wife Jane. A JOURNALIST approaches her. She shuns him.

INT. THE COMANCHE COUNTY COURTROOM-DAY.

THE JUDGE, a small thin man in his sixties sits behind his desk, reading over a document. Hardin stands before him in chains, flanked by two armed guards.

JUDGE

John Wesley Hardin, having been found guilty of the crime of murder in the second degree in the killing of Sheriff's Deputy Charles Webb, I now sentence you to a prison term of twenty five years at hard labor.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Sentence to begin immediately.  
Prisoner is to be remanded to the  
Rusk penitentiary at Huntsville.

Hardin's head drops to his chest as the judge's gavel adjourns the court.

He is whisked a way quickly by the guards. He scours the courtroom as they drag him out. Jane is on her feet desperately trying to get a look at her husband.

He fights to keep her in sight. Their eyes meet, for only a moment. She cannot mask her disappointment, nor does she try. He knows he has failed and he is powerless to deny it to anyone. Their connection broken, he is dragged through a doorway, leaving his wife alone again.

INT. THE COMANCHE COUNTY JAIL-DAY.

Hardin sits in his cell, his hands and feet shackled. He is the only inmate.

A large door opens. He rises to his feet. A JAILER enters carrying a ring of keys. He holds the heavy door open for Jane, then escorts her toward Hardin's cell.

JAILER

I got your wife here Hardin. I'm supposed to stay here and watch y'all. But if you'll give me your word that you won't try nothing, I'll just go down to that last cell and wait till you call me.

HARDIN

You have my word.

He leaves. Jane approaches her husband tentatively. She reaches out and touches one of the bars.

Hardin reaches for her hand. She withdraws it before he reaches her.

HARDIN (CONT'D)

Jane.

She steps back from the cell, looking at her husband, stooped and in chains.

JANE

What are you going to say to me now?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARDIN

Jane, please for give me. I've been weak.

JANE

No. It's I who has been weak. It's weak to live a life you hate, that you know is wrong.

(Calling)

Jailer.

HARDIN

No Jane, wait a moment longer. There's more I want to tell you.

JANE

Tell me how I'm going to provide for the children I gave you. Tell me how I'm to live my life alone. Tell me? Tell me about your plans for us? What dream is this? What wish is this?

The Jailer emerges from the cell, standing at the end of the hallway.

JAILER

Ma'am?

JANE

I'm ready to go.

(To Hardin)

I'm done with my wishes. I don't have room for them anymore.

JAILER

Really?

JANE

Yes.

The Jailer walks up the short hallway and unlocks the large door. Jane turns from her husband and leaves. The sound of the door bolting seems to push Hardin back into his dark cell.

FLASH FORWARD:

INT. HARDIN'S BOARDING HOUSE ROOM-DAY.

Hardin stumbles into the room to discover Beulah packing her things. She is crying.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He watches her, transfixed, unable or more precisely, unwilling to say anything.

BEULAH

(continuing to pack)

You're not the same. You're drunk all the time; or when you're not, you're staring off into space. You don't say a word for hours. I thought we'd be happy. You said we'd be happy. That things were going according to plan.

She stops packing and looks at him.

BEULAH (CONT'D)

Did you even have a goddamn plan? I want to be happy. Don't I have a right to be happy?

He sits, continuing to watch her, impassively.

BEULAH (CONT'D)

I'll not stay and watch you disappear.

He stands and walks to the dresser. He picks up the bundle of money and walks to the bed. He throws it into her bag.

HARDIN

There. Now you're ready to leave.

She looks up at him, tears rolling down her pretty face.

BEULAH

Is it so easy to see me go?

He stares back coldly and returns to his seat. She closes her bag and flees.

EXT. THE STREETS OF EL PASO-DAY.

On a street corner, Milton, Scarborough and Selman stand talking. All three appear very grave.

Their heads turn as they notice Beulah walking down the sidewalk, suitcase in hand. As she leaves they close ranks.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. HARDIN'S HOUSE-DAY.

