MOSS SAT WITH THE HEELS of his boots dug into the volcanic gravel of the ridge and glassed the desert below him with a pair of twelve power German binoculars. His hat pushed back on his head. Elbows propped on his knees. The rifle strapped over his shoulder with a harness-leather sling was a heavy-barreled .270 on a ‘98 Mauser action with a laminated stock of maple and walnut. It carried a telescopic sight of the same power as the binoculars. The antelope were a little under a mile away. The sun was up less than an hour and the shadow of the ridge and the datilla and the rocks fell far out across the floodplain below him. Somewhere out there was the shadow of Moss himself. He lowered the binoculars and sat studying the land. Far to the south the raw mountains of Mexico. The breaks of the river. To the west the baked terracotta terrain of the running borderlands. He spat dryly and wiped his mouth on the shoulder of his cotton workshirt.

The rifle would shoot half minute of angle groups. Five inch groups at one thousand yards. The spot he’d picked to shoot from lay just below a long talus of lava scree and it would put him well within that distance. Except that it would take the better part of an hour to get there and the antelope were grazing away from him. The best he could say about any of it was that there was no wind.

When he got to the foot of the talus he raised himself slowly and looked for the antelope. They’d not moved far from where he last saw them but the shot was still a good seven hundred yards. He studied the animals through the binoculars. In the compressed air motes and heat distortion. A low haze of shimmering dust and pollen. There was no other cover and there wasn’t going to be any other shot.

He wallowed down in the scree and pulled off one boot and laid it over the rocks and lowered the forearm of the rifle down into the leather and pushed off the safety with his thumb and sighted through the scope.

They stood with their heads up, all of them, looking at him.

Damn, he whispered. The sun was behind him so they couldn’t very well have seen light reflect off the glass of the scope. They had just flat seen him.

The rifle had a Canjar trigger set to nine ounces and he pulled the rifle and the boot toward him with great care and sighted again and jacked the crosshairs slightly up the back of the animal standing most broadly to him. He knew the exact drop of the bullet in hundred yard increments. It was the distance that was uncertain. He laid his finger in the curve of the trigger. The boar’s tooth he wore on a gold chain spooled onto the rocks inside his elbow.

Even with the heavy barrel and the muzzlebrake the rifle bucked up off the rest. When he pulled the animals back into the scope he could see them all standing as before. It took the 150 grain bullet the better part of a second to get there but it took the sound twice that. They were standing looking at the plume of dust where the bullet had hit. Then they bolted. Running almost immediately at top speed out upon the barrial with the long whaang of the rifleshot rolling after them and caroming off the rocks and yawning back across the open country in the early morning solitude.

He stood and watched them go. He raised the glasses. One of the animals had dropped back and was packing one leg and he thought that the round had probably skipped off the pan and caught him in the left hindquarters. He leaned and spat. Damn, he said.

He watched them out of sight beyond the rocky headlands to the south. The pale orange dust that hung in the windless morning light grew faint and then it too was gone. The barrial stood silent and empty in the sun. As if nothing had occurred there at all. He sat in the rocks and steadied his elbows on his

It took him some forty minutes to cross the barrial. From there he made his way up a long volcanic slope and followed the crest of the ridge southeast to an overlook above the country into which the animals had vanished. He glassed the terrain slowly. Crossing that ground was a large tailess dog, black in color. He watched it. It had a huge head and cropped ears and it was limping badly. It paused and stood. He lowered the glasses and stood watching it go. Then it went on. He lowered the glasses and stood watching it go.

He hiked on along the ridge with his thumb hooked in the shoulderstrap of the rifle, his hat pushed back on his head. The back of his shirt was already wet with sweat. The rocks there were etched with pictographs perhaps a thousand years old. The men who drew them hunters like himself. Of them there was no other trace. At the end of the ridge was a rockslide, a rough trail leading down. Candelilla and scrub catclaw. He sat in the rocks and steadied his elbows on his
knees and scanned the country with the binoculars. A mile away on the floodplain sat three vehicles. He lowered the
binoculars and looked over the country at large. Then he raised them again. There looked to be men lying on the ground.
He jacked his boots into the rocks and adjusted the focus. The vehicles were four wheel drive trucks or Broncos with big
all-terrain tires and winches and racks of rooflights. The men appeared to be dead.

