

**2b- Danger Ahead, Larry Mc Murtry, *Lonesome Dove*, 1985**

Once Call and he had sat on the western edge of the great canyon, looking across the brown waterless distances to the west. They had finally decided to end their pursuit there while they had a fair chance of getting back alive. It wasn't Indians they feared so much as lack of water. It had been midsummer and the plains looked seared<sup>1</sup>, what grass there was, brown and brittle<sup>2</sup>. Call was frustrated; he hated to turn back before he caught his man.

"There's got to be water out there," Call said. "They cross it, and they can't drink dirt."

"Yes, but they know where it is and we don't," Augustus pointed-out. "They can kill their horses getting to it—they got more horses. But if we kill ours it's a dern<sup>3</sup> long walk back to San Antonio."

That afternoon he crossed the Clear Fork of the Brazos and passed a half-built cabin, abandoned and empty. It was a vivid enough reminder of the power of the Comanches—their massacres caused plenty of settlers to retreat while they still had legs to retreat on. Call and he had watched through the Fifties as the line of the frontier advanced only to collapse soon after. The men and women who came up the Trinity and the Brazos were no strangers to hardship—but hardship was one thing, terror another. The land was spacious and theirs for the taking, but land couldn't cancel out fear—a fact Call never understood. It annoyed him that the whites gave up and retreated.

"I wish they'd stick," he said many times. "If they would, there'd soon be enough of them to beat back the Indians."

20 "You ain't never laid in bed all night with a scared woman," Augustus said. "You can't start a farm if you've got to live in a fort. Them that starts the farms have got to settle off by themselves, which means they're easy to cut off and carve up."

"Well, they could leave the women for a while," Call said. "Send for them when it's safe."

25 "Yes, but a man that goes to the trouble to take a wife don't generally want to go off and leave her," Augustus pointed out. "It means doing the chores all by yourself. Besides, without a wife handy you won't be getting no kids, and kids are a wonderful source of free labor. They're cheaper than slaves by a damn sight."

They had argued the point for years, but fruitlessly, for Call had no sympathy for human weakness. Augustus put it down to a lack of imagination. Call could never  
30 imagine what it was like to be scared. They had been in tight spots<sup>4</sup>, but usually that meant action, and in battles things happened too fast for fear to paralyze the mind of a man like Call. He couldn't imagine what it was like to go to bed every night scared that you and your family would feel the knives of the Comanches before sunrise.

Larry McMurtry, *Lonesome Dove*, 1985

1- dried by the heat

2- *cassante* / *fragile*

3- Damn

4- in difficult situations