Several buggies and wagons are scattered around the house. On the porch a HANDFUL OF MEN all dressed in black stand stoically looking across the fields. On the door to the house a large black crepe ribbon flaps in the light breeze.

INT. THE HARDIN'S PARLOR-DAY.

The genteel furnishings have been cleared from the room to make way for a casket and MOURNERS. A COUPLE OF WEEPING WOMEN stand at the coffin.

Inside the coffin, at peace, lies Jane Hardin, older and decimated by the life she led. The women walk away from the coffin and stop before THE TEEN-AGE HARDIN CHILDREN, awkward on a loveseat near their mother. The women stand weeping in front of the children then drift away into the crowd of mourners.

EXT. HARDIN'S PORCH-DAY.

The men stand gazing off across the fields. The faint shuddering of the crepe against the door is like some paper clock.

MAN (O.S.)

Has somebody sent word to that  
sorry bastard husband.

ANOTHER MAN (O.S.)

Grade's rode out for Huntsville.

EXT. PRISON WALLS, HUNTSVILLE-DAY.

Grade descends slowly from his wagon. He walks to the massive door of the prison and pounds on it. The sun is starting to sink behind the pines. He reaches inside his jacket and removes a letter.

A GUARD opens the massive door. Grade walks to the Guard and hands him the letter.

GRADE

This is for Wes Hardin. His wife's  
died.

The Guard takes the letter from him. Grade steps away as the door slowly swings closed. He mounts his wagon and pulls away.

INT. HARDIN'S CELL-DAY.

Hardin lies in his bunk staring numbly at the ceiling, his hands fixed for all the world like a corpse. He hears the door opening he turns to see.

EXT. PRISON WALL, HUNTSVILLE-DAY.

The walls of the prison are silent. The wind in the pines and the voices inside: all seem absorbed into the silence of the walls. Nothing permeates nor escapes these walls. The trees sway back and forth.

EXT. A CEMETARY GONZALES, TEXAS-DAY.

A lone tree top sways in the prairie breeze. The sun wanes. The tree is the lone maple in the lonely cemetery. It stands a few feet from a new grave. On the stone it is carved: Jane Bowen Hardin.

FLASH FORWARD:

EXT. THE STREETS OF EL PASO-NIGHT.

Hardin is walking alone down the silent dark streets. He stops at his boarding house and gazes up at his window. It is dark. He starts to climb the stairs but stop. He turns away and walks away down the street.

HARDIN THE NARRATOR (V.O.)  
 Something is out there waiting for  
 us all. A birthright, a falling  
 star, a voice. Our hands extend  
 from our first breaths, reaching  
 for it.

INT. THE ACME SALOON 1895-NIGHT.

Hardin is standing at the bar, talking to a couple of gentlemen.

HARDIN THE NARRATOR (V.O.)  
 We are as unknowable as the wind in  
 our hands; as ungraspable as our  
 names; as temporary as our graves.

One of the men makes a joke and the three all break out in laughter.



EXT. THE STREETS OF EL PASO-NIGHT.

John Selman is walking fiercely down a lonely street.

His pace is quick and his eyes are dead set, straight ahead.

INT. THE ACME SALOON-NIGHT.

Hardin is at the bar drinking and talking to HENRY BROWN, a short wiry fellow, very unassuming. The two men are laughing and drinking beer. Hardin reaches into his pocket and pulls out his dice.

HARDIN

Here let's work for our beer.

They laugh and begin rolling dice.

INT. HARDIN'S BOARDING HOUSE ROOM-NIGHT.

The door to Hardin's room crashes open. Milton and Scarborough hurry inside, slamming the door behind them.

They rifle through the room, tearing the drawers from the dresser, tearing the sheets off the bed.

EXT. THE STREETS OF EL PASO-NIGHT.

Selman turns the corner. He walks down the side walk looking off to his side across the street. He stops and stands staring at the Acme Saloon across the street.