He lowered the glasses. Then he raised them again. Then he lowered them and just sat there. Nothing moved. He sat
there for a long time.

When he approached the trucks he had the rifle unslung and cradled at his waist with the safety off. He stopped. He
studied the country and then he studied the trucks. They were all shot up. Some of the tracks of holes that ran across
the sheetmetal were spaced and linear and he knew they'd been put there with automatic weapons. Most of the glass
was shot out and the tires flat. He stood there. Listening.

In the first vehicle there was a man slumped dead over the wheel. Beyond were two more bodies lying in the gaunt
yellow grass. Dried blood black on the ground. He stopped and listened. Nothing. The drone of flies. He walked around
the end of the truck. There was a large dead dog there of the kind he'd seen crossing the floodplain. The dog was
gutshot. Beyond that was a third body lying face down. He looked through the window at the man in the truck. He was
shot through the head. Blood everywhere. He walked on to the second vehicle but it was empty. He walked out to where
the third body lay. There was a shotgun in the grass. The shotgun had a short barrel and it was fitted with a pistol stock
and a twenty round drum magazine. He nudged the man's boot with his toe and studied the low surrounding hills.

The third vehicle was a Bronco with a lifted suspension and dark smoked windows. He reached up and opened the driver
side door. There was a man sitting in the seat looking at him.

Moss stumbled back, leveling the rifle. The man's face was bloody. He moved his lips dryly. Agua, cuate, he said. Agua,
por dios.

He had a shortbarreled H&K machinepistol with a black nylon shoulderstrap lying in his lap and Moss reached and got
it and stepped back. Agua, the man said. Por dios.

I aint got no water.

Agua.

Moss left the door open and slung the H&K over his shoulder and stepped away. The man followed him with his eyes.

Moss walked around the front of the truck and opened the door on the other side. He lifted the latch and folded the
seat forward. The cargo space in the rear was covered with a metallic silver tarp. He pulled it back. A load of bricksized
parcels each wrapped in plastic. He kept one eye on the man and got out his knife and cut a slit in one of the parcels. A
loose brown powder dribbled out. He wet his forefinger and dipped it in the powder and smelled it. Then he wiped his
finger on his jeans and pulled the tarp back over the parcels and stepped back and looked over the country again.

Nothing. He walked away from the truck and stood and glassed the low hills. The lava ridge. The flat country to the
south. He got out his handkerchief and walked back and wiped clean everything he'd touched. The doorhandle and the
seatlatch and the tarp and the plastic package. He crossed around to the other side of the truck and wiped everything
down there too. He tried to think what else he might have touched. He went back to the first truck and opened the door
with his kerchief and looked in. He opened the glovebox and closed it again. He studied the dead man at the wheel. He
left the door open and walked around to the driver side. The door was full of bulletholes. The windshield. Small caliber.
Six millimeter. Maybe number four buckshot. The pattern of them. He opened the door and pushed the windowbutton
but the ignition was not on. He shut the door and stood there, studying the low hills.

He squatted and unslung the rifle from off his shoulder and laid it in the grass and took the H&K and pushed back the
follower with the heel of his hand. There was a live round in the chamber but the magazine held only two more rounds.

He sniffed at the muzzle of the piece. He ejected the clip and slung the rifle over one shoulder and the machinepistol
over the other and walked back to the Bronco and held the clip up for the man to see. Otra, he said. Otra.

The man nodded. En mi bolsa.

You speak english?
He didn't answer. He was trying to gesture with his chin. Moss could see two clips sticking out of the canvas pocket of the jacket he was wearing. He reached into the cab and got them and stepped back. Smell of blood and fecal matter. He put one of the full clips into the machine pistol and the other two in his pocket. Agua, cuate, the man said.

Moss scanned the surrounding country. I told you, he said. I aint got no water.

La puerta, the man said.

Moss looked at him.

