No Country for Old Men

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CORMAC MCCARTHY

McCarthy was born as one of six children, and he grew up in Knoxville, Tennessee, where his father worked as a lawyer. McCarthy pursued creative writing at the University of Tennessee, but he never graduated. He has been married three times, to Lee Holleman, Annie DeLisle, and Jennifer Winkley, and has two children. He moved to Santa Fe with Winkley to raise his young son John Francis. McCarthy's first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, was published in 1965. Overall he has written ten novels and is now one of the best-known contemporary American writers, but McCarthy remains a reclusive figure. He was awarded the MacArthur Fellowship in 1981, the National Book Award in 1992, and the Pulitzer Prize (for *The Road*) in 2006. Several of his books have been made into feature films, including *No Country For Old Men*. McCarthy still lives and writes in Santa Fe.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The events and characters of *No Country for Old Men* are cast in the shadow of several wars, and looking toward a future that will include several more. Several of the novel's characters, including Bell, Moss, and Wells, are veterans of foreign wars. The novel explores the impact of these experiences on these characters, and also on the nation. The novel is also set just prior to Ronald Reagan's declaration of "the war on drugs." The novel deals directly with the impacts of the drug trade on the U.S./Mexico Border. During the 1980's the U.S. saw a major increase of drug activity in this area. Pablo Escobar's Medellin Drug Cartel, and the drug smuggler Pablo Acosta Villarreal, who is mentioned briefly in the text, were two notorious drug lords with operations along the border during the time of the novel. The novel also makes subtle references to the oil industry, which looks forward to the American military campaigns in the Middle East after 2001.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Though McCarthy's work is undoubtedly literary in its style and intent, he is known to blend genres in his work, including science fiction, southern gothic, western, and thriller. His earlier work stems from the southern gothic tradition, and was heavily influenced by William Faulkner, the author of *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*. Herman Melville, the author of *Moby Dick*, has also been cited as an influence on McCarthy's work. Like several of McCarthy's other novels, *No Country for Old Men* includes all of the elements of the traditional western genre, including goodhearted sheriffs, ruthless outlaws, tragic heroes and dames, and gunfights. These elements place *No Country for Old Men* within a broad tradition of westerns including works such as *Lonesome Dove*, by Larry McMurtry, and *True Grit*, by Charles Portis. *No Country for Old Men*, however, adds modern elements to the traditional western genre, and adds new shades of complexity to the age-old battle between good and evil. The novel is also deeply philosophical in its exploration of morality, ethics, and human nature, drawing on the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Emanuel Kant.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *No Country for Old Men*
- **When Written:** 1998-2005
- **Where Written:** Santa Fe, New Mexico
- **When Published:** July 19th, 2005
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary American Literature
- **Genre:** Blend of literary, thriller, western
- **Setting:** West Texas, along the U.S./Mexico border
- **Climax:** Moss's death at the motel in Van Horn, followed by Bell's near miss with Chigurh
- **Antagonist:** Anton Chigurh
- **Point of View:** 3rd person, omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Poetic Inspiration. The novel's title, *No Country for Old Men*, is the opening line from William Butler Yeats' poem, "Sailing for Byzantium." The novel and the poem share several themes, primarily the theme of aging and the idea of confronting a changing world.

From Book to Film. McCarthy's novel was adapted for the silver screen by Joel and Ethan Coen in 2007. The film stars several noteworthy actors, including Tommy Lee Jones, Javier Bardem, and Josh Brolin. The film is deeply faithful to the narrative as it appears in the novel, and is almost completely devoid of music, which was intended to mimic the novel's minimalist style and add to the sinister and empty quality of the West Texas landscape. The film has done incredibly well, receiving several academy awards, including, Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Adapted Screenplay. Javier Bardem also won an academy award for Best Supporting Actor.

PLOT SUMMARY

No Country for Old Men is set in 1980 in the barren West Texas

landscape along the U.S./Mexico Border. The novel opens with a monologue delivered by Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, a WWII veteran and sheriff of Terrell County, in which he speaks about the evolving evil in America and his struggle to reconcile the changes he is witnessing in society. This monologue, and those that follow, establish several of the novel's themes.

The narrative begins with Vietnam veteran, Llewellyn Moss. Moss is hunting antelope when he stumbles upon a drug deal gone terribly wrong. He discovers a dying Mexican man in a truck packed with a large quantity of heroin. The man begs for water, but Moss leaves to search for the man he suspects survived the carnage. He finds the man lying dead beside a briefcase packed with 2.4 million dollars. Moss takes the briefcase, and returns home to his wife Carla Jean. Later that night he wakes with a feeling of remorse, and returns to the scene to bring the dying man some water. When he arrives, he finds the man has been shot and killed. Meanwhile, a pair of drug dealers discovers his truck. A chase ensues, but Moss escapes by jumping into a river. He realizes that the men will track him using the information from his truck, and understands they will never stop looking for him. Returning home, Moss tells Carla Jean she needs to go to Odessa and stay with her mother. She leaves for Odessa, and Moss goes on the run.

Sheriff Bell and his deputies begin their investigation of the botched drug deal and several connected murders. Bell, who is haunted by the death of his men in WWII, makes it his mission to protect Moss and Carla Jean, while bringing justice to the criminals involved. Meanwhile, Chigurh, a ruthless hit man who uses a slaughterhouse **bolt gun** used to kill cattle as his weapon of choice and often flips **a coin** to determine whether a person lives or dies, is hired to track Moss and the drug money. A deadly game of cat and mouse begins, in which Moss uses his survival skills and military expertise to evade Chigurh and the Mexican drug dealers who have been sent out to recover their money.

Chigurh uses a tracking device linked to the briefcase holding the money to find Moss. A shootout occurs in Eagles Pass, in which both Chigurh and Moss are wounded. The shootout continues in the center of town, involving Moss, Chigurh, and several Mexican drug dealers who arrive on the scene. Moss barely escapes over the Mexican border, but before crossing the bridge into Mexico, he tosses the drug money over the bridge into a patch of river cane beside the Rio Grande. Moss wakes up in a Mexican hospital and finds Carson Wells sitting beside him. Wells has been hired to stop Chigurh and recover the briefcase. Wells, a Vietnam veteran like Moss, but Special Forces, tries to reason with Moss about the danger he is in, but Moss believes he can handle the situation on his own. Wells gives Moss his business card and leaves. Meanwhile, Sheriff Bell continues to search for Moss. He visits Carla Jean in Odessa and asks her for any leads on Moss. She refuses to help him, stating that Moss can take care of himself, but Bell is not so sure. He tells her to contact him if he hears from Moss.

Wells returns to Eagles Pass, and explores the town, looking for clues. When he gets back to his motel, Chigurh is waiting for him. After a short exchange, Chigurh kills him. Meanwhile, Moss calls Carla Jean from Mexico and tells her she needs to take her grandmother and go to El Paso. After he calls Carla Jean, Moss calls Wells' phone, but Chigurh answers. Chigurh tells Moss if he turns over the money he will spare Carla Jean, but Moss refuses. Moss, still injured, crosses back to the U.S. and retrieves the money from the bank of the river. He begins heading west toward El Paso where Carla Jean is waiting. He picks up a young hitchhiker along the way to help him drive. They are caught by the Mexican drug dealers at a motel in Van Horn, and killed. Later, Chigurh arrives and finds the money, which he returns to its owner.

Though Moss has been killed and the money returned, Chigurh continues hunting Carla Jean. Chigurh catches Carla Jean in her grandmother's house, and kills her. While driving away, Chigurh is struck by a car that runs a stop sign. Chigurh buys a shirt from a boy named David DeMarco, and leaves the scene. Demarco and a friend steal the gun used to kill Carla Jean from the seat of Chigurh's truck.

A few months later, Bell visits his Uncle Ellis and seeks advice on the guilt he feels about his experience in WWII and his failure to solve the crimes in his community. He talks about quitting his job as sheriff. When he returns home, he receives a call informing him about the discovery of the gun used to Kill Carla Jean. He questions DeMarco, but the young man is unhelpful. At this point in the narrative, Bell feels defeated by the situation. He decides to retire, a decision supported by his wife Loretta. The narrative ends with Bell's resignation, a symbolic surrender to the overpowering forces of evil that will continue to reign in the world.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Sheriff Ed Tom Bell – The sheriff of Terrell County, Texas, and protagonist of the novel, Ed Tom Bell struggles to adapt to a changing world where senseless violence, greed, and corruption have become the norm. Bell is a man of faith who values ethics, morality, and honesty, but finds it increasingly difficult to effectively do his job in the face of the heinous violence he confronts in U.S. society. He depends on his wife of 31 years, Loretta, and his Uncle Ellis for support as he comes to terms with the end of his career. Bell is a decorated WWII veteran, and struggles with guilt through the narrative as he tries reconcile his involvement in the war and the loss of men under his command. His desire to make right the actions from his past leads to his striving to protect the people of his

community. He goes to great lengths to protect Llewellyn Moss and Carla Jean, and put Anton Chigurh behind bars, but by the end of the novel, he recognizes his powerlessness over the forces of evil in the world, and retires from his duty as sheriff.

Llewellyn Moss – A Vietnam Veteran, Llewellyn Moss is a strong willed and self-sufficient man. Moss stumbles upon a drug deal gone wrong and takes a **briefcase** full of drug money from the scene. This action sets in motion a train of circumstances that force him to use his military training and survival skills in order to evade the dangerous men seeking his death. Moss has been disillusioned by his experience fighting in Vietnam, and does not operate in the world with the same moral framework as Bell. His sense of morality comes from within, through his desire for authenticity, autonomy, and freedom. His actions through the narrative are morally complex. Because Moss's objectives are authenticity, autonomy, and freedom, he refuses to cooperate with Chigurh when he offers to spare Carla Jean's life in exchange for the money. Moss's sense of self-sufficiency leads him to believe he can overcome Chigurh, but this mistake ultimately leads to his and Carla Jean's demise.

Anton Chigurh – The novels main antagonist, Anton Chigurh is a remorseless hit man who kills without hesitation. Anton Chigurh lacks a clear personal history, and is often described in the novel as looking exotic because of his tan skin and blue eyes. Though Chigurh is ruthless in his killing, he is described as a man with principles. He is the only person in the novel who doesn't care about the money in the briefcase. He perceives himself as the arbiter of fate, and operates outside of conventional understandings of justice and morality. As opposed to an orientation that posits God as the ultimate judge, he believes only in choice, chance, and fate. He sometimes preaches his philosophy before killing his victims, leaving the ultimate decision of whether the individual lives or dies to a **coin** toss. While Chigurh often seems above the law, he is subject to the laws of choice, chance, and fate like the other characters, as shown through his injuries in the car accident at the end of the novel. Chigurh's chosen weapon is a **bolt gun** used for killing cattle in slaughterhouses because of its effectiveness and simplicity, though he doesn't hesitate to utilize an arsenal of guns through the novel to complete his work. In the end, Chigurh disappears the way he entered the narrative, seemingly into thin air.

Carson Wells – A Vietnam veteran and hit man, Carson Wells is hired to track down Chigurh and find the missing **briefcase**. Wells has worked with Chigurh in the past and understands the danger Moss is in. He finds Moss in the hospital in Mexico, and attempts to convince Moss to work with him to return the money to its rightful owner. Wells is a confident man, which ultimately leads to his demise. He does not take into consideration the role of chance and bad luck in an individual's fate, elements of life that Chigurh is very aware of, and is overpowered by Chigurh. In the end, before Chigurh kills him, he struggles to accept his fate. Ultimately, his oversights and false sense of self-confidence lead to his death.

Carla Jean Moss – The young wife of Llewellyn Moss, Carla Jean is a faithful and strong-willed young woman. Nineteen at the time of the narrative, she married Moss at sixteen after a premonition delivered to her in a dream. Despite the warnings of her grandmother, who also raised her, she married Moss and enjoyed their life together. She loves and trusts her husband, listening to him after he tells her to hide out with her grandmother in Odessa. Even after Moss is wounded, she trusts his advice, and refuses to help Bell as he attempts to track Moss down. Carla Jean bravely confronts Chigurh at the end of the novel, arguing against his philosophy. Ultimately, Chigurh helps her to accept her fate, and kills her.

Loretta Bell – Sheriff Bell's Wife, Loretta is a strong and spiritual woman. Through the novel she provides support for her husband, who often takes note of her spirituality and strong faith. Loretta is involved in her husband's professional life as well, cooking meals for prisoners in the county jail, and making sure they are cared for. These prisoners often return to visit her after they have turned their lives around. Loretta stands by Bell after he quits his job as sheriff, and helps him come to terms with his grief.

Uncle Ellis – Sheriff Bell's uncle, Uncle Ellis is a retired sheriff who uses a wheelchair since being disabled by a gunshot wound in the line of duty. Ellis lives in the family homestead, and Bell visits him to seek guidance and ask questions about his family history. Bell imagines Ellis as an old-timer who upholds a view of justice, faith, and morality that is fading from society. Although Ellis is a moral man who loves his country, he is not as nostalgic as Bell about the past. He is a realist, noting the way in which this country is hard on its people and God does not seem to meddle in human affairs.

Sheriff Lamar – A friend of Sheriff Bell's and the sheriff in Sonoma, Texas, Lamar struggles with the grisly murders occurring in his county. The first man murdered in the novel, a young deputy, was one of Lamar's men. Similar to Bell, Lamar considers leaving the police force, but Bell encourages him to continue his work.

David DeMarco – A young man who gives Chigurh his shirt after a car accident in exchange for one hundred dollars. After Chigurh leaves the scene of the accident, DeMarco and his unnamed friend steal a pistol from the seat of Chigurh's vehicle. Later, after the pistol is recovered, Bell speaks to DeMarco about his interaction with Chigurh. DeMarco is uncooperative.

The Young Hitchhiker – A young woman Moss picks up on the shoulder of the highway, the young hitchhiker is on her way to California. She and Moss have existential conversations about running from problems, and the inability to escape the past. She tries to tempt Moss into a sexual interaction, but Moss remains

faithful to Carla Jean. After Moss gives her a thousand dollars, she says she has always been lucky, but Moss tells her eventually her luck will run out. In the end, Moss is right. Two Mexican men searching for **the briefcase** full of money kill the young woman along with Moss.

Moss's Father – A WWII veteran, Moss's Father did his best to raise his son with good values. When Bell visits, Moss's Father insists that Moss wasn't involved in drugs; he wasn't raised that way. Moss's Father is proud of his son, noting that Moss was the best rifle shot he'd ever seen. He talks about the way Moss visited the families of men lost in Vietnam, and how this experience was hard on him. He speaks in general about the way the Vietnam War affected U.S. society, and the way in which war cannot be fought and won without trust and faith in God.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Torbert and Wendell – These men are Sheriff Bell's deputies. Both men work with Bell on the investigation of the murders. Beyond their duties as deputies, these men offer support for Bell as he struggles to face the gruesome violence that has occurred in their community.

McIntyre – A DEA agent, McIntyre arrives by helicopter to investigate the scene of the botched drug deal. McIntyre is a detail oriented and sharp investigator. He and Sheriff Bell butt heads through the novel.

