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The Kill

By

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It was a cold night. The wind blew hard. Bits of scrap and dirt flew around me. I was sitting in a dead bush, its branches sticking me everywhere I wasn't padded. This was a simple job, a job I volunteered for. A quick shot to the head using the rifle that had been passed on to me from my father. He had told me it would be the tool that kept me alive. He never knew how right he was.

I kept the rifle as clean as I could but my oil had run dry three days ago. This kill would pay for what I needed. Water. Food. Most important, the bullets I would need for the next job. I pulled back the bolt as quiet as I could and loaded one of the three bullets I had left.

I had taken my time creeping into this bush. I hadn't noticed the thorns, but the caravan had lights, and they were pointed outward. I couldn't risk the comfort of moving. The lights were enough to deter the thieves and raiders in the wasteland. They knew if you had lights, then you had electricity. If you could afford electricity, well, then you could afford guns. Guns were the apotheosis of commodity; but they were scarce. It was easier to use a piece of sharpened scrap metal, or a large

rock to hunt for food, defend yourself or kill your neighbor.

I heard a coyote in the distance, a long mournful howl. The sound reminded me of my lost child. In the valley below me beyond the caravan, I could see the dead forest. Trees blackened from some fire they were taking their time recovering from. The animals in this world were as desperate as us. If lucky, they would live and die in their dead forest, away from the sins of man.

The night sky was starting to brighten. Was it morning already? I watched the shadows of the dead forest grow over themselves, and it became darker, a contrast to the dirt reflected sun. The caravan started to make noise. The morning fire was started. A cooking smell reached my nose. At first I thought of bodies. Then rabbit. My mouth watered the little bit it could. I couldn't afford to let it bother me.

I tracked the target to the largest tent. My vantage point was maybe 100 yards away and 20 feet up a hill; through my scope, I could see the tattered flap that served as a door. People walked by. Large people. Armed people. The trick wasn't killing the target. The trick was not getting

caught. He would emerge, I would fire, and then I had to get my ass out of this damned thorny bush. I knew the caravan was moving north, so, perhaps I could burrow myself south a ways. Just enough to see them pack up, and- fingers crossed -see them move on.

The man I was after wasn't the leader of the caravan, but he could afford the electric lights and he could afford the hired guns. His sins would catch up to him. Through the scope I stood vigil. The tattered flap stayed closed.

The sun dimmed and I risked a look up at the sky. The sky was a harsh red. Dusty brown clouds were circling. Rain? No, not this season. Mother Nature had given up, she was trying to get rid of us all. It had happened before, and it'll happen again. We're just too stupid, or maybe stubborn, to understand.

The wind started to pick up. I adjusted my rifle, and settled down again. The sun had risen behind me; it would help shield me from the inevitable bullets. I hoped I had stacked the deck enough in my favor.

Through my scope the tent shivered. Someone had

woken up. Perhaps the roasting rabbit had awoken him too. I settled into my killers pose. My finger was a feather on the trigger. My eyes were open. The wind howled, then died. I risked re-adjusting the rifle.

The flap opened and I thought about the atrocities this man had committed, the burned bodies of women and children fresh in my mind. As I grieved my wife and child, I wondered if my loss had given someone else the will to survive in this world. I forgave this man for his actions, knowing the world we lived in never could.

"Rest in Peace." I whispered and pulled the trigger.