

We fired up the old Chevy and headed for the trailhead to Emory Peak, several miles away.

“Great country, Loeffler, especially when you consider that Mexico is right over there. Could probably hide here indefinitely if there was a need.”

“Yeah. We could probably make a halfway decent living holding up the smugglers and river runners. Put the fucking border patrol out of work, where they belong.”

“Then the illegal aliens would take over. They’re streaming out of that forsaken country of theirs and want to take over ours. Garrett Hardin’s right. You probably don’t agree.”

“I agree in principle. But I don’t restrict it to illegal aliens. We’ve all overpopulated. I think we have to defend the home ecosystem, especially from ourselves. More people moving in kills it. But when you actually see some poor bastard dying of thirst who’s hiked a few hundred miles across the desert to try and escape an intolerable system, you sure as hell want to help him out.”

“I agree,” said Ed. “But you want to help him out by feeding him a few square meals, arming him well, and heading him back south filled with the intent of overthrowing the system he’s trying to escape. Otherwise not only is he truly defeated, he puts even more of a drag on the system north of the border. California has millions of illegal aliens now. Soon there will be more people who speak Spanish than speak English. What do you think about that? Do you prefer Mexican culture to American culture?”

“If the truth were known, I’m a great believer in cultural diversity. I happen to like Mexico. Some of my best friends are Hispanos and Native Americans who have been willing to share their music and lore with me. Nobody’s perfect, Ed. You’re not perfect. Hell, I’m not even perfect.”

“C’mon, Loeffler. You’re skirting the issue. Do you want Peregrina to have to take a bilingual program in school to accommodate the presence of millions of Hispanos who have poured into this country because they’ve made their own country unlivable? That’s horseshit.”

“Consider this. When your ancestors and my ancestors came to this continent, we were displacing cultures that had been evolving along quite nicely here for millennia. We fought the Mexicans for this turf that we’re driving on right now. And both the Mexicans and ourselves displaced the Jumanos Indians, who lived here before we got here. What you’re doing

and what Garrett Hardin is doing as well is defending the territory that the culture you were born into *currently* controls. This so-called culture is a northern European transplant. It's biased against the southern European transplant that *currently* controls the territory known as Latin America. Both transplants are biased against the so-called indigenous cultures, which undoubtedly supplanted earlier cultures, and so forth. I believe that the time is ripe to overthrow the whole goddamn European-American transplant system and begin anew."

"That's very profound, Loeffler. In the meantime, do you want Peregrina to have to learn Spanish just so she can communicate with several million illegal aliens?"

"I have nothing against Peregrina learning Spanish so she can communicate with Spanish-speaking people in their own tongue. What I can't stand is human overpopulation and what this overpopulation does to the land. Especially when the humans who have overpopulated believe they have a God-given right to be fruitful in order to dominate the land. Christ, Abbey. You've yet to convince me that you're still not some Presbyterian fundamentalist who still condones all that biblical anthropomorphism."

"Stick to the point, for chrissake. Mexico is a wasteland thanks to the Mexicans. Now they're leaving in droves for the United States so that they can turn it into a wasteland as well. When Renée and I flew down to the Barranca del Cobre, we saw what had happened to the land. Slashed and burned. Overgrazed. Clear-cut. Polluted from end to end."

"Sounds like much of the American Southwest."

"That may be true in part," said Ed. "But in Mexico it's true for the whole country. The Mexicans have ruined that land. Made it unbearable. Now they can't stand it themselves and they're coming north, ten to a family. In a generation or two what's left of the United States will be just like Mexico is today."

"What's your solution?" I asked.

"Like I said. Catch 'em, feed 'em, arm 'em, and head 'em back south to clean out their politicians, get rid of the Catholic Church, and clean up the mess they've made of their land."

"Maybe we should do that here."

"Hell, yes, we should. Then we'll be free to start over and live on the land properly. But first we have to clean out the politicians and the priests and the military-industrial complex and the developers and the extractors. We have to

initiate the use of contraceptives and cut our human population by a factor of ten. If we don't, America as well as Mexico will be unlivable."

We pulled into a parking area where the trailhead for Emory Peak was identified. Ed climbed out of the car, grabbed my walking stick, and looked at the mountain. I climbed out and went over and stood beside him.

"Well, Ed. I hope you have a great day out on the trail."

"I won't have a great day if I don't want to." He grinned at me, turned, and hiked into the brush.

The sun crossed the blue dome above the Big Bend country, where Comanches and Apaches had fought each other and fought Mexicans and fought Americans. The Chihuahuan Desert endured as an ecosystem unto its own, sensing, perhaps, human presence, but not dominated by it like other less fortunate ecosystems. I thought of my friend circumambulating Emory Peak, stopping to stare off into the great distance spanned by his wonderful mind. I remembered another time, another camping trip we had taken into the Superstition Mountains, when Ed was healing from the very first attack of the malady that would one day carry him away. It was his turn to rest in camp and mine to wander a trail around a peak that Ed had urged I wander. It had been a wonderful day for me.

During the course of the day I had scouted another campsite for us and had returned well before sunset to meet him. I chewed on some jerky and limped up the trail a mile or so. The sun set, and there was no sign of Ed. Dusk settled in. I hiked back down to the truck and got out my flashlight. I waited. It got dark, and two hours passed. I was finally, truly worried. I went over to the visitor's center and scouted down a ranger and told him that I had a friend out on the mountain who was supposed to have come in hours earlier. The ranger looked thoughtful for a moment and asked me if my friend was trail worthy. I said he was as trail worthy as anyone I knew. He asked me my friend's name. I reluctantly told him. "Oh, shit," said he. "I'll get a rescue team together." I told him I'd meet him out at the trail. I went back out, straining my ears, listening for Ed. Crash. "Shit." Stumble, crash. "Goddammit!"

"Is that you, Abbey?" I hollered.

"Who the hell do you think it is, for chrissake? Do you have a flashlight handy? I can't see the trail."