McIntyre – A DEA agent investigating the drug deal gone wrong.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

PHILOSOPHY, MORALITY, AND ETHICS

McCarthy's novel explores the human struggle toward a definition and framework of morality and ethics. Several of the novel's characters search for a moral center—some reference point against which they may measure their decision, actions, and beliefs—as they confront extreme instances of violence and corruption. The novel's three main characters, Llewellyn Moss, Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, and Anton Chigurh, each operate in the world with different conceptions of morality and ethics. Each man holds a different moral code, and each character's actions work to challenge common frameworks of morality and ethics.

Sheriff Bell struggles to find a moral center against which he might explain the gruesome violence he encounters throughout the narrative. Since he was a young sheriff, he has perceived the law, religion, and truth as the reference points for morality. These moral frameworks have not only provided a clear sense of right and wrong, they have given him a clear sense of obligation and duty as a sheriff, husband, and community member. Llewellyn Moss's philosophy is not as clear-cut as Bell's. Common frameworks of morality and ethics defined by law and religion do not guide him. His sense of morality comes from within, through his desire for authenticity, autonomy, and freedom.

Moss is operating in a framework that is not defined externally, by society or god, but by his own internal framework. Chigurh provides a counterpoint to these different moral positions. He operates outside of any single understanding of morality and ethics, and continually raises philosophical questions to his victims. His actions do not fall into any single philosophical framework. During the scene with the proprietor, he shifts the situation from a moral decision to chance by introducing **the coin**. When he kills Wells, his philosophy hinges on pragmatism. And when he kills Carla Jean, he does so out of moral duty. He acts in ways that complicate human attempts to construct moral frameworks and guidelines for their lives and society.

Through the exploration of these characters, their decisions, and the outcomes, the novel raises questions about human conceptions of morality and ethics, but does not seem to offer any single answer beyond the fact that the world remains indifferent to the strivings of its people. The novel is not concerned with providing an answer or a version of the "correct" moral philosophy. Instead, the novel aims to explore the limits and frailties of several philosophical frameworks dealing with morality and ethics, leaving the reader to face their own conceptions of these ideas.

FATE, CHANCE, AND FREE WILL

No Country for Old Men begins with Llewellyn Moss's chance discovery of the drug deal gone wrong, and later, **the briefcase** full of money. From this moment forward, the novel begins posing questions about the function of fate, chance, and free will, and the extent to which human beings have choice in the outcomes of their lives. The novel does not refute the idea of free will. It does, however, recognize its limits. In a large sense, the novel suggests free will can only function within the limits of one's mortality. We make choices that influence the trajectory of our lives, but ultimately, no matter what route we chose, life ends in death.

Chigurh embodies the idea of universal fate, and becomes the ambassador of the novel's philosophy on fate and free will. In his interactions with other characters, Chigurh continually suggests that each and every choice we make determines our fate—even small actions bring us toward death. The novel brings forward the idea of chance and luck in connection with

choice and free will. Luck and chance account for those elements of reality that exist entirely outside of free will and the power of choice. So while we do have agency over the choices we make, we are unable to control the elements of luck and chance inherent in the journey. Chigurh uses the **the coin** to demonstrate the way in which our choices determine our fate. The coin serves several functions. The coin toss is an extreme example of the connection between the choices we make and their eventual outcomes. At the same time, the coin represents the presence of chance inherent in the nature of decision-making.

Other characters perceive fate and free will in different ways. Moss continues to exert free will in hopes that he can overcome fate, but ultimately fails in the end. Carson Wells believes he can overcome Chigurh, refusing to admit his choice to pursue Chigurh will lead to his death. In the end, he attempts to reason with Chigurh, indicating his struggle to accept his fate. Both Bell and Carla Jean seem to accept their fates in ways other characters do not. Bell eventually accepts the fact that he is incapable of overcoming Chigurh and the new way of the world he represents, so he retires, which can be read as an acceptance of his fate. Carla Jean also accepts her fate after confronting Chigurh. Finally, even though Chigurh perceives himself as the spokesperson for fate, he is not impervious to the reality of the message he preaches. After he kills Carla Jean, he himself ends up in a car accident—a function of chance or bad luck—and though he survives the accident and escapes, this moment serves as a reminder that nobody is above the randomness of chance inherent in the universe, and nobody escapes their fate.

JUSTICE AND HIGHER LAW

Sheriff Bell strives for justice within the framework of the state and the community, which are defined by what we might call "the law". This judicial framework is rooted in a sense of higher law, God-given in nature, which provides a clear distinction between right and wrong. In this way, Bell is a representative of the community's belief in justice, an ideal that might also be thought of as an American framework of justice. As a sheriff, Bell perceives himself as a shepherd for the people of his community, which inspires his determination to protect Moss and Carla Jean, and put Chigurh behind bars. From the start of the novel, however, he begins to question the ideology behind the system of justice he seeks to uphold.

In confronting a man like Chigurh, Bell's conception of a God-given higher law becomes destabilized. While Chigurh is a deeply principled man, he does not submit to the idea that God is the source of higher law. Instead, he believes that higher law stems from chance and the chaotic order of the universe. For Chigurh, luck replaces the need for God—an indifferent universe deals justice randomly. Without the idea of higher law rooted in a Judeo-Christian conception of God, Chigurh feels free to act outside of the judicial framework in which Bell operates. Moss's understanding of justice and higher law rests somewhere between Bell and Chigurh's. He operates outside the confines of state law, as shown by his unwillingness to cooperate with the sheriff, but at the same time he believes he can escape Chigurh's philosophy of chance and fate through self-determination, as shown by his refusal to submit to Chigurh when he offers to spare Carla Jean's life.

The events of the novel reposition the characters with regard to their view of justice and higher law. Although Moss strives to overcome his situation by self-determination, he ultimately fails, suggesting that self-determination is not enough to overcome the external forces of the universe. Chigurh, who operates outside of Bell's conception of higher law, is also not able to escape his own philosophy of justice, as shown by the car accident after he murders Carla Jean. Even though he seems at times outside of the realm of justice and higher law, he is still subject to the chaos and chance inherent in the universe. By the end of the novel, Bell resigns from his position as sheriff, realizing the futility of his mission to uphold God's higher law. He begins to suspect that God does not care about human affairs. His resignation suggests his personal surrender of his old views of justice stemming from a God-given higher law, and in a larger sense, the end of a society based on those views that Bell has upheld during his career.

CHANGING TIMES: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

The title of *No Country for Old Men* speaks directly to the theme of changing times. Throughout the novel, Bell continually considers the distinction between the old ways and the new. He holds to a nostalgic view of the past, reminiscing about a time where order and justice reigned. He talks about a time in America where police officers didn't need to carry guns and knew the people of their communities. Children were safe at school and striving to become good citizens. The senseless violence he encounters, however, leads him to believe that this nation is heading toward chaos. He states that he is seeing "a new type," a kind of person who has "another view of the world out there and other eyes to see it…" Chigurh is the definition of this new type, as shown through his complete disregard for law, God, and the value of human life. His disregard of the value of human life is embodied in his use of the **bolt gun**, a tool used in the slaughter of cattle, to kill people. Chigurh does not operate in the world with the same orientation as the old type. Bell begins to feel that men with his moral leaning can no longer compete with the changing face of society, which leads to his longing for the past and his fear of the future. As the narrative continues, it becomes clear that this "new type" is not an individual, but a new framework and set of values that have taken hold in American society. Bell realizes

that in order for the drug trade to flourish as it does, the market must exist, and that market is comprised of everyday citizens. He laments the young people he sees who live their lives outside of his understanding of societal norms.

Moss holds a different position to the world, one between Bell and the young people Bell refers to. While Bell fought in WWII, a war with clarity around the moral objectives in its resistance against Nazi Germany, Moss is a veteran of the Vietnam War, in which moral clarity was hazy at best. Unlike Bell, who ultimately submits to the fact that he can no longer compete with the new ways and resigns, Moss attempts to compete, but fails. While Moss doesn't quite fit the category of a "new type", he feels able to compete in a way that Bell doesn't.

At the same time, the novel continually challenges Bell's nostalgia for a "morally clear" past. During his visit with Uncle Ellis, a retired Sheriff and representative of the generation that Bell romanticizes, we begin to see the unreliability in Bell's memory. Ellis did not become sheriff out of a sense of duty, but because it paid well, and he didn't see any other options. He explains that he was too young for WWI and too old for WWII, so policing became his outlet. He believes in God, but doesn't think God cares or has any control over human affairs. Ellis recognizes the way in which this country is hard on people, and sees the absurdity in the way people still love it. He still loves it, but recognizes his ignorance. This alternate view of the past knocks off kilter Bell's romanticization of the past and the older generation. Through Ellis's commentary, it becomes clear that the old generation is not as steadfast in their values, love of God, and love of country as Bell thinks. Through the conversation, it becomes clear that violence, greed, and the struggle for power has always been a fundamental part of American society. While the characteristics and limits of this violence, greed, and power seeking may have changed (or may not have), they are not in any way new to our society, and will likely carry on into the future.

CORRUPTION, GREED, AND POWER

The issues of corruption, greed, and power are at the heart of McCarthy's novel. The entire world of the story is tainted with these vices, and the characters fight to overcome and reconcile their effects. To understand McCarthy's novel, one must understand the larger context in which the narrative takes place. Corruption, greed, and the struggle for power provide a backdrop for the novels events and shape the personalities of the novel's characters. The novel is set in the shadow of several wars. Bell, Moss, and Wells, along with several minor characters, are military veterans, and the novel is set near the American/Mexican border just prior to Reagan's declaration of "the war on drugs." There is mention throughout the novel of the corrosive forces of war, and the struggle for power inherent in military operations. The inciting incident of the novel—Moss's discovery of **the briefcase** full of drug money—depicts the gruesome effects of a business founded on corruption, greed, and the search for power, and the events that follow are backed by these ideas. We later discover that the owner of the money is not some kind of outlaw on the streets, but a high power executive from the Matacumbe Petroleum Group in Houston. This suggests that the corruption and greed are not simply taking place on the streets and in Mexico, but involve American men at the top with wealth and power.

On the level of character, both Bell and Moss's narratives explore the individual struggles against corruption, greed, and power. Through the course of the novel, we begin to understand that Bell's entire career is casted in the shadow of dishonesty. The bronze star he earned in WWII was, in his estimation, unearned. He tried to turn down the honor, but was told he had to accept it because it would make the American effort in Europe look like it was worth something. Moss has also been disillusioned by his experience fighting in Vietnam, which becomes a major element in his character and decision-making. While greed certainly plays a roll in his decision to take the drug money and run, his decision to hold onto the money is more complicated. This is shown once Wells enters the story. He offers to give Moss some of the money if he turns it over, but by this point it is not about the money for Moss, but *who* controls the money. A similar idea backs his refusal to give the money to Chigurh. In this way, Moss is struggling for power and autonomy.

Chigurh provides a counterpoint to the corruption, greed, and struggle for power in the story. As Wells suggests, "[Chigurh] is a peculiar man. You could say he has principals. Principals that transcend money or drugs or anything like that." As the representative of fate, Chigurh arrives in the story to demonstrate the futility of greed and power. In the end, he puts an end to both Moss and Bell's narratives—Moss ends up dead, and Bell ends up resigning from his position and living in the shadow of his guilt and shame. Ultimately, the novel depicts the way in which corruption, greed, and the search for power only bring suffering, and in the end, those who engage in these vices must bear the consequences.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE BRIEFCASE

In *No Country for Old Men*, **the briefcase** full of money is a symbol that reflects the theme of power, greed, and corruption. The question of whom the money belongs to runs through the course of the novel, and the violent events of the narrative are driven by several entities

attempting to retrieve it. Individuals are willing to kill and put their lives on the line for the briefcase, speaking to the power of greed. When Moss first finds the briefcase, his entire life flashes before his eyes. As a working class individual, the money means access to a life he could only have dreamed of. He takes the money, knowing the dangers involved, but deciding the risk is worth the consequences. As the novel progresses, Moss's motives shift away from the issue of wealth, toward the issue of power and autonomy. The question of who possesses the money becomes more important than the money itself. This struggle to keep the money ultimately leads to Moss's death, and the downfall of several other characters, suggesting that the individual's striving for power and wealth, signified by the briefcase, ultimately destroys those who seek it.

THE BOLT GUN

Chigurh's **bolt gun**, his weapon of choice through the novel, works symbolically to depict his view of humanity and his philosophy of fate and human nature. Typically, the air powered bolt gun is utilized in slaughterhouses to quickly and effectively slaughter cattle. The fact that Chigurh uses the bolt gun to kill his victims speaks to his conception of human beings as no different than animals. Chigurh does not believe in the concept of the soul or the afterlife, so in his mind, humans are no different than any other organism. The bolt gun was also developed as a tool that limits the chances of mistake in the slaughter of cattle. In the old days, individuals would use sledgehammers to slaughter cattle, but this old method left plenty of room for error. Because Chigurh's goal is to deliver death quickly and effectively without any room for error, the bolt gun provides the most effective means to carry out his mission. The bolt gun is also an immensely pragmatic tool Chigurh uses to gain entrance into homes, businesses, and motels. The practical nature of this tool works in line with Chigurh's logic through the novel.

THE COIN

Chigurh often tosses a **coin** before killing his victims. He uses the coin as a tool to demonstrate his philosophy of life, especially the ways in which fate, chance, and free will function in determining the outcome of one's life. The novel posits the existence of free will, but only within the limits of one's mortality—we make choices, but each choice, no matter the outcome, takes us closer to death. The fact that Chigurh forces his victims to choose in the coin toss speaks to the way in which we can only make choices within the limits of our own mortality, even though people don't recognize this fact. We do not have a choice over our death. The coin accounts for the function of chance and choice in this journey toward death. In one sense, the act of choosing heads or tails is a hyperbolic example of the way in which each and every choice we make has outcomes, which lead us toward our end. Chigurh uses the coin to teach those he confronts that the smallest action—the toss of a coin—can have severe consequences down the road. The chance involved in the coin toss also speaks to the impossibility of know what outcomes our choices will be. Life forces us to make decisions, but we can never predict the outcome because chance is a factor that cannot be accounted for.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *No Country for Old Men* published in 2006.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ But there is another view of the world out there and other eyes to see it and that where this is going...Somewhere there is a true and living prophet of destruction and I dont want to confront him.

Related Characters: Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Sheriff Bell, an agent of law and order, is frightened by the state of modern society. There is tremendous evil in the human soul--indeed, Bell has met the very embodiment of evil; the "prophet of destruction." Though we haven't met him yet, Bell is probably referring to Anton Chigurh, the nihilistic killer around whom much of the book revolves. As Bell admits, he has no desire to confront such a frightening person ever again.

Bell's description of Chigurh makes him sound like a force of nature more than a human being. In the clash between good and evil, Bell seems to acknowledge that evil has the "edge." Bell can't do anything to remove evil from the face of the Earth; all he can do is hope that Chigurh chooses to stay far away from the rest of humanity.

❝ He sat there looking at [the money] 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.

Related Characters: Llewellyn Moss (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Llewellyn Moss discovers a mysterious briefcase full of money. As Moss opens the briefcase, he sees millions of dollars, and feels that his "whole life" is sitting there.