La puerta. Hay lobos. There aint no lobos.

Si, si. Lobos. Leones.

Moss shut the door with his elbow.

He went back to the first truck and stood looking at the open door on the passenger side. There were no bullet holes in the door but there was blood on the seat. The key was still in the ignition and he reached in and turned it and then pushed the window button. The glass ratcheted slowly up out of the channel. There were two bullet holes in it and a fine spray of dried blood on the inside of the glass. He stood there thinking about that. He looked at the ground. Stains of blood in the clay. Blood in the grass. He looked out down the track south across the caldera back the way the truck had come. There had to be a last man standing. And it wasnt the cuate in the Bronco begging for water.

He walked out on the floodplain and cut a wide circle to see where the track of the tires in the thin grass would show in the sun. He cut for sign a hundred feet to the south. He picked up the man's trail and followed it until he came to blood in the grass. Then more blood.

You aint goin far, he said. You may think you are. But you aint.

He quit the track altogether and walked out to the highest ground visible holding the H&K under his arm with the safety off. He glassed the country to the south. Nothing. He stood fingering the boar's tusk at the front of his shirt. About now, he said, you're shaded up somewheres watchin your backtrack. And the chances of me seein you fore you see me are about as close to nothin as you can get without fallin in.

He squatted and steadied his elbows on his knees and with the binoculars swept the rocks at the head of the valley. He sat and crossed his legs and went over the terrain more slowly and then lowered the glasses and just sat. Do not, he said, get your dumb ass shot out here. Do not do that.

He turned and looked at the sun. It was about eleven oclock. We dont even know that all of this went down last night. It could of been two nights ago. It might even could of been three.

A light wind had come up. He pushed back his hat and wiped his forehead with his bandanna and put the bandanna back in the hip pocket of his jeans. He looked across the caldera toward the low range of rock on the eastern perimeter.

Nothin wounded goes uphill, he said. It just dont happen.

It was a good hard climb to the top of the ridge and it was close to noon by the time he got there. Far off to the north he could see the shape of a tractor-trailer moving across the shimmering landscape. Ten miles. Maybe fifteen. Highway 90. He sat and swept the new country with the glasses. Then he stopped.

At the foot of a rockslide on the edge of the bajada was a small piece of something blue. He watched it for a long time through the binoculars. Nothing moved. He studied the country about. Then he watched it some more. It was the better part of an hour before he rose and started down.

The dead man was lying against a rock with a nickel plated government .45 automatic lying cocked in the grass between his legs. He'd been sitting up and had slid over sideways. His eyes were open. He looked like he was studying something small in the grass. There was blood on the ground and blood on the rock behind him. The blood was still a dark red but then it was still shaded from the sun. Moss picked up the pistol and pressed the grip safety with his thumb and lowered the hammer. He squatted and tried to wipe the blood off the grips on the leg of the man's trousers but the blood was too well congealed. He stood and stuck the gun in his belt at the small of his back and pushed back his hat and blotted the sweat from his forehead with his shirtsleeve. He turned and stood studying the countryside. There was a heavy
leather document case standing upright alongside the dead man's knee and Moss absolutely knew what was in the case and he was scared in a way that he didn't even understand. When he finally picked it up he just walked out a little ways and sat down in the grass and slid the rifle off his shoulder and laid it aside. He sat with his legs spaced and the H&K in his lap and the case standing between his knees. Then he reached and unbuckled the two straps and unsnapped the brass latch and lifted the flap and folded it back.

It was level full of hundred dollar banknotes. They were in packets fastened with banktape stamped each with the denomination $10,000. He didn't know what it added up to but he had a pretty good idea. He sat there looking at it and then he closed the flap and sat with his head down. His whole life was sitting there in front of him. Day after day from dawn till dark until he was dead. All of it cooked down into forty pounds of paper in a satchel.