INT. HARDIN'S BOARDING HOUSE ROOM-NIGHT.

Milton and Scarborough have pulled the mattress off Hardin's bed. They slash it open and dig through its contents, throwing the chunks of stuffing to the floor.

INT. THE ACME SALOON-NIGHT.

Hardin and Brown are a beer or two drunker as they pause for a moment in their dice game.

BROWN

Wes, you're a lucky man.

HARDIN

Why?

BROWN

You were married. You knew the love of a good woman.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BROWN (CONT'D)

Just once in my life I wish I could know that. Just once. But, you know what they say, "You can wish in one hand--"

HARDIN

I know what they say. It's what you do with your hands, not what you wish into them.

BROWN

What?

Brown is drunk. He looks at his friend with quickly glazing eyes.

Hardin shrugs and straightens his tie in the mirror. He halts a moment to consider himself, his reflection looking back at him. Weary of it, he turns back to his friend

HARDIN

Nevermind.

He shakes the dice onto the bar.

EXT. THE STREET IN FRONT OF THE ACME SALOON-NIGHT.

Selman walks across the street and enters the saloon.

INT. THE ACME SALOON-NIGHT.

Once inside, Selman sees Hardin and makes a beeline for him. He taps Hardin on the shoulder.

HARDIN

Hello John.

SELMAN

We need to talk.

HARDIN

All right. Let's talk.

SELMAN

Outside.

HARDIN

(to Brown)

I'll be right back.

Brown watches them leave then turns to a window to watch them.

EXT. THE SIDE-WALK OUTSIDE THE ACME SALOON-NIGHT.

Through the window, Brown can see the two men. Selman is doing all the talking. Hardin is leaning calmly against a post. Selman finishes and waits for Hardin's reply.

Hardin shakes his head no. Selman stands there glaring as Hardin walks back inside the saloon.

INT. HARDIN'S BOARDING HOUSE ROOM-NIGHT.

Milton and Scarborough look at each other. Scarborough shakes his head. He and Milton turn and leave, slamming the door behind them. The door is broken and will not stay shut.

A beam of light from outside dances over the wreckage of Hardin's things. On the floor beside Hardin's dresser lies his wall mirror. It is broken into two symmetrical pieces.

INT. THE ACME SALOON-NIGHT.

Hardin and Brown are rolling dice anew.

Selman enters the bar. He slowly begins to make his way toward Hardin.

Brown rolls his dice.

BROWN

Beat that.

HARDIN

Four sixes to beat.

He looks up at the mirror behind the bar. He stares into his own eyes. He is looking old, his eyes are tired. His hair is greying around the temple. He slowly tumbles the dice back and forth between his hands.

HARDIN THE NARRATOR (V.O.)

Most men live but one life. A life in shadows, narrow, harried, obscure. When granted a light, they recoil and never grasp what it brings, holding feebly before releasing it.

Selman is directly behind him now. He drops his hand and removes his gun from its holster.

Hardin rolls the dice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Selman raises his pistol and cocks back the trigger.

Hardin smiles as he sees he has won the point.

HARDIN THE NARRATOR (CONT'D)

That recognition, that re-birth is  
what life was bestowed on us for.  
And I have turned my back on it too  
many times to redeem myself.

Selman pulls the trigger. He pulls it twice more. Smoke  
wafts and there is the sound of weight falling to the floor.

All is quiet for a moment, then as if emerging from some vast  
invisible curtain, the noise of the crowd invades,  
surrounding the dead man.

HARDIN THE NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Would that I could begin again.

Hardin's eyes are closed. He looks peaceful, as if he were  
sleeping.

FLASHBACK: 1868

EXT. A COUNTRY ROAD IN POLK COUNTY, TEXAS-DAY.

It is a curious day. Sunny, but the light has an almost hazy  
quality. Hardin rides his horse upon the first man he will  
ever kill. He looks into that man's eyes; his expression as  
curious as the day.

THE END.