What does Moss mean by "whole life?" One could say that Moss is excited by the prospect of never having to work again--with the money in the briefcase, Moss could have an easy, leisurely life, totally unlike the one he has now. More sinisterly, though, Moss's thoughts seem to foreshadow his own death. By choosing to live and die over a briefcase of money, Moss makes the choice that will eventually lead to his execution. In short, the passage suggests the duality of Moss's apparent good fortune. The briefcase has the potential to be a blessing, but in reality it is cursed.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Anything can be an instrument, Chigurh said. Small things. Things you wouldnt even notice. They pass from hand to hand. People dont pay attention. And then one day there is an accounting. And after that nothing is the same…you see the problem. To separate the act from the thing. As if parts of some moment in history might be interchangeable with the parts of some other moment. How could that be? Well, it's just a coin. Yes. That's true. Is it?

Related Characters: Anton Chigurh (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Anton Chigurh, the novel's main antagonist, challenges a man to bet on the outcome of a coin toss. Chigurh spares the man's life, it's strongly implied, because the man correctly guesses the result of the toss. Chigurh gives the man a flavor of his life philosophy: as he sees it, major events can be determined by the tiniest of events. Here, for example, a man's life has been spared due to something as minor as a coin flip. Chigurh leaves the man to puzzle over his own fate: was it destiny that led him to correctly predict the toss, sparing his own life? Or was it just random chance?

The themes Chigurh raises in this passage are crucial to the plot of the novel. Chigurh seems like the embodiment of evil, and yet he also seems to abide by a strict moral code that respects the basic uncertainty of the universe. Instead of choosing to kill his victim, Chigurh honors the results of the coin toss. Even if he's dangerous, Chigurh himself is just a cog in the "machine" of life--as we'll come to see, he has no real control over his own fate.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ The ones that really ought to be on death row will never make it. You remember certain things about [an execution]. People didnt know what to wear. There was one or two that come dressed in black, which I suppose was all right...Still they seemed to know what to do and that surprised me. Most of em I know had never been to a execution before. When it was over they pulled this curtain back around the gas chamber with him in there settin slumped over and people just got up and filed out. Like out of church or somthin.

Related Characters: Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62-63

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sheriff Bell comments on the decay of law and order, and connects it to the broader decay of society. Bell notes that the people who really deserve to die never actually make it to death row--sometimes, they go free, since they're smart enough to escape the police. On the other hand, many people who are executed for their crimes don't really deserve to die, at least according to Bell. Bell describes a grisly execution, and then compares it to a church gathering.Bell's comparison between the execution and church seems to suggest that death and execution have replaced love and mercy as "events" for common people. All of society seems to follow a twisted religion, in which a man's death is a cause for a community gathering.

Clearly, Bell has some strong opinions about modern society, and a nostalgic view of a more "just" past. By the same token, he himself has a strong moral code--a code grounded in his own experiences as a police officer and former soldier, and in his religious faith. One of the most important conflicts of the novel is between Bell's philosophy

of justice, higher power, and moral absolutes, the chaos and nihilism of Chigurh, and the independence and self-actualization of Moss.

> It's a odd thing when you come to think about it. The opportunities for abuse are just about everywhere. There's no requirements in the Texas State Constitution for bein a sheriff. Not a one. There is no such thing as county law. You think about a job where you have pretty much the same authority as God and there is no requirements put upon you and you are charged with preservin nonexistent laws and you tell me if that's peculiar or not. Because I say it is...it takes very little to govern good people. Very little. And bad people can't be governed at all.

Related Characters: Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Sheriff Bell is insecure about the current state of society, and he's equally insecure about the current state of law enforcement. Despite working as a sheriff for many years, Bell notes that anyone can be a cop, no matter how immoral they are. Bell recognizes the absurdity of the situation: anyone can apply to be a police officer and be given "the same authority as God."

Bell's comments reinforce the decay of civilization as he sees it. Law enforcement--an institution that's supposed to protect good people and punish bad people--has become hopelessly corrupt, to the point where the law enforcers themselves are often the real villains. In the end, Bell repeats, justice has disappeared and the most evil people always go free--Chigurh is just one example.

> I used to say they were the same ones we've always had to deal with. Same ones my granddaddy had to deal with...but I dont know as that's true no more. I'm like you. I aint sure we've seen these people before. Their kind. I don't know what to do about em even. If you killed em all they'd have to build an annex on to hell.

Related Characters: Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (speaker), Torbert and Wendell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Bell surveys a crime scene: a man has been murdered with a bolt gun (which belonged to the depraved killer Anton Chigurh). Bell has never seen anything that can compare with the crime scene. In a literal sense, the murder weapon in question is unlike any murder weapon he's seen before (he doesn't yet know that it was a bolt gun, a tool for slaughtering cattle efficiently). More abstractly, though, Bell can't remember a time when people killed each other with so little remorse or guilt.

Bell conveys the decay of social values by contrasting his experiences as a sheriff with those of his grandfather. Bell seems to be dealing with a greater evil than his ancestors ever had to confront--an evil that's utterly free of guilt or meaning. Bell concludes that very structure of the (Christian) universe (the layers of hell) is unprepared for this new, savage evil.

Chapter 4 Quotes

> [Moss] thought about a lot of things but the thing that stayed with him was that at some point he was going to have to quit running on luck.

Related Characters: Llewellyn Moss (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

Llewellyn Moss discovers that there's a tracking device in the briefcase of money that he's been carrying with him. The entire time, the owners of the briefcase have been able to track Moss's movements very precisely. Therefore, the only reason Moss isn't already dead is sheer dumb luck.

Moss seems to sense--if only on a deep, gut level--that he's running out of luck, and out of time. Put another way, he seems to realize that his possession of the briefcase is going to lead to his own death. And yet Moss doesn't surrender the briefcase--his desire to assert his own independence and free will has become greater than his desire for wealth.

Chapter 5 Quotes

I know they's a lot of things in a family history that just plain aint so. Any family. The stories get passed on and the truth gets passed over...which I reckon some would take as meaning that the truth cant compete. But I dont believe that. I think that when the lies are all told and forgot the truth will be there yet.

Related Characters: Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

Here Bell acknowledges that his family history is full of fictions--tall tales that have been passed down from generation to generation. In spite of the prevalence of fiction in his "family lore," Bell insists that truth wins out in the end. Truth--with a capital "T"--will always last longer than fiction.

Bell's comments could be interpreted as a confirmation of his faith in moral values--the timeless truths of human society. Rules like "do unto others ..." and "love thy neighbor" don't fade away with time, at least according to Bell--rather, they're true both now and forever. Bell sees evil and immorality all around him, And yet rather than accept that the world is a dark, meaningless place, he continues to feel a profound faith in the *rightness* of moral truths. Whether this kind of rigid morality is admirable or just naive, however, is up to the reader to judge.

I guess in all honesty I would have to say that I never knew nor did I ever hear of anybody that money didnt change.

Related Characters: Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (speaker), Carla Jean Moss

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Bell pays a visit to Carla Jean Moss, the wife of Llewellyn Moss. Carla Jean knows that Moss has run off with a lot of money, but she's confident that her husband will remain the same man--in other words, his personality and values won't change at all. Bell, who's more experienced and more realistic about human nature (on this subject, at least), insists that money changes everyone.

We've already seen plentiful evidence that Bell is right about Moss. Even after Moss senses that possessing the briefcase full of money is endangering his life, he continues to hang onto it. The love of money, so the saying goes, is the root of all evil. But the novel makes a subtler point about the briefcase--that Llewellyn keeps it even after he knows his peril not because he hopes to get rich (he seems to know that he would never have the freedom and safety to actually enjoy the money), but because he wants to assert his own survival and independence in the face of a seemingly-unstoppable murderer like Chigurh.

You can't make a deal with him. Let me say it again. Even if you gave him the money he'd still kill you. There's no one alive on this planet that's ever had even a cross word with him. They're all dead. These are not good odds. He's a peculiar man. You could even say that he has principals. Principals that transcend money or drugs or anything like that.

Related Characters: Carson Wells (speaker), Llewellyn Moss

Related Themes:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Carson Wells--a criminal and negotiator--tries to tell Llewellyn the truth about his situation. Wells knows that Moss is even now being hunted by Anton Chigurh, and he tells Moss that there's nothing he can do to escape Chigurh's vengeance. Moss cockily claims that he can "cut a deal" with Chigurh, but Moss disagrees: Chigurh doesn't bargain with his enemies--he tracks them down and kills them.

The passage helps us understand what kind of man Chigurh is. Moss--who trusts that money can buy anything--thinks that he can always pay off Chigurh in return for protection. But Chigurh isn't a regular human being--he doesn't let his short-term need for money distract him. Once Chigurh has decided to kill a man, nothing can distract him from his goal--not even the offer of millions of dollars.

The irony of Wells's speech is that Chigurh comes off as being much more "principled" than either Wells or Moss. Where Moss trusts that money is the ultimate source of power, Chigurh appeals to a higher set of rules. What, exactly, these rules are is unclear. And yet, peculiarly,

Chigurh's refusal to be "bought" is what makes him stand out from the rest of society.

Chapter 6 Quotes

What is that Torbert says? About truth and justice? We dedicate ourselves anew daily. Somthin like that. I think I'm goin to commence dedicatin myself twice daily. It may come to three fore it's over.

Related Characters: Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (speaker), Torbert and Wendell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Bell remembers something his colleague says about law and justice: one must dedicate himself to the rules of justice every single day. In other words, one makes a constant "choice" to uphold the laws of morality--at any given time, one could choose to stop upholding justice.

Bell acknowledges that it takes constant effort to be a good, moral agent in the modern world. Indeed, it's not enough to choose to uphold the law every day--Bell promises, half-jokingly, to dedicate himself two or more times daily. Bell's quiet joke expresses the impossibility of being a constant moral agent. Bell has managed to spend most of his life being "good," but at any given time, he could waver in his principles and commit an evil act. In spite of the apparent impossibility of justice, Bell resolves to continue *trying* to be good--a mark of his near-fanatical devotion to right and wrong.

If the rule you followed led you to this of what use was the rule?

Related Characters: Anton Chigurh (speaker), Carson Wells

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Anton Chigurh tracks down Carson Wells and prepares to murder him. Before he kills Wells, Chigurh taunts his victim. He wants to know: if the "rules" by which Wells lived his life brought him to this point (i.e., brought him to be murdered by Chigurh), what was the point of following the rules?

Chigurh's question is more profound than it might seem. As Chigurh sees it, the only reason to live according to a moral "code" (a religion, a philosophy, etc.) is that the code brings you some kind of success. There's no point in being, say, a Christian, if your Christian beliefs lead you to death. In short, Chigurh sneers at all of society's values and laws. Where most human beings delude themselves into following useless rules, Chigurh follows his own religion--the religion of random chance--and breaks all other rules.

You've been giving up things for years to get here. I dont think I even understood that. How does a man decide in what order to abandon his life? We're in the same line of work. Up to a point. Did you hold me in such contempt? Why would you do that? How did you let yourself get in this situation?

Related Characters: Anton Chigurh (speaker), Carson Wells

Related Themes:

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

In this complex scene, Anton Chigurh continues to talk to Carson Wells before murdering him. Chigurh makes a complicated, contradictory point, simultaneously distinguishing himself from Carson and identifying with him.

Chigurh criticizes Wells for living his life according to other people's rules. Wells obeys his bosses, and--crucially--he "worships" money. Chigurh, by contrast, seems not to care about money or authority--he's "his own boss," and can't be bought or paid off. In the end, Chigurh claims, Wells's love for money has been utterly futile--his love hasn't led to wealth or prosperity; it's led to his death at Chigurh's hands.

And yet Chigurh insists that he and Wells are alike, "up to a point." Both Chigurh and Wells would be considered criminals by society's standards. But according to Chigurh, Wells doesn't go far *enough* in rejecting conventional law and order. Wells breaks the law all the time, but he's allowed himself to be controlled by money--the ultimate symbol of society. Chigurh, by contrast, is totally amoral and totally nihilistic. He doesn't let anyone or anything control what he does--even himself. Instead, he submits to random chance.

Chapter 7 Quotes

Chigurh thought it an odd oversight but he knew that fear of an enemy can often blind men to other hazards, not least the shape which they themselves make in the world.

Related Characters: Anton Chigurh (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 198

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Anton Chigurh hunts down the man who sent Carson Wells to kill him. Chigurh sneaks into the man's building and waits for his victim to arrive. When Chigurh's victim enters, the man's own shadow lets Chigurh know that his victim is there. Chigurh finds it bizarre that his victim could have given away his presence so clumsily. Counterintuitively, fear makes his victim *less* cautious and more likely to die.

As the passage suggests, human beings sometimes become clumsy and careless when they're blinded by fear of another person. More to the point, people forget "the shapes they make in the world." Literally, the passage is referring to the shape of a man's shadow, but the passage could also be interpreted more symbolically. People forget how easy it is for others to follow them--Llewelynn Moss, for example, forgets how easy it is for Chigurh to track him down and kill him. Thus, the passage foreshadows the ugly fate that's coming to Moss.

Chapter 8 Quotes

That aint half of it. [The drug dealers] dont even think about the law. It dont seem to even concern em. Of course here a while back in San Antonio they shot and killed a federal judge. I guess he concerned em. Add to that that there's peace officers along this border getting rich off narcotics. That's a painful thing to know. Or it is for me. I dont believe that was true even ten years ago. A crooked peace officer is just a damn abomination.

Related Characters: Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

In the prologue to Chapter 8, Bell continues to lament the decay of law and order. Even a decade ago, he claims, there were no corrupt peace officers--nowadays, however, the prevalence of drugs has led to police officers who secretly sell drugs and profit at every turn.

Bell's point is that criminals no longer try to kill police officers--unless the officers are corrupt, and need to be taken "out of the picture." Police officers have become so ineffectual that criminals have no practical need to murder them. In short, Bell is humiliated and embarrassed by the incompetence and corruption of his peers, and, as usual, he nostalgically looks back to an idealized past to contrast to the current state of affairs.

The point is there aint no point.

Related Characters: The Young Hitchhiker (speaker), Loretta Bell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Llewellyn Moss crosses paths with a young female hitchhiker. They drive together, not even bothering to share names. In the car, Moss begins to talk about the "one who follows"--a figure whom the young woman thinks is God, but whom we know to be Anton Chigurh. Eventually, the young woman asks Moss what's the point of his ramblings--Moss responds that there is no point.

The quote encapsulates the bleak nihilism of the novel. There is no "point"--no moral or intellectual *meaning*--inlife, Moss seems to suggest. He's going to die because he's stolen money from drug dealers, and there's basically nothing he can do about it except wait for death.

And yet Moss's quote suggests that there is a kind of freedom in accepting that life has no point. Moss seems to be accepting his fate, where before he tried to avoid it by running away. Moss's observation also sums up Chigurh's nihilistic philosophy. Chigurh doesn't believe in religion or philosophy of any kind--and yet his *lack* of belief becomes a kind of religion, a belief in the power of chance and randomness that acts as Chigurh's guiding principle. In short, at the end of his life, Moss seems to accept some of the same depressing ideas about life that Chigurh upholds.

Chapter 9 Quotes

Not everyone is suited to this line of work. The prospect of outsized profits leads people to exaggerate their own capabilities. In their minds. They pretend to themselves that they are in control of events where perhaps they are not. And it is always one's stance upon uncertain ground that invites the attentions of one's enemies. Or discourages it.