He raised his head and looked out across the bajada. A light wind from the north. Cool. Sunny. One o'clock in the afternoon. He looked at the man lying dead in the grass. His good crocodile boots that were filled with blood and turning black. The end of his life. Here in this place. The wind in the grass. The quiet. He latched the case and fastened the straps and buckled them and rose and shouldered the rifle and then picked up the case and the machinepistol and took his bearings by his shadow and set out. He thought he knew how to get to his truck and he also thought about wandering through the desert in the dark. There were Mojave rattlesnakes in that country and if he got bit out here at night he would in all likelihood be joining the other members of the party and the document case and its contents would then pass on to some other owner. Weighed against these considerations was the problem of crossing open ground in broad daylight on foot with a fully automatic weapon slung across one shoulder and carrying a satchel containing several million dollars. Beyond all this was the dead certainty that someone was going to come looking for the money. Maybe several someones.

He thought about going back and getting the shotgun with the drum magazine. He was a strong believer in the shotgun. He even thought about leaving the machinepistol behind. It was a penitentiary offense to own one.

He didn't leave anything behind and he didn't go back to the trucks. He set out across country, cutting through the gaps in the volcanic ridges and crossing the flat or rolling country between. Until late in the day he reached the ranch road he'd come down that morning in the dark so long ago. Then in about a mile he came to the truck. He opened the door and stood the rifle in the floor. He went around and opened the driver door and pushed the lever and slid the seat forward and set the case and the machinepistol behind it. He laid the .45 and the binoculars in the seat and climbed in and pushed the seat back as far as it would go and put the key in the ignition. Then he took off his hat and leaned back and just rested his head against the cold glass behind him and closed his eyes.

When he got to the highway he slowed and rattled over the bars of the cattleguard and then pulled out onto the blacktop and turned on the headlights. He drove west toward Sanderson and he kept to the speed limit every mile of the way. He stopped at the gas station on the east end of town for cigarettes and a long drink of water and then drove on to the Desert Aire and pulled up in front of the trailer and shut off the motor. The lights were on inside. You live to be a hundred, he said, and there won't be another day like this one. As soon as he said it he was sorry.

He got his flashlight from the glovebox and climbed out and took the machinepistol and the case from behind the seat and crawled up under the trailer. He lay there in the dirt looking up at the underside of it. Cheap plastic pipe and plywood. Bits of insulation. He wedged the H&K up into a corner and pulled the insulation down over it and lay there thinking. Then he crawled back out with the case and dusted himself off and climbed the steps and went in.

She was sprawled across the sofa watching TV and drinking a Coke. She didn't even look up. Three o'clock, she said. I can come back later.

She looked at him over the back of the sofa and looked at the television again.

180 What have you got in that satchel?

It's full of money.

Yeah. That'll be the day. He went into the kitchen and got a beer out of the refrigerator.

Can I have the keys? she said.

Where you goin.
Get some cigarettes.

Cigarettes.

Yes, Llewelyn. Cigarettes. I been settin here all day.

What about cyanide? How are we fixed for that?

Just let me have the keys. I'll set out in the damn yard and smoke.

He took a sip of the beer and went on back into the bedroom and dropped to one knee and shoved the case under the bed. Then he came back. I got you some cigarettes, he said. Let me get em.

He left the beer on the counter and went out and got the two packs of cigarettes and the binoculars and the pistol and slung the .270 over his shoulder and shut the truck door and came back in. He handed her the cigarettes and went on back to the bedroom.

Where'd you get that pistol? she called.

At the gettin place.

Did you buy that thing?

No. I found it.

She sat up on the sofa. Llewelyn?

He came back in. What? he said.

What did you give for that thing?

You don't need to know everything.

How much.

I told you. I found it.

No you never done no such a thing.

He sat on the sofa and put his legs up on the coffee table and sipped the beer. It don't belong to me, he said. I didn't buy no pistol.

You better not of.

She opened one of the packs of cigarettes and took one out and lit it with a lighter. Where have you been all day?

Went to get you some cigarettes.

I don't even want to know. I don't even want to know what all you been up to.

He sipped the beer and nodded. That'll work, he said.

I think it's better just to not even know even.

You keep runnin that mouth and I'm goin to take you back there and screw you.

Big talk.

Just keep it up.

That's what she said. Just let me finish this beer. We'll see what she said and what she didn't say.