Related Characters: Anton Chigurh (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 253

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Anton Chigurh returns the drug money to its "rightful" owner, a quiet man who works in an office. As he leaves, Chigurh warns the man not to believe that he controls his own destiny--no one does. Chigurh even suggests that the belief that one controls destiny is a sign of weakness--an invitation for failure and defeat.

The passage is arguably Chigurh's most coherent explanation of his own philosophy. Chigurh believes that fate (or random chance) is the ultimate authority in the universe--nobody can control it or master it, Chigurh included. Even powerful drug lords, who control millions of dollars, have no real control over their own destinies--at any given time, they could lose their money or be killed. The only source of power, paradoxically, is accepting one's own powerlessness. Chigurh has long since accepted that randomness governs his own life--and ironically, his acceptance is what makes him such a dangerous enemy for Moss and the other characters (for example, he refuses money and bribery, and can't be bought or pleaded with).

Every moment in your life is a turning and every one a choosing. Somewhere you made a choice. All followed to this. The accounting is scrupulous. The shape is drawn. No line can be erased. I had no believe in your ability to move a coin to your bidding. How could you? A Person's path through the world seldom changes and even more seldom will it change abruptly. And the shape of your path was visible from the beginning.

Related Characters: Anton Chigurh (speaker), Carla Jean Moss

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 259

Explanation and Analysis

In this disturbing scene, Anton Chigurh tracks down Carla Jean and prepares to murder her, claiming that Llewellyn Moss has doomed her by refusing to part with his money. He gives her the chance to save her life by flipping a coin--when Carla Jean makes the wrong call, Chigurh prepares to shoot her. Before dying, Carla Jean asks Chigurh how he can choose whether or not to kill someone based on a simple coin toss.

Chigurh offers Carla Jean a long, contradictory explanation for his own behavior. As Chigurh sees it, humans go through life with free will--they exercise their freedom thousands of times. And yet all these free choices can't save a human being from the inevitable act of dying, which no one can choose to escape. Chigurh sees himself as an executor of fate, neither good nor evil. Paradoxically, he describes Carl Jean's death as both fated and a product of her free will: she "made a choice" that led her here, and yet cannot escape her predetermined fate ("visible from the beginning") in the present moment.

Chigurh's philosophy, in short, is contradictory and baffling. What makes Chigurh so maddening is that Chigurh himself refuses to exercise any free will: he just lives out his dark philosophy, obeying his own word and the "law of the coin toss."

How come people dont feel like this country has got a lot to answer for? They dont. You can say that the country is just the country, it dont actively do nothing, but that dont mean much...This country will kill you in a heartbeat and still people love it. You understand what I'm sayin?

Related Characters: Uncle Ellis (speaker), Sheriff Ed Tom Bell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 271

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Sheriff Bell talks to an old relative, Uncle Ellis. Ellis challenges Bell's nostalgia for the past, pointing out that the nation of America has always been violent and dangerous, killing its own citizens. Ellis is old enough to remember some of the wars Americans have fought in long

ago. Moreover, he's critical of the people who continue to trust their country long after their country proves itself to be corrupt.

In short, Uncle Ellis's words challenge everything Sheriff Bell has been telling us. Bell naively believes that things were better a time long ago in America--a belief that Ellis angrily disputes. Bell continues to feel a deep faith in American law enforcement and government, even if he doesn't like specific law enforcers and governors. Ellis tells Bell that he should throw aside his own love for his country and for the past: life has always been and will always be savage.

Chapter 10 Quotes

I thought about my family and about [Ellis] out there in his wheelchair in the old house and it just seemed to me that this country has got a strange kind of history and a damned bloody one too.

Related Characters: Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (speaker), Uncle Ellis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bell thinks about his recent conversation with Uncle Ellis--a conversation that ended with Ellis angrily telling Bell that America has always been a violent, amoral country. Bell has always had a lot of faith in the idyllic past: he sincerely believes that things used to be good in the U.S., and now they're bad.

Now that he's spoken with Uncle Ellis, Bell starts to question his own naive faith in America's past. America has always been dangerous, Bell realizes--therefore, he was wrong to celebrate American history as a model for honor and morality.It would seem that Bell is finally losing his moral faith. After 200 pages of acting as the "moral center" of the novel, Bell is finally surrendering to the darkness and nihilism of life. This is, as the novel's title says, "no country for [loyal, moral] old men."

Chapter 11 Quotes

I told him that a lawyer one time told me that in law school they try and teach you not to worry about right and wrong but just to follow the law and I said I wasnt so sure about that. He thought about that and he nodded and he said that he pretty much had to agree...if you dont follow the law right and wrong wont save you.

Related Characters: Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 298

Explanation and Analysis

Sheriff Bell crosses paths with a young lawyer, with whom Bell discusses law in the United States. The prosecutor confirms Bell's worst suspicions: he claims that the purpose of the legal system of the United States is to maintain law, not to "do the right thing."

In short, the institutions of law and order--the very thing that Bell continues to trust after all these years--are no more "right" than organized crime. Courts and juries aren't really designed to dole out justice to people; they're designed to preserve the law itself, whether the law is morally correct or not. In general, the passage further challenges Bell's faith in morality. There is no institution, it would seem, that's genuinely concerned with good, moral behavior. Bell's only benchmark for right and wrong, then, is his own instinct.

Chapter 12 Quotes

She was tryin to be a reporter. She said: Sheriff how come you to let crime get so out of hand in your county? Sounded like a fair question I reckon. Maybe it was a fair question. Anyway I told her, I said: It starts when you begin to overlook bad manners. Anytime you quit hearin Sir and Mam the end is pretty much in sight. I told her, I said: It reaches into every strata. You've heard about that aint you?...I told her that you cant have a dope business without dopers. A lot of em are well dressed and holdin down goodpayin jobs too.

Related Characters: Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 304

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sheriff Bell offers his own theory for the

decay of society. Bell, when asked by a reporter why crime is so bad in the U.S., claims that crime begins with the decay of manners. When people don't say Sir and Ma'am, "the end is pretty much in sight."

Bell seems to believe in a kind of "broken window hypothesis" of crime: i.e., he believes that small crimes and misdemeanors gradually give rise to big crimes like murder and theft. It's difficult to tell if Bell is being totally sincere in this passage, though. Bell's explanation may explain *some* crimes, but it can't do justice to a figure like Anton Chigurh. (Chigurh, we can be pretty sure, didn't become a criminal simply because he didn't say "please" as a child.)

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ This man had set down with a hammer and a chisel and carved out a stone water trough to last ten thousand years. Why was that? What was it that he had faith in? It wasn't that nothing would change. Which is what you might think, I suppose. He had to know bettern that. I've thought about it a great deal…And I have to say that the only thing I can think is that there was some sort of promise in his heart.

Related Characters: Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 308

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sheriff Bell recalls a stone trough that he saw long ago. The trough makes a great impression on him: it strikes him as a symbol of everything that humans, and human civilization, are capable of. The stone trough will still be there in thousands of years, exactly the same as it is now. When Bell tries to understand why anyone would carve such a trough, he concludes that the sculptor must have been trying to honor "a promise."

What does Bell mean by "a promise?" Perhaps Bell is suggesting that it takes faith to build something like the stone trough: faith in the correctness and usefulness of one's own profession. The sculptor carves the trough because he's confident that his work will bring help and comfort to people for many years. It could also be something vaguer and more individual, like a sense of hope or optimism. Sheriff Bell obviously admires the sculptor deeply: Bell struggles to bring the same commitment and optimism to his own work as a law enforcement officer, but by now he can't help but feel that his work is useless. He'll never be able to reduce crime or fight people like Chigurh. In part, Bell's poignant admiration for the sculptor's work explains why Bell chose to retire: he knew he could never create anything as useful and long-lasting.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The novel begins with a monologue from Sheriff Ed Tom Bell. Each of the following chapters begins with a similar monologue told from the present tense, after the story's events. Bell speaks about a nineteen-year-old man who is on his way to the gas chamber because of Bell's testimony. The young man murdered his fourteen-year-old girlfriend. Bell meets with the young man before his execution. The papers have suggested that the murder was a crime of passion, but the young man tells him there wasn't any passion to it. The young man tells Bell he knows he is going to hell. Bell wonders if this young man is "a new kind", and wonders what society can say to a man who believes he has no soul.

That Sherriff Bell frames the story of No Country for Old Men *with monologues told after the events of the story suggests that these events have profoundly changed him. Bell's anecdote about the young man has no connection, in terms of plot, with the rest of the story. His decision to include it suggests that the anecdote has an explanatory or spiritual connection to the events of the story; this connection seems to be Bell's conviction that some new evil or amorality is rising—what he calls "a new kind"—as well as his profound doubt about what society can do about it.*

Bell believes there is a way to view the world that is different than his, and suggests that there is a true and living prophet of destruction walking through the world. Bell has crossed paths with the prophet, but doesn't want to do it again. He reflects on his job as Sheriff, stating that you have to be willing to put your soul at risk to confront a man like the prophet, and he is unwilling to gamble with his soul.

Bell is referencing Anton Chigurh, the novel's antagonist, when he mentions the prophet of destruction. Chigurh has not appeared yet in the narrative, but Bell has witnessed Chigurh's wrath, and understands Chigurh's philosophy and beliefs stand in direct contrast to his own. Chigurh operates outside of societal conceptions of morality and higher law, which challenges Bell philosophically and spiritually. His unwillingness to gamble with his soul foreshadows his later decision to quit the police force and surrender to his inability to influence the overwhelming forces of evil in the world.

The narration then moves to the past, and cuts to Anton Chigurh who is handcuffed in the police station. The deputy, who has his back to Chigurh, calls Sheriff Lamar, a sheriff who serves in Sonora, and tells him Chigurh has an instrument that looks like an oxygen tank, but is connected to a **bolt gun** like the ones used to kill livestock in slaughterhouses. The deputy says he's "Got it covered," but even as he does so, Chigurh squats down and steps over the handcuffs, bringing them forward from behind his back. He has practiced this maneuver many times. Chigurh strangles the deputy with the handcuffs, pulling so hard the deputy's carotid artery bursts, and blood sprays the walls. They fall to the ground, and Chigurh holds him there, breathing quietly as the deputy dies.

The deputy's false sense of control over the situation leads to his demise, an early example of how the novel treats fate as something beyond anyone's control. Chigurh's escape signifies his disregard for the boundaries of the law, and the fact that the law is unable to contain him. The details of the brutal murder show Chigurh's violent nature. He is devoid of empathy and morals, and has no regard for human life. His composure and lack of emotion during and after the murder, shown through his quiet breathing, suggests that he has prior experience with this kind of violence.

Chigurh unlocks the cuffs, and puts the officer's gun in his waistband. He cleans the wounds on his wrists in the sink. As he bandages his wrists, he studies his victim. Afterward, he takes the deputy's money, leaving his wallet on the floor. Before he leaves, he grabs his air tank and **bolt gun**.

Even though Chigurh may seem, at times, to lack human feeling and empathy, the wounds on his wrists show his humanity and vulnerability. Chigurh is driven by pragmatism, as opposed to greed, which is subtly depicted through his decision to take the money, but refrain from looking through the wallet.

Chigurh steals the deputy's cruiser and drives down the interstate. He pulls over a Ford Sedan, and tells the driver to step out of the car. Chigurh sees the doubt come into the man's eyes as he realizes Chigurh is not a police officer. Chigurh places his free hand on the man's head "like a faith healer", and kills him with the **bolt gun**. Before leaving, Chigurh tells the dead man he just didn't want to get blood in the car.

Though Chigurh perceives himself as outside of the law, he freely manipulates the authority granted to law enforcement by getting the man to pull over. The man's realization that Chigurh is not an officer and Chigurh's gesture of placing his hand on the man's head like a "faith healer" links the law with the "higher law" of religion. Chigurh's facetious comment to the dead man again shows his lack of empathy and concern for the man.

The narrative then moves to Llewellyn Moss. Moss positions himself on a ridge with his rifle and binoculars. It is early morning, and the desert is cast in shadows from the ridge and desert plants. Moss's shadow is out there somewhere. Below him, he sees a herd of antelope. Further back, the mountains of Mexico rise from the south. He takes off his boot and lies down, resting the barrel of the rifle on it. The antelopes rear their heads, having spotted him. The sun is behind him, so they couldn't have seen the reflection in the scope's lens. He aims the rifle, noting that he knows the exact drop of the bullet in hundred yard increments, but the exact distance is uncertain.

The shadows in the desert point metaphorically toward the darkness Moss will confront, and the presence of his own shadow suggests he will become entangled in this darkness. Moss's actions reveal his expertise in hunting and shooting—skills he gained as a sniper in Vietnam—but the fact that the antelope detect him suggests his skills are flawed. The uncertain distance relates to the issue of morality and free will—individuals have the free will to make decisions, but the moral boundaries and the exact outcomes are often unclear.

Moss fires. It takes the bullet a second to get there, but the sound takes twice that. He misses his shot and the bullet sends a plume of dust into the air. The antelope run. One of the antelope limps as it runs away, and Moss thinks the bullet must have ricocheted up and caught the animal in the leg. He stands and looks at the desert, noting that the dust kicked up by the shot is gone, as if nothing had occurred at all. He ejects the bullet casing and puts it in his pocket.

The bullet moving faster than the sound and the way the dust quickly disappears shows how death can arrive without warning and leave no trace. The missed shot again suggests that Moss is flawed. The fact that the missed shot still hits the animal is an early indicator of the role chance will play in the narrative. Just because the intended action didn't hit the target doesn't mean there won't be consequences.

Moss sets out across the desert. As he climbs another slope, he looks out and sees a pit-bull with cropped ears limping across the desert. The dog pauses and looks back before continuing forward. He continues up the path, passing some rocks etched in ancient pictographs. Moss notes they were carved by hunters like him, but there is no trace of these men except for their carvings. As he reaches the ridge, he sees three vehicles parked on the floodplain below him. He looks through the binoculars and sees men lying dead on the ground.

Cropped ears on a pit-bull are often a sign of dog fighting. This detail connects the situation to corruption and greed, pointing to the way in which individuals exploit weaker beings for power and profit. The pictographs connect Moss to the ancient past. Though these ancient hunters are gone, Moss is engaging in the same activity, evoking the idea that even though times have changed, certain elements of the past remain. The carnage at the scene shows the outcomes of the greed and corruption involved in the drug trade.

Moss approaches the vehicles with his rifle drawn, and the safety off. Among the dead bodies, he sees another dog killed by gunfire. He checks two vehicles, finding one empty and one with a dead body inside. In the third vehicle, he discovers a severely wounded Mexican man. Moss stumbles back, raising the rifle. The man begs moss in Spanish for water, calling him buddy in Spanish, and asking in the name of God. Moss takes the man's gun, and tells him he doesn't have any water.

The presence of the dead dog among the dead men suggests metaphorically that the murderers do not value human life any more than that of animals. From the moral and ethical standpoint of the killers, both are worthless. The wounded man's plea for water in the name of God forces Moss to make a moral decision and confront the idea of higher law. Though he is dismissive of the man in this moment, he will later feel guilty about his lack of morality.

Moss discovers bricks of heroin covered in a tarp in the rear of the truck. He covers the bricks again, and looks out over the desert. He begins wiping his fingerprints off of the surfaces he has touched, and then collects the several guns lying around. Returning to the dying man, he asks in broken Spanish if there are other guns. The man tells him there is one in his bag. Moss asks if the man speaks English, but he doesn't answer. The man asks again in Spanish for water. Again, Moss tells him he doesn't have any. As he leaves, the man asks him to close the door. He is worried about wolves and mountain lions. Moss says there aren't any wolves, but he uses his elbow to close the door anyways.

Moss realizes he is in a very dangerous situation, but instead of leaving, he attempts to gain control over the situation by covering his tracks and collecting the guns. These actions demonstrate his philosophical orientation toward autonomy and self-reliance. The language barrier between Moss and the Mexican man does not stop Moss from acting ethically and empathetically. The man's comment about dangerous animals foreshadows the men who will come in search of the drugs and money. Moss does not see the significance of this comment, and his shortsightedness shows the flaws in his philosophy of autonomy and self-reliance.

Moss realizes someone has survived the carnage, and discovers a trail of blood across the caldera. He begins to track the missing man, commenting that the man thinks he is going to escape, but he isn't. Moss reasons that the man would have sought some shade and would not have climbed uphill if he were injured. He climbs a ridge, and from the top, to the north, he sees a tractor-trailer pass on Highway 90. Then, he spots something blue down below. He waits the better part of an hour, watching through his binoculars before he starts down.

It can be assumed that Moss understands the "last man" is holding the money, and his decision to pursue the man shows how greed can impair judgment. He is given the opportunity to choose in this moment, and therefore, must exercise his free will. Moss's decision constitutes a major step toward his demise, and furthers the idea that every action a person takes, no matter how well planned or executed, leads toward his or her inescapable fate.

The dead man is leaned up against a rock. A government issue .45 automatic and a leather **briefcase** rest beside him. Moss takes the gun and tries to wipe the blood off the grip but it is too well congealed. He looks across the desert again, and then approaches the briefcase. He knows there is money inside, and feels scared in a way he doesn't understand. He takes the briefcase a short distance away, and opens it. The briefcase is full of hundred dollar bills, fastened with bank tape stamped $10,000. He sits and closes his eyes, seeing his whole life there in front of him, day after day from dawn till dark until he was dead.

The pistol draws a connection between the government and the drug trade, suggesting that corruption occurs on a grand scale. Being a working class individual, Moss knows the money will change his life, leading him to think about where he has come from and where he his heading. He is aware of the danger, as shown through his reference to death, but the temptation of a better life outweighs the risks.

Before leaving, Moss considers the dead man and the way his life ended in this place. Then Moss sets out, taking **the briefcase** with him, and weighing the dangers of his escape. He could be bitten by a rattlesnake or arrested for carrying the illegal weapons he took from the scene, but worst of all, he realizes that someone will be looking for the money he has taken.

Moss confronts the possibility of his own fate as he studies the man. The immediate dangers he faces in the desert are grave, but he understands that the owners of the money are far more dangerous than the landscape or the law. Even knowing this, he decides to take the money, trusting himself to defeat those who will seek his death.

Moss walks for several hours before reaching his truck. He leaves his headlights off until he reaches the highway, then he turns them on and begins home. He checks the speed limit every mile of the way. He stops once for a pack of cigarettes for his wife Carla Jean. When he reaches his trailer he sees the lights are on. He sits in the car for a moment and realizes the importance of this day. He will never experience another one like it. As soon as he says it he feels sorry.

Moss's wariness in keeping the headlights on and following the speed limit closely shows how aware he is of the danger he is in. He stops for the cigarettes knowing Carla Jean will want some, which suggests he is thinking about her as he carts the money home. As he sits in the car, he realizes that his life with Carla Jean will never be the same, and in this moment the implications of his decision begin to set in, leading to a feeling of remorse.

Inside, Moss finds Carla Jean sitting on the couch. She asks what is in **the briefcase**. He tells her it is full of money, but she doesn't believe him. He hides the briefcase beneath the bed, and goes out to the truck to get her cigarettes, returning with his binoculars, rifle, and the pistol he took from the murder scene. Carla Jean asks where he got the pistol, and Moss tells her he found it. Again, Carla Jean doesn't believe him. She tells him she doesn't even want to know where he was. He tells her it's better not to know.

Moss is as honest as he can be with Carla Jean, but he keeps the details from her as not to frighten her. Though Moss loves Carla Jean, he is a fiercely autonomous person, and Carla Jean knows this. He is already worried about her safety, and feels it better to keep the information secret as a measure of protection.

Moss wakes up at 1:06am and sits up. He looks at Carla Jean, still asleep, and pulls the blanket up over her shoulder before going into the kitchen. He takes a drink of water, and stares out the window toward the highway. He goes back into the bedroom and takes out **the briefcase**. Opening it, he reaches in and figures that it holds about 2.4 million dollars. He tells himself he has to take this seriously; he can't treat it like luck. He looks back out the window, realizing it wasn't the money that woke him, but the man he left out in the desert without any water.

Moss is roused by the guilt he feels about leaving the man without water in the desert. Though he does not always make moral decisions and often acts outside the boundaries of the law, he does have a strong moral center, and values human life. His tenderness toward Carla Jean shows his love and concern for her, even though he has made a bad decision and put her at risk. Moss makes the decision not to rely on luck, but he foolishly continues to believe he can overcome luck and chance through self-reliance and careful action.

Carla Jean wakes up as Moss is getting dressed. She asks him where he is going, and he tells her he is about to do something incredibly stupid, but is going anyways. He tells Carla Jean that if he doesn't return, to tell his mother he loves her. She reminds him his mother is dead, and he says he will tell her himself then. He fills a gallon jug of water at the sink. Carla Jean follows him into the kitchen, telling him she doesn't want him to go. He says he doesn't want to go either, but he has to.

Though Moss recognizes the danger of his decision to help the man, he is overcome by a sense of moral responsibility. Moss feels he must abide by his own sense of morality. He is very aware that he may die as the result of his actions, but in Moss's mind, dying while doing the right thing is better than living with regret.

Moss stops at a filling station to study a map of the terrain. He has all terrain tires on his truck, but he notes that the landscape is treacherous. He drives out on the deserted road, noting that he is so far out the radio won't even receive static, it is completely dead. When the moon is up, he shuts out his headlights and continues driving into the desert. Before he reaches the man, he parks the truck and sits for a moment, thinking about what he is about to do. He asks himself why he risking his life for a Mexican drug dealer, but justifies it by saying everyone is worth something.

Moss is confronting how alone he is in the landscape and in his decision to risk his life. Even though Moss does not follow societal conventions of morality, ethics, and law, he has a strong internal sense of morality and places a high value on human life. His moral compass leads him to pause and think before moving forward with his plan.

Before Moss parks the car, he takes the bulb out of the dome light. He takes the jug of water and the pistol and starts out toward the man. As he approaches, he notes that his shadow was more company than he would have liked. He is out there among the dead, but he attempts to stay calm, reminding himself he is not yet one of them. When he gets close to the truck, he sees the door is open. He immediately recognizes his mistake, calling himself a "dumbass," and noting that he is too stupid to live. He finds the man leaned over, with fresh blood coating the interior of the truck, and discovers the heroin and the weapons are missing.

In the same way the shadows earlier in the novel represent a figurative darkness, or a touch of evil, Moss's aversion to his own shadow suggests that he'd rather turn away from the ugly parts of himself, especially the greed that led him here. He confronts death once again when he sees the bodies, but knows he must compose himself, for a single wrong move could mean the end of his life. His mistake and the self-loathing he feels show that in No Country for Old Men, *acting in an ethical way does not guarantee positive outcomes.*

As Moss makes his way back to his truck, he sees someone standing beside it. He realizes what a fool he is for coming back, and believes he is going to die. He lays flat on the ground, trying not to think about the snakes and spiders that call this place home. The truck circles around him, searching with a spotlight. As the spotlight sweeps past him he thinks it would be better for everyone if he were put out of his misery. He moves again, realizing he will never see his truck again, and in that moment thinks there are many things he will never see again. As he tries to escape, he berates and mocks himself for his decision to help the man.

Until this moment, Moss has only speculated about his death, but now he confronts the men who might actually kill him. He also recognizes in a very concrete way that his relationship and future with Carla Jean will change—they will always be running and hiding from these dangerous men. Moss's continued self-reproach reaffirms the idea that "no good deed goes unpunished": even acting morally, such as by offering help to a person in need, can lead to trouble.

Moss runs toward the sound of a river, realizing that he needs to be somewhere with cover before daylight. As he runs, he notes that he has had this feeling before, in another country, and he thought he'd never feel it again. As he reaches the flood plain, the truck begins to approach him from behind. He takes the gun from his belt, and sets off, running as fast as he can. The men in the truck begin firing shots at him. He hears the buckshot fly over his head, and is struck in the back of the arm, though he doesn't notice until later.

The last time Moss had this feeling was during his tour in Vietnam. Moss's experience in Vietnam has shaped his personality and moral code, and has taught him how to survive in situations like the one he is in. The emergence of this feeling suggests that the past has never left him, and this regression back into this state of mind leads to detachment, making him unable to feel the shot that hits him in the arm.

Moss falls down a steep bank, and lands hard letting out a groan. Two men appear against the sky on the ridge above him and he fires at them until they flee. He dives into the river, and emerges from the water a mile down stream. He hides some vegetation called "river cane", and when he looks back and sees the truck is gone. He sees the men up river, but thinks about his truck abandoned in the desert. He knows within 24 hours, the men will be able to call the courthouse with the vehicle number and get his information. He understands they will never stop looking for him. He thinks of his brother in California, and wonders how he will explain the danger he is in. Eventually, he runs east forward Langtry, Texas, realizing, as the river drops away behind him, that he didn't even take a drink.

Moss stumbling upon the river is an example of how chance and luck can have a big impact on our lives. The river works symbolically in the novel. As a Christian symbol, water represents redemption and rebirth. In this moment, Moss saves himself by jumping in the river, and he emerges with a new understanding of his situation and a new role as a man on the run. He realizes his life will change, and must confront the way in which his decision to take the money will affect those around him. Forgetting to take a drink, however, shows that his survival skills are flawed, and foreshadows the missteps he will make as the novel continues.

CHAPTER 2

The narrative moves back to Bell's monologue in the present tense. He contemplates whether working in law enforcement is more dangerous now than it was in the past. When he first became sheriff, he'd break up fistfights, and sometimes he had to defend himself, but now, he sees worse. One night, he found a truck with Coahuila plates parked on a back road. Two men sat in the bed. He hit the lights, and someone handed a shotgun through the back window to one of the men in the bed. Bell slammed on his brakes and went off the road. The man started firing. Bell fired back, but the criminals escaped. Bell realizes that the he is dealing with very serious people.

During his time as sheriff, Bell has seen societal changes, mostly regarding the effects of the drug trade on the U.S./Mexico border. The suspected drug dealers' willingness to shoot at a police officer shows that they completely disregard the law, and forces Bell to confront the evolving danger of the job. Their escape causes a feeling of powerlessness in Bell, and forces him to question whether the law can bring justice to these dangerous men.

After the shoot out, Bell drove to a café in Sanderson, Texas. People came out to see the bullet holes in the cruiser. He was criticized for escaping unharmed, and people say he is just showing off. He read the papers, trying to figure out what danger might be heading his way. He states that it is getting harder to keep order in his community. He tells a story about two men, one from California and one from Florida, who went on a killing spree. The men had never met, but they came together randomly and started killing. He guesses it was just chance and that there can't be many people like that out there, but he doesn't know. He even read about a woman who put her baby in a trash compactor. He wonders who would ever do such a thing.

The people in the community expect Bell to protect them, and criticize him for letting the criminals escape, but their expectations are unrealistic: the law can only do so much to protect people from danger and criminals. The story about the two murderers demonstrates the way chance can bring together two people who then exercise their free will to do evil. Bell's struggle to understand why a woman would murder her child shows his strong sense of morality. Crimes like this make him worry that society is falling into chaos and immorality.

The narrative then moves back to the past. Bell goes to his office and gets a call from a deputy named Torbert telling him they have a body in the trunk of an abandoned police cruiser on the side of the highway. They don't know it yet, but this is the man Chigurh killed before taking the man's car, leaving the police cruiser he took after escaping custody. He tells the deputy to keep his lights on and the trunk closed—he will be there in fifty minutes. When Bell arrives with another officer, Wendell, they look at the body in the trunk. Bell says it's just dumb luck; the man was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Bell's direction to keep the man hidden in the trunk shows desire to protect the public from having to witness the violence occurring in the community, and to keep people from asking too many questions. Without knowing the whole story, Bell blames the situation on luck. In part this is true—the man was in the wrong place at the wrong time—but Bell does not take fate and free will into account.

Bell states that the wound in the man's head looks as if it came from a .45. They don't know about Chigurh's **bolt gun** yet. They talk about the next move. Bell tells Torbert to take the police cruiser to Austin with the body in the trunk and they will pick him up there. Torbert asks what information they have on the perpetrator and Bell tells him they have nothing. He says he hopes the murderer is all the way in California by now, though he doubts that is the case. He tells Torbert to fill out the report, but leave the man's name off of it since he might have family, and if he gets stopped on the way to Austin, to play dumb about the body. Torbert jokes that if he gets caught they will have to get him off of death row. Wendell says if they can't get him out, they will join him there. Bell tells them not to joke about the dead that way. Wendell agrees, stating he might be a dead man himself one day.

As an experienced lawman, Bell begins to examine the crime scene, but he does not yet know that Chigurh is a killer who operates outside of traditional frameworks of morality and justice. The comment about the police report can be read in two ways. In one sense, Bell wants to protect the man's family from hearing about the murder before someone has the chance to talk to them. In another sense, Bell is hiding information to protect himself and his department until they have more information, which reveals that Bell runs his department without a strict allegiance to the law. Bell's comment about death shows his reverence for the departed, and Wendell's follow up comment reaffirms that in their line of work, death can come at any moment.

Back on Highway 90, Bell comes across a big red-tailed hawk, dead in the road. He picks it up and lays it in the grass on the edge of the highway. The hawks sit on the power lines and hunt for unsuspecting small animals that cross the highway. He looks across the desert, and beyond to the stone arroyos, and notes that there are tracks from dragons out in the desert. He notes that God, who has scoured the following land with salt and ash, lives in silence. Then he leaves.

Even though the hawk is a predator, Bell has compassion for it and a respect for life. The mention of the dragons hearkens back to a historical period in which violence and predation were the norm. The presence of the tracks suggests that these elements of the past continue to exist in the present. The comment about God shows the shifting nature of Bell's religious beliefs in the face of the violence he just encountered. He is beginning to waiver in his faith in God and God's care for humanity.

Bell heads to the sheriffs office in Sonora, and finds the building surrounded by yellow police tape. People ask him what happened, but he tells them he doesn't know, he just got there. Bell finds Lamar inside, at the scene where Chigurh killed the deputy. They walk outside, and Lamar notes that as a child he used to play games in the spot where they now stand. He notes that the youngsters today wouldn't even about the games he played. Lamar says if he finds the murderer, he will kill him before he gets his day in court. Lamar tells Bell that the deputy was 23 years old, married, and straight as a die. They are dealing with a lunatic, he says. After realizing he has to tell the deputy's young wife he is dead, he tells Bell he is going to quit. Bell says he has a feeling they are dealing with a type of killer that have never seen before. He tells Lamar he hopes he doesn't quit. They are going to need all of the officers they can get.

As a sheriff, Bell embodies the idea of the law, and the community turns to him to provide answers and deliver justice. Bell expects the same from himself, and struggles to confront the limits of his power in the face of a changing society. Like Bell, Lamar is coming to terms with the changing society, as shown through his mention of the games. His desire to kill Chigurh is an expression of his frustration with the criminal justice system. He does not believe justice will be served by operating within the boundaries of the law. Both men struggle to understand Chigurh's complete absence of morality. In their view of the world, terrible things like this should not happen to good men, but Chigurh does not share this world view. Bell still has hope that they will bring Chigurh to justice and encourages Lamar to continue his work, but Bell will later begin to fight this same battle, and eventually quit the police force.

The narrative moves to Moss who is taking a bus home after escaping from the Mexicans. When he walks in to the trailer, Carla Jean rushes off of the couch, and hugs him, telling him she thought he was dead. He tells her he isn't dead, so she shouldn't cry. She makes him some eggs and bacon, while he showers. As he eats, she asks him about the wound on the back of his arm and his leg. Carla Jean says she wants the truth, but quickly notes she knows he will not tell her.

Here we get some insight into Moss and Carla Jean's relationship. Carla Jean is a loving and concerned wife. She understands that her husband will not tell her the full truth. In this moment, Moss feels it is right for him to remain calm and protect Carla Jean in order to ensure a future together.

Moss tells Carla Jean she needs to pack her things. Whatever she doesn't take, he says, she will never see again. He tells her to go to her grandmother's house in Odessa and wait for him there. She doesn't believe him at first, and asks what is in **the briefcase**. He tells her it contains money, and says she doesn't have a choice about leaving—she needs to get on a bus and go to her grandmother's house. She asks where the truck is, and he tells her that it's gone the way of all flesh, noting that nothing lasts forever. She tries again to care for his wounded arm, and Moss mockingly says he thinks there is some buckshot salve in the cabinet. She is worried by the fact that he was shot. He tells her he was just saying it to get her stirred up, and she needs to get moving.

Moss knows that their future will now be dictated by his decision to take the money. His comment about the truck implies that he accepts this fate, and views it as a natural part of life. He continues to make light of the situation, which suggests two things. First, that he is trying to remain calm for Carla Jean, but also that he does fully understand the depth of the trouble he will face when he meets Chigurh and the other parties seeking the money.

The narrative cuts to Chigurh as he pulls into a filling station. He makes a phone call, fills his tank, and goes inside to pay. The proprietor asks about the weather in Dallas, noticing the license plate on Chigurh's car. Chigurh asks him if it is any of his business. The proprietor says he didn't mean anything by it. Chigurh buys a bag of cashews. The man places his change on the counter the way a dealer in a casino places chips. Chigurh stares the proprietor down, eating his cashews. The proprietor, growing worried, tells Chigurh he needs to close the store. Chigurh begins asking the proprietor personal questions: what time he goes to bed, whether he lives in the house behind the store, and how long he has lived there. The man answers hesitantly, and his concern grows.

The proprietor's comment about the weather and Chigurh's reaction shows how the smallest actions can have unpredictable consequences. Again, there is a gambling reference in the coins being placed like casino chips, alluding to the presence of chance in every action. Chigurh tends to ignore societal norms, as shown by the personal questions he asks the man. This exchange also shows Chigurh's menacing power. The man begins to sense that something is wrong, which becomes a trope in the story: Chigurh's very presence instills feelings of terror.

Chigurh asks the proprietor about the most he's ever lost in a coin toss. The man says people don't generally bet on coin tosses, but use them to settle things. Chigurh flips **the coin** and slaps it onto the back of his arm with his fingers over it. He tells the proprietor to call it. The proprietor says he wants to know what he stands to win or lose. Chigurh says knowing wouldn't change anything. Chigurh tells the man he needs to call it since it wouldn't be fair for Chigurh to call it for him.

Chigurh uses the coin to demonstrate the function of chance and free will in determining fate. The proprietor does not understand that Chigurh is out to settle whether he lives or dies, which connects to the idea of fate in a larger sense—we are gambling for our lives with each and every decision we make, whether we realize it or not. Chigurh's allowing the man to call the coin toss gives the illusion of free will: whatever side he calls, he's still playing by Chigurh's rules and will almost certainly lose.

The proprietor resists, saying he hasn't put anything up for bet. Chigurh tells him he has been putting it up his entire life. He tells the man the date on **the coin** is 1958, meaning the coin has been traveling twenty-two years to get there. Now it is there, and so is Chigurh. The coin has been flipped, and now the man needs to call it. Again, the man says he doesn't know what he stands to win. Chigurh says he stands to win everything. The man calls heads, and gets it right.

Chigurh believes that each and every action a person takes is a gamble that leads us closer to our ultimate fate, which is death. The suggestion that the coin has been traveling toward the man for twenty-two years suggests that fate is inevitable, even if it seems random and changeable. This idea complicates the idea of free will. If one's fate has been determined, then free will becomes a myth. In Chigurh's view, the only way to avoid fate is by chance, and in this moment, the man's life is spared by the luck of a coin flip.

Chigurh tells the proprietor well done and hands him **the coin**, telling him it's his lucky coin. The man moves to put the coin in his pocket, but Chigurh stops him. He says that if the coin goes into his pocket he won't know which one it is anymore. Anything can be an instrument, Chigurh says, even things you wouldn't notice. He continues: Things pass between people, but nobody pays attention, until one day there is an accounting. The problem is that people don't separate the act from the thing, thinking that some moment in history might be interchangeable with some other moment. How could that be? Chigurh asks. He says the coin is just a coin, then immediately asks whether it is or not. The Proprietor watches Chigurh leave, then puts both hands on the counter and stands there with his head bowed.

Chigurh has a code that dictates his actions. He does not decide a person's fate, the person brings the fate upon himself through his actions, and Chigurh delivers. Chigurh does not kill the proprietor because, in his view, chance has spared the man. Chigurh makes his philosophy clear when he tells the man that each and every choice in the past, no matter how small, has consequences in the future. Something as small as a coin toss can bring a person to their fate. Chigurh leaves the man with the question of whether it is just a coin or whether it is something more, allowing the man to choose whether or not he will abide by this philosophy.

Chigurh drives down Highway 90 before turning off onto a ranch road. He pulls up in front of a Dodge Ramcharger and shuts the engine down. Chigurh gets into the truck with two other men. They drive out to where Moss's truck is parked. Chigurh pries the aluminum inspection plate from the inside of the door. They go down to the scene of the failed drug deal, and Chigurh asks about the dead dog. Chigurh asks the men for a tracking device, designed to track the money that Moss has stolen. Chigurh then pulls out his gun and shoots both of the men in their heads. He takes their guns, before getting back into the truck and driving away.

In Chigurh's mind, there is no difference between a dead dog and a dead human, which is shown by his commenting on the dog and ignoring the dead men. By murdering his two associates, it becomes clear that Chigurh does not show allegiance to anyone. He is a free agent out for himself. At this point, Chigurh begins his pursuit of Moss. The impending pursuit will metaphorically demonstrate the inescapable nature of fate. Though Moss thinks he can overcome Chigurh, his choices, starting with the decision to take the money, will all play a key role in determining his fate.

CHAPTER 3

In this monologue, Bell reflects on the changing technology in law enforcement. He is not sure it helps, and notes that the new technology also falls into the hands of criminals. He prefers classic pistols and shotguns, so he doesn't have to hunt for the safety before firing. He also prefers older police vehicles with 454 engines, an engine you can't get anymore. He drove a new cruiser once, but told the man he'd prefer to stay with the old vehicle.

The nature of law enforcement has become complicated during Bell's career, and he sees police agencies struggling to keep up with the evolving nature of criminal activity. In order to keep up with changing technology in the hands of criminals, the police must also advance technologically, and Bell sees this as a negative cycle. He longs for a time when things were simple, but knows that by refusing to adapt, he is being left behind.

Bell goes on to note that the people who really deserve to be on death row don't end up there. He reflects on an execution he went to, noting that people don't know how to dress for an execution. The people there, however, knew what to do after the execution, which surprised him. After the execution, people got up and filed out, like they would at church. He states that some people, even those who work on death row, don't believe in the death penalty. You get to know the prisoners, and most of them aren't very intelligent. One man ate his last meal before his execution, but saved his desert for later.

Bell sees the connection between the failure of the criminal justice system, and the decay of morality within the community. The people believe capital punishment is justified by God's higher law, which is reflected in Bell's comment about church, but he has begun to question this idea. Even though the executed men are prisoners, Bell has empathy for them, and feels deep down that it is not ethical and not true justice. This point is expressed in the anecdote about the developmentally disabled man.

Bell is glad that he never had to kill anyone in the line of duty. He notes that sheriffs in the old days didn't even need to carry guns. He laments the loss of the concern for the people in the community that old-time sheriffs used to have. One sheriff, who Bell calls "Nigger Hoskins," knew everybody's name and phone number in his county by heart. He notes how strange it is that there is no requirement to become a sheriff in Texas. He finds this especially unsettling because the job pretty much gives you the same authority as God, but does not require any special qualifications.

Bell's use of the word "nigger" complicates Bells nostalgic romanticized view of the sheriff's role: he does not recognize his own offensive prejudice, which stems from a history of racism in America, which arose from anything but a sense of "community." He begins to question the power a sheriff holds in Texas, finding it ridiculous that there are no formal rules around who can be placed in this position of power. The rules are arbitrary, which destabilizes the structures Bell has spent his career trying to uphold.

The narrative moves to Moss as he says goodbye to Carla Jean, telling her he will call her in a few days. Before getting on the bus, Carla Jean tells him she has a bad feeling, but he tells her he has a good feeling, so the two should balance out. He tells her to quit worrying. She says his name, and when he responds, she tells him it's nothing, she just wanted to say his name. She tells him not to hurt anyone, and he responds that he can't make any promises—that's how you get hurt.

Moss is not interested in feelings; he trusts his self-will and believes he can overcome his situation and escape death. Carla Jean's love for Moss comes across clearly in her desire to say his name once more before they part ways. Moss recognizes that his future is unclear, and he may need to protect himself. His experience in Vietnam has shown him that he cannot take any chances and may need to use force to survive.

The narrative cuts to Bell. He gets a call from Wendell during dinner about a reported car fire. He finishes his meal, and asks his wife, Loretta, if she'd like to come along. They drive down to the scene together. When they arrive, they realize that the burned car belonged to the man Chigurh killed on the highway. They wonder why someone would set fire to it, but decide they are not sure. Wendell, who meets them there, says this wasn't what the man had in mind when he left Dallas. Bell agrees that this was probably the farthest thing from his mind.

Loretta is Bell's biggest support in the story, and her involvement in his work demonstrates her moral leanings and her dedication to justice, to her husband, and to the community. The authorities are still unaware of Chigurh, lending irony to the situation: the reader knows what Bell and his deputies are trying to figure out. Bell and Wendell are correct in assuming the man couldn't have known he would meet his fate on the highway. From their perspectives, the killing was totally random, but from Chigurh's point of view, the man had been making decisions his entire life that led him to that moment. It was his fate to die by Chigurh's hand.

The next morning, Bell tells Wendell to get his wife Loretta's horse saddled. They drive with the horses in a trailer down to the burned car. They decide to explore the area looking for any leads. They take their rifles and ride into the desert, unaware of the carnage they will find below. Bell constructs a narrative about that night based on the composition of tire tracks in the dirt. They identify Moss's truck at the scene of the crime, as both Bell and Wendell recognize it. Wendell asks if Moss has a wife, and Bell says he does. They remark that it is curious that nobody has reported his disappearance. Wendell asks if Moss is a dope runner, and Bell says he wouldn't have thought so. When they discover the carnage below, Bell tells Wendell to take the horses elsewhere, stating they don't need to witness the massacre.

Chigurh operates beyond the framework of good and evil, which is a fundamental element of the traditional western genre. In Chigurh's mind, he is simply fulfilling the work of an indifferent universe that has no sense of good or evil. Bell's moral and spiritual framework cannot explain the carnage they encounter in this scene. Bell's comments about the horses oppose Chigurh's views. Chigurh believes humans are no better than animals, while Bell projects human emotions on the horses, believing that witnessing the carnage might damage them emotionally.

Bell and Wendell find the two men Chigurh murdered the night before, and Bell notes that they have been executed. He looks at the pistol, stating that the man didn't even get the safety off before they were killed. As they move through the carnage, Wendell notes the dead men are bloody as hogs. Bell glances at Wendell, who corrects himself, stating he shouldn't cuss about the dead. Bell says there isn't any luck in what they are observing. Wendell says they were just a bunch of drug dealers, and Bell replies that the only thing they are now is dead.

Bell begins to realize that the killer (who the reader knows is Chigurh) has no concern for ethics. He kills quickly and ruthlessly. Wendell's comment reduces the men to the status of animals, but Bell has respect for the dead even though they are drug dealers. Based on his moral and spiritual orientation, he sees value in all human life. From Bell's perspective, the men are victims of bad luck, but Chigurh would likely note that their actions led to their fate.

Bell looks in the truck and discovers there was heroin inside at some point. He and Wendell wonder where the money went. Bell notes that there was another event that occurred after the initial violence. They move through the scene reconstructing the event, noting the different types of weapons used. Bell notes that somebody made it out of the carnage alive. Wendell notes that it must have sounded like Vietnam during the incident.

The presence of the weapons suggests they are dealing with a new kind of serious criminal. Comparing the drug war to Vietnam conveys the severity of the situation. The American campaign in Vietnam and the American drug war both involved extreme violence and unclear moral and ethical boundaries. The connection between the two suggests a consistency in American policy, and challenges Bell's idea that the American past was morally superior to the present.

Bell and Wendell find the final dead man. They note that the man was not killed execution style. Bell notes that he died of natural causes, and when Wendell scoffs, Bell says they are natural to the line of work he was in. They realize that someone has been here before them, and that person likely has the money. They leave, and Bell has Wendell take the horses back to his house. He tells him to thank Loretta since the county doesn't pay for the use of her horse.

In terms of fate, the decision to enter the drug trade involves actions that expedite a person to their fate, which is reflected in Bell's comment about the man dying of "natural causes." Loretta's willingness to support the county reflects her sense of ethical responsibility to the community. Bell admires her for this, but recognizes the strain it puts on her.

Bell drives out to pick up Torbert. Torbert says he got a report from the coroner in Austin about the man Chigurh murdered for his car. They still do not know about Chigurh's **bolt gun**, so Bell asks what he the man shot with. Torbert tells him they don't know. They told him it looked like a large caliber bullet hit him, but there was no exit wound and the penetration was only two and a half inches. Bell can't make sense of the incident. Torbert asks about the body count, and then asks who the hell these people are. Bell responds that at first he thought they were the same kind of people they'd always dealt with, the same ones his grandfather dealt with, but now he isn't sure if they've ever seen these kinds of people before. He admits he doesn't know what to do about them.

The mysterious nature of the man's wound suggests they are dealing with a new kind of killer, an executioner with unconventional methods. Bell's inability to make sense of the situation is frustrating, and causes him to worry that he is being left behind in a changing society. Bell is beginning to recognize that his old methods of law enforcement, and his sense of higher law and justice may not suffice to hold back these unprecedented evil forces.

The narrative moves to Chigurh as he drives to Moss's trailer. He knocks on the door, waits, and when no answer comes, he uses the **bolt gun** to knock the lock cylinder out of the doorknob. Inside, he walks through the house, opening and closing closets and drawers. In the kitchen, he opens the refrigerator and takes a drink of milk, then puts the jug back. In the living room, he sits on the sofa and looks at himself in the dead gray television screen. He finds some mail on the floor and takes three envelopes before leaving.

Chigurh operates outside of normal societal boundaries, as shown through his entry into the house. Societal foundations, like the law, which are designed to prevent actions such as breaking and entering, are of no concern to him. Going into the fridge is a symbolic breach of personal space. His reflection in the television screen metaphorically mirrors Chigurh's aura—dead and grey.

Chigurh drives up to the trailer park's front office and asks the receptionist about Moss. She says Moss is probably at work, and when Chigurh asks her where he works, she says she is not a liberty to say. Chigurh asks again, demanding the information, but just then a toilet flushes in the back, and Chigurh leaves. He goes to a café and opens the phone bills he took from the house. He calls Carla Jean's grandmother, and asks if she has seen Moss, but she says she hasn't. When she asks who is calling, Chigurh hangs up the phone. He then goes to the shop where Moss works and asks some of his co-workers if they have seen him. They tell Chigurh he hasn't shown up for work and hasn't called. Afterward, he gets back in the Ramcharger and leaves.

Chigurh does not recognize societal structures and norms that protect people's privacy, so he expects the woman to release Moss's information without hesitation. Chigurh takes the toilet flushing as a sign that it is not the woman's time to meet her fate, so he leaves. Refraining to say his name on the phone is a practical decision, but also holds symbolic significance—as a symbol of fate, he is mysterious and unpredictable. The way Chigurh finds out where Moss works is not explained, which suggests something uncanny and almost omniscient in his character, connecting him again to fate—no matter the obstacles one puts in fate's way, it always seems to arrive.

The narrative moves to Moss as he gets off a bus in Del Rio, Texas. He takes a cab to a cheap motel called the Trail Motel. He asks for a room, and the receptionist tells him about weekly rates. Moss tells the woman he will just take the night, saying he will take it one day at a time.

Moss is aware of the unpredictability of his situation, and his decision to take it a day at a time is rooted in his philosophy on life. Instead of banking on the future, he must focus on surviving moment to moment.

In his room, Moss takes lays his on the bed beside him. He takes a nap, and when he wakes up, he decides to hide **the briefcase**. He unscrews the air duct grille in the wall. He ties a length of cord from the blinds around the case, and takes a thousand dollars from it before using a hanger pole from the closet to push the briefcase back as far as he can. Then he screws the grille back in place.

Moss doesn't realize it at this moment, but his decision to hide the money in the vent will later save his life: every action we take has consequences, whether good or bad. Moss takes just enough money to hold him over. His priorities are shifting. While unchecked greed once fueled his decision to take the money, he can now contain it.

Moss wakes up in the dark. He looks out the window, finding nothing but deep shadows and silence. He gets dressed, and calls a cab. He pays the cab driver an extra ten dollars to take him over the border to Ciudad Acuña, Mexico. He looks at some boots made from exotic animals—crocodile, ostrich, and elephant—but realizes their quality is nothing compared to the ones he already has. On the corner a cab driver asks him if he wants to go to see the girls, but Moss shows him the ring on his finger and carries on. He eats in a restaurant, ordering a glass of red wine and a steak. As he eats, he thinks about his life.

The exchange of money, as shown with the cab driver, becomes an important trope in the novel. People are willing to take risks, both physically and morally, for money. The fancy boots and the driver's offer of women highlights the U.S./Mexico relationship in the novel: Mexico is presented as a place of vice, corruption, and decadence. Bell resists the temptation, as seen through his decision not to blow his money on the boots. Showing the driver his ring reflects Moss's dedication to Carla Jean. Both of these actions demonstrate fundamental aspects of Moss's moral and ethical code. The steak brings the reader back to Chigurh's bolt gun, which is a tool for slaughtering cattle. This allusion is important as Moss thinks about his life, as it foreshadows the conflict the men will share as the novel progresses.

Moss takes a cab back to the motel after leaving Mexico. As the cab approaches the motel, Moss sees a gap in the blinds of his room's window. He is unable to tell if he put it there himself, so he tells the driver to drive him around the building without stopping. The driver grows concerned, and decides to drop him off, but Moss hands a hundred dollar bill over the seat and tells him to keep going. The man says he doesn't want to get into a jackpot, but Moss tells him he is already in one and he, Moss, is trying to get them out.

Moss recognizes his own fallibility and begins to doubt himself in this moment. The driver again follows Moss's orders in exchange for money, showing the influence of money and greed. The reference to the "jackpot" again brings forward the idea of gambling, luck, and chance in every action we take.

Moss spends the night at a Ramada Inn. He eats breakfast, and wonders if whoever is looking for the money has found it. He realizes he is probably going to have to kill somebody before this ordeal is over, though he doesn't know who it will be. He goes into town and buys a twelve gauge shot gun and a box of shells. He notes the box of shells has the same firepower as a claymore mine. After leaving the sporting goods store where he bought the gun, he goes to a hardware store and buys a hacksaw, a file, a pair of pliers, a pair of side cutters, a screwdriver, a flashlight and a roll of duct tape. Then, he goes back to the sporting good store and asks for a tent with aluminum poles. Moss takes the tent out and puts his supplies in the bag along with the poles. The employee is confused as to why Moss only wants the poles, but Moss doesn't explain. He leaves and returns to the motel.

Moss prepares for battle, realizing that the situation is escalating. He recognizes that he may have to kill, but there is still an element of chance with regard to where, when, and to whom it will happen. The thought of killing is in conflict with Moss's morality, and disturbs him, but he would rather work toward freedom and autonomy than get the police involved. The comment about the box of shells reminds the reader of Moss's experience in Vietnam. The employee's confusion and Moss's reticence suggests that Moss is moving outside of normal society and entering Chigurh's world, which operates under a different set of rules. Moss is starting to think only of survival now.

In his motel room, Moss saws off the shotgun's barrel and stock off and files them smooth. Then, he loads the gun. He calls the Trail Motel and tells the woman at the front desk to hold his room. He goes to Wal-Mart, buys some clothes, and then throws the sawed off barrel into a lake, and hides the stock in some shale. He stays at the lake, and watches the sunset.

Again, Moss is overstepping the boundaries of law and order by modifying his weapon: sawed off shotguns are illegal. The sunset represents a metaphorical looming darkness: Moss's imminent encounter with Chigurh.

CHAPTER 4

Bell reminisces about his service as sheriff. He was elected when he was twenty-five. His father was not a lawman, but his Grandfather was, and they were proud to be sheriffs together. He tells how he had just returned from WWII with some medals, and campaigned hard for his position as Sherriff. He ran a fair campaign, and his grandfather told him if talking badly about other candidates means you are losing.

Law enforcement is a tradition in Bell's family, and has always been a source of pride. Bell's service in WWII was a part of his success, but as the novel progresses, the complication and corruption involved in his election becomes clear. Despite the corruption involved in his military decoration, Bell was inspired by his grandfather to run an ethical campaign.

Bell talks about his thirty-one year marriage to Loretta. They lost a little girl, he says, but he doesn't want to talk about it. He says Loretta is a better person than he, but that isn't saying a whole lot. He suggests that people think they know what they want, but generally they don't, but sometimes, if you're lucky, you get it anyways. He says that he has always been lucky. The luckiest day of his life was when he first saw Loretta, tipped his hat at her, and almost got a smile back. He says that people usually complain about bad things that happen to them, but don't mention the good. He doesn't think he has given God much reason to smile on him, but he believes God has blessed him anyway.

Bell loves and respects his wife for her morality and her faith in God, which are places in his life where he perceives weakness in himself. The loss of his daughter has been painful and challenging to his faith, as shown through his refusal to talk about it directly. He speaks about the role of luck, but Bell clearly thinks of luck in terms of God. He chooses to recognize the good things in life along with the bad, and believes that God has blessed him, even though he has not deserved it. Bell's understanding of luck may actually be closer to grace.

The narrative moves to the past. Bell sits in a café, reading the newspaper. There is a picture of Lamar's deputy (the one whom Chigurh killed) on the front page. He notes that the deputy's wife was only twenty years old. There is nothing he can do for her. He notes that Lamar would always be remembered for this tragedy.

Bell confronts his powerlessness as sheriff to do anything about the murder, which is a challenge for him morally and ethically. He must confront the failure of justice in this moment. The death of the deputy seems senseless. The fact that Lamar will be remembered for this tragedy points to the way in which the past follows an individual into the future.

Bell and Wendell go to Moss's trailer. They enter cautiously, and Bell notes that there is no reason in the world not to be careful. They find the cylinder Chigurh knocked out of the doorknob on the floor, and see that it left a dent in the wall. They realize that Moss and Carla Jean left in a hurry. Bell opens the refrigerator and closes it, then looks in the freezer. They reflect on the situation, and Wendell wonders if Moss understands the nature of the dangerous people pursuing him. Bell notes that Moss and Carla Jean are in a world of trouble.

Bell's comment about being careful shows recognition of his vulnerability. Just as Chigurh entered the house and the refrigerator, Bell and Wendell enter the house and breach the boundaries of personal space. This raises questions about the power of law enforcement. The police are granted power by the law, and Chigurh is granted similar power by his disregard of the law.

On Wednesday, Bell is sitting in the café reading the newspaper. A reporter from the San Antonio Star approaches and asks what is going on. Bell lies, telling the reporter the murders were a hunting accident. The man obviously knows this is not true, and lets Bell know this. Bell tells him that last year only two of the nineteen charges filed in the county court were not drug charges. He says he has a county the size of Delaware and the people need his help. He tells the reporter he has a full day ahead of him and he needs to eat his breakfast.

Throughout the novel, it becomes clear that most people don't read or watch the news anymore because of how violent and upsetting modern American society has become. Bell's defensiveness toward the reporter suggests his concern about his reputation; he worries that the news will present the situation in a way that casts his department in a negative light. In this way, Bell too is unwilling to honestly confront the changes and violence within in his community, and still feels he has the power to overcome it.

Bell and Torbert drive back out to the scene. Torbert says ten people are dead, including the man murdered on the highway, and Bell says there are ten that they know about. A helicopter arrives, and a DEA agent named McIntyre arrives on the scene. Bell is agreeable, but it is clear that he doesn't like McIntyre. McIntyre examines Moss's truck, and notes that the vehicle is not full of bullet holes like the others. Bell agrees facetiously to McIntyre's simple observation. He is unwilling to pitch in any additional help for McIntyre. McIntyre says that Bell isn't going to make this easy for him, but Bell says he is just messing around.

Bell's comment about the number of casualties suggests that he recognizes the killing is not over. Bell's conflict with McIntyre rests in the fact that Bell wants power over the investigation, and doesn't think he needs other agents interfering. Bell has already figured out that Moss arrived on the scene after the shooting took place, so he responds to McIntyre's comment sarcastically.

McIntyre walks around the scene with Bell and Torbert. He holds a handkerchief to his nose to block the smell of the dead bodies. He takes notes on a clipboard, and draws a rough sketch of the scene. He notes that there aren't many guns. Bell tells him there weren't as many as there should have been, but they have two in evidence. They talk about the missing heroin and money, and McIntyre says someone made off with it. Bell says that's a reasonable guess, and McIntyre tells Bell he knows he didn't understand that before he showed up. Additional law enforcement agencies are on their way, including Border Patrol, the rangers, and the DPS drug unit. Bell notes that this event will draw a bigger crowd than the flood of 1965. McIntyre lists the guns on scene, including a nine-millimeter Parabellum. Torbert repeats the name of the gun, and Bell nods, telling him to put that in his file.

Bell responds sarcastically because he has already figured out everything that McIntyre deduces. Bell is not happy about the fact that additional agencies are getting involved and wants to solve the situation on his own. The reference to the flood of '65 speaks to the monumental nature of this event, and also references a time in the past where challenging situations like these were not caused by humans, but by nature. The repetition of the gun named "parabellum", which is Latin for, "prepare for war", alludes to the larger social context and the drug war on the border.

The narrative shifts to Chigurh. He picks up a signal on the tracking device as he crosses the Devil's River Bridge. His headlights shine on a large bird sitting on the bridge rail ahead. He rolls down the window and fires a shot at the bird. His pistol has been fitted with a makeshift silencer. The shot misses, hitting the guardrail, and the bullet ricochets off into the night. The bird flies away. Chigurh rolls the window and continues on.

In this moment, it becomes clear that Chigurh is using a tracking device to find Moss. Moss is still unaware of the device, a major oversight that again shows a flaw in his perceived self-sufficiency. Chigurh's action of shooting at the bird opposes Bell's earlier reverence for the dead hawk. Chigurh does not have respect for life the way Bell does. On the contrary, his mission is to destroy life.

The narrative then moves back to Moss. He pays the cab driver who brought him back to the motel, and enters the lobby. He tells the woman behind the counter he needs another room. She pulls a map of the motel from under the counter with a picture of a car from the fifties on it. She offers him the room next to the original room, but he picks on the opposite side of the building, knowing that the two rooms share the same air duct. In the new room, he uses the tent poles, some clothes hangers, and the supplies from the hardware store to make a hook to pull **the briefcase** through the vent into the new room.

The picture of the car on the map refers to a time in the past. The 1950's are often thought of as a positive period in American history, but with start of Vietnam, and later, the drug war, the nation was changed and the good times ended. Moss's decision to pull the briefcase into the room is a function of free will, but the fact that Chigurh ends up at the other room stems from chance.

As Moss attempts to get **the briefcase** through the vent, Chigurh drives through the motel parking lot with the tracking device in his lap. He goes into the motel office. It 12:42 am, and the woman looks like she has been asleep. Chigurh rents a room, goes to it and drops his bag off. Before he leaves he takes off his boots, then he goes into the hall, holding the tracking device and his shotgun, an automatic with a military stock and a parkerized finish. The shotgun has a special silencer that is a foot long and as big around as a beer can.

Moss is not in the room Chigurh is casing, but in the adjacent room, retrieving the money in the nick of time. The suitcase is in the vent between the two rooms, and it is only by chance that Chigurh chose the wrong room. The military stock and parkerized finish of his rifle allude to war in a larger context. Parkerizing was a process for weapon manufacturing popularized during WWII.

Chigurh walks by the doors, listening to the signal from the tracking device. After he finds the room, he goes back to his room and makes a mental note of the room's dimensions. He gets his boots on, grabs his **bolt gun** and goes back. Using the bolt gun, he punches out the lock cylinder and kicks the door open. He finds a Mexican man who was waiting for Moss to return. The man reaches for a gun, but Chigurh shoots him three times, so quick it sounds like a single shot. He shoots another man through the bathroom door. When he goes into the bathroom, he finds the man slumped against the tub with an AK47, badly bleeding from his chest and neck. The man begs for his life, but Chigurh shoots him in the face.

Chigurh is patient in his approach, taking time to return to his room and study the dimensions. As an expert hit man, he does not leave any room for mistakes in his approach The Mexican men's presence reveals the larger context of the situation. It is by pure chance that they become the victims and not Moss. Chigurh is a heartless killer, and emotion plays no part in his decision on whether to let any of his victims live: they are all fated to live or die, and he's just carrying out the order.

Chigurh searches the room, finding Moss's machinegun resting on the sink. He wipes the blood from the soles of his boots onto the carpet, and as he does, he sees the air duct. He bashes in the grate with the base of a lamp and looks inside. He can see the drag marks in the dust from **the briefcase**. Moss has already pulled the briefcase out through the vent in the other room and escaped. Chigurh takes his bloody shirt off and goes into the bathroom where he washes himself off.

As mentioned before, Moss escapes Chigurh by pure chance. The machinegun and drag marks in the vent leave an actual trail behind as he flees, but also symbolize the way in which actions leave a trail that continue into the future. The fact that Chigurh sticks around to clean himself up with two dead men in the room shows his calm emotionless response to the extreme violence of his "work."

The narrative moves to Bell as he enters his office. Torbert lays the coroner's report on the desk in front of Bell. Bell tells him he knows how Chigurh killed the man on the highway. He asks Torbert if he's ever been to a slaughterhouse. Torbert says he snuck into one when he was a kid. Bell asks how they killed the cows, and Torbert says a man would hit the cows in the head with a maul. Bell explains that nowadays, they have an air powered **bolt gun** they use to shoot the cows between the eyes. Torbert says he wishes Bell hadn't told him that. Bell says he knows, and that he knew what Torbert was going to say before he said it.

The understanding that Chigurh is using a bolt gun to kill his victims is profoundly disturbing to Bell and Torbert. The changes in technology in the beef industry are a micro example of the larger societal chances these men are confronting. Torbert's wish that Bell hadn't told him holds meaning on two levels. In one sense, it is difficult for these men to confront the deranged violence they are encountering. In a larger sense, this moment illuminates the societal desire not to confront violence, especially the ways in which violence is a part of our daily lives through things like our diet and shopping habits.

The narrative switches to Moss. He takes a cab to the Hotel Eagle in Eagle Pass, Texas. The clerk is waiting at the desk as if he has been expecting him. Moss pays and goes to his room. The room has old-fashioned pushbutton light switches and old oak furniture. Suddenly, he realizes that **the briefcase** may be bugged. He finds the sending unit in the middle of a packet of bills, and realizes he is going to have to quit running on luck. He understands what is coming for him, he just doesn't know when. In the bathroom, he looks at himself in the mirror. It has already occurred to him that he will never be safe again in his life, and he wonders if it is something that a person could get used to.

Moss thinks he is acting freely and choosing as he goes, but according to Chigurh's philosophy, the extent of choice and free will is limited by fate. The room's décor points us back to the idea that elements of the past continue into the present. Moss's perception of fate, chance, and free will is changing. The discovery of the tracking device lowers his self-confidence, though he still holds to the idea that he can overcome his situation through self-will. Regardless, he understands that his greedy decision to take the money will haunt him for the rest of his life.

Moss goes to the front desk and gives the night clerk a hundred dollar bill. He tells the man he isn't asking him to do anything illegal, and the man says he is waiting to hear his description of that. Moss says someone is looking for him, and he needs the man to call him if anyone checks in. The night clerk agrees.

This moment shows the power of money in influencing people to make foolish decisions. The clerk immediately assumes Moss is asking him to do something immoral, which draws a connection between immorality and money, but the clerk agrees to help Moss without asking what the consequences might be.

The phone doesn't ring, but something wakes Moss a couple of hours later. He gets up and presses his ear against the door. Hearing nothing, he goes into the bathroom, turns on the shower, and closes the shower curtain. He pulls out his bag of supplies and puts it on the chair in the corner. Realizing the phone might ring, he takes it off its cradle. He rumples the blanket and pillows on the bed, and realizing the phone off the hook might look conspicuous, hangs it back up and unplugs the chord. He goes back to the door, and getting down on his stomach, he puts his ear to the crack below the door. A cold wind comes through, as if a door has opened somewhere. He asks himself what he has done, and what he has failed to do.

Moss mysteriously wakes just as Chigurh arrives at the motel, which can be thought of as a function of chance, which ultimately saves his life. He intuitively knows something is wrong and prepares for a confrontation, though he second-guesses himself with the phone. Again, chance is involved in this decision. If he leaves it off the hook it will look strange, if he leaves it on, it may ring. The chance inherent in this choice demonstrates the impossibility of knowing the outcome of any decision. The question he asks himself at the end shows his sense of doubt about whether any of the decisions he has made have been right.

Moss hides under the bed and waits with the shotgun facing the door. Chigurh enters the room, and pauses. Moss realizes Chigurh is not going to go into the bathroom, and decides it is too late to make any more mistakes, that it is too late do to anything at all, and he is going to die. He tells Chigurh from under the bed that he will blow him to hell if he turns around. He crawls forward, and commands Chigurh drop his gun. Moss does not know who Chigurh is, and notes that he seems oddly untroubled, even with a gun on him. Moss finds something about him faintly exotic, and notes that Chigurh is beyond his experience. He asks Chigurh what he wants, but Chigurh remains silent.

Moss accepts his fate, but he does not give up his drive to overcome death through sheer will. Moss recognizes that Chigurh is "beyond his experience" which has a dual meaning. In one sense, he is unable to place Chigurh's appearance and reactions. In another way, he fears Chigurh is more powerful than he is. Chigurh's lack of response and his unwillingness to tell Moss what he "wants" points toward his character, principals, and philosophy. He is not afraid of death, and he doesn't "want" anything in terms of money or material things. Ultimately, his only desire is to settle Moss's fate.

Moss pushes the bed to the side, and grabs **the briefcase**. Moss notes that Chigurh doesn't even seem to notice. Keeping his gun on Chigurh, he tells him to leave the room. Outside the door, Moss sees Chigurh's tracking device on the floor, but he leaves it there, deciding he's taken enough chances. Moss tells Chigurh to stay where he is. Moss backs down the stairs, and then runs. He hasn't thought far enough ahead to think about where he is going. In the lobby he sees the night clerk's feet sticking out from behind the desk.

Moss's philosophy of thinking moment by moment and his moral code fail him. He does not have the foresight to take the tracking device or kill Chigurh. Moss does not want to kill anyone, as he sees this as morally reprehensible. He does not understand that Chigurh will never stop hunting him. He realizes Chigurh's willingness to kill without strong reason when he sees the dead clerk. In this moment he recognizes his mistake.

By the time Moss reaches the other side of the street, Chigurh is on the motel balcony. Moss feels a bullet tug at the bag on his shoulder. The next shot hits him in the shoulder, but he continues running. The final shot hits him in the side. He notes that Chigurh is quite a shot. Further down the road, Moss turns and fires his shotgun toward Chigurh, striking him with buckshot in the leg. Suddenly, a Cadillac spins out in the intersection. Two men get out and start firing at him. He fires two shots back and continues running. On the next street over, he sees himself in the storefront windows. Delirious, he looks up and finds himself sitting on the sidewalk. He tells himself to get up and survive.

Moss's admits that Chigurh is a worthy opponent when he states that Chigurh is "quite a shot." Moss was a sniper in Vietnam, and is an excellent shot, so this recognition is poignant. By returning fire, however, he sends the message that he will not give up easily. Like Chigurh, the men who arrive in the Cadillac completely disregard the law and innocent community member. Near death, Moss almost gives up, but his desire to survive and overcome his situation drives him to get to his feet and continue forward.

Moss packs his gun in his bag, and crosses the bridge into Mexico. He feels cold and nauseous from blood loss. He pays a dime at the turnstile, and enters Mexico. Half way across the bridge, he meets a party of four young men coming back into the U.S. He pulls five hundred dollars from his pocket, and asks to buy one of the young men's coats. They pass him before one man turns and asks what he will pay. He offers five hundred, but the young man doesn't believe him. He tells him to show him the money. Moss hands him a hundred dollar bill and offers the rest when he hands over the coat. The man asks why there is blood on the money and Moss tells him he's been shot. Nervous, the young man's friends say let's go, but he demands the rest of the money. Moss hands the money over, they give him the coat, and leave.

Like other scenes involving the exchange of money, the attitudes of the young men change once compensation is offered. Again, greed becomes a factor in the moral dynamics of the situation. Instead of trying to help Moss, which would be the morally correct thing to do, the young men are focused on the money. The young man's greed becomes even more apparent after he demands the rest of the money. Despite knowing that Moss is seriously injured, the young man is only focused on the money, showing the way in which greed overpowers the capacity for empathy.

Moss stops on the bridge between the U.S. and Mexico, directly over the river. He throws **the briefcase** over the railing into some cane on the riverbank. He slides to the ground, and sits in a puddle of his own blood. When he finally motivates himself to survive, he continues into the town of Piedras Negras, Mexico. He goes to a park, and sits on a bench as the sun rises. Birds are calling in the eucalyptus trees, and a church stands in the distance. It seems very far away from him.

Moss understands the danger of carrying the money into this economically depressed and corrupt area. The money would make him a prime target. In noting the perceived distance between him and the church, moss metaphorically alludes to the distance between himself and God or himself and his moral center. The fact that the distance is a matter of perception—it "seems" far away—points to the difficulty in defining the moral boundaries of his situation and actions.

An old man approaches with a broom, and Moss calls out to him, asking if he speaks English. The man shrugs his shoulders. Moss tells him he needs a doctor, but the man doesn't respond until Moss lifts himself up and shows the blood on the bench. The man asks in Spanish if he can walk, making a walking motion with his fingers. Moss nods, and the man asks if he has money. Moss hands him a hundred dollar bill, and the man takes it reverently.

The man demonstrates a sense of morality by helping Moss, and his question about money is not based on a personal sense of greed, but whether or not Moss will be able to pay for medical attention. His reverence toward the money suggests he did not expect it, but is grateful to be receiving it.

A short while later, Chigurh comes out of the motel with a towel wrapped around his bullet-wounded leg. The Cadillac is still in the intersection, and he hears the gunfire of automatic weapons hitting the buildings. The two men firing the weapons are wearing raincoats and tennis shoes, which surprises Chigurh. They don't look like men one would find in this part of the country. He climbs back up the steps and opens fire on them, killing one man and wounding the other. The man returns fire, shooting out windows and lights. Chigurh realizes that all of this is taking place one block from the Maverick County Courthouse, and knows that the authorities will soon arrive.

Chigurh often seems above the law and beyond the rules of fate, but the fact that he is wounded reminds the reader that he still human and vulnerably. The attire of the men in the center distinguishes them from the Mexicans. These men have been hired by high-powered executives involved in the drug trade, which becomes clear later in the novel. The boldness of these men firing guns so close to the courthouse demonstrates their lack of concern for the law.

Chigurh goes down to the corner and shoots the remaining man in the back. He picks up an Uzi machine gun and rifles the dead man's pockets for the clips. When he looks up he sees the man he shot in the back looking at him. The man asks Chigurh to help him. Chigurh looks the man in the eye, but the man looks away. Chigurh tells him to look at him, and the man looks, but quickly looks away again. He asks the man if he speaks English, and he says he does. Chigurh tells him not to look away—he wants the man to look at him. He shoots the man in the head and watches his own image degrade in the man's consciousness. Then he leaves.

Chigurh has no concern for morality and ethics, and doesn't care about fairness or rules of engagement, as shown by his willingness to shoot the man in the back. Chigurh does his best to make sure his victims understand his philosophy around fate. He wants his victims to confront and accept their fate, which is why he demands the man look at him. Those who look him in the eye don't live long enough to provide a description of him, so Chigurh, like fate, always prevails.

CHAPTER 5

Bell tells about his family coming west to Texas from Georgia by horse and wagon. He recognizes that lots of things in a family history aren't true—the stories get passed through the generations and changed. Some people say the truth can't compete, but he doesn't believe that. He believes the truth is always there and can't be corrupted. He's heard about the truth being compared to "the rock" from the Bible, meaning Peter; upon whom God said he would build his church. Bell believes the truth will outlast "the rock". Bell states that in his role he would always show up for social events and cemetery cleanings. These actions were part of ensuring he got reelected, but at the same time, it was doing something good for people who couldn't do things for themselves. He says he does it out of a sense of community and respect. The dead, he says, have more claim on the living than one might admit.

Bell believes in God, but he recognizes that humans fail in understanding and interpreting the truth. The church has been built upon human imperfection, but even if the church fails, Bell believes the truth will remain. The complexity of Bell's character is highlighted in his mention of his campaign for reelection. While he is dedicated to his community, he also recognizes ulterior motives for his service.

Bell tells about a newspaper article he read last week about a couple from California who was killing elderly folks, and taking their social security checks. The couple would torture their victims before killing them and burying them in the backyard. The torture confuses Bell. He says maybe the couple's television was broken. The couple was caught when a neighbor saw an elderly man run from the premises wearing only a dog collar. He says you can't make this sort of thing up. He laughed to himself after reading that part, stating there isn't a whole lot else one can do about these things.

Bell is able to understand killing for money, but the fact that the couple was torturing their victims before killing them does not make moral sense to him. He recognizes the role of the media in sedating the masses and fulfilling a human need for violence. Bell understands he is powerless over this kind of evil, and feels the only thing you can do is laugh at the absurdity of human nature.

The narrative shifts to the past as Bell drives out to Odessa to talk to Carla Jean at her grandmother's house. When she answers the door, Bell takes off his hat, and is immediately sorry he did. Carla Jean puts her hand to her mouth, thinking Moss is dead. Bell assures her Moss is still alive. Carla Jean asks him if he is lying, and Bell tells her he doesn't lie. They go to the Sunshine Café and have coffee. Bell asks about the money, but Carla Jean doesn't answer. He tells her to just pretend he isn't the sheriff, but she asks him what she should pretend instead. He asks if he can call her Carla, but she says she goes by Carla Jean. He tells her that Moss is in trouble with very dangerous people, but she trusts that her husband can take care of himself, even after Bell tells her the people looking for him won't stop until Moss is dead. Carla Jean says Moss won't quit either.

As a man dedicated to truth and morality, Bell feels guilty about leading Carla Jean to believe that Moss is dead. His statement about lying is complex. Bell is determined to uphold truth and justice, but he does not account for the fact that, though he is acting in good faith, he may not be able to see the whole truth. Later he asks Carla Jean to pretend that he isn't the sheriff, but pretending can be read as a denial of what is true. Like Moss, Carla Jean does not trust the law to help her. She believes in Moss's will to survive, and she knows he will fight until the end.

Bell looks at his face reflected in his coffee, noting the way it shifts and loses shape, an omen of things to come. He tells her that the situation is not in Moss's favor. Carla Jean replies that Moss will not change. Bell asks if they were having marital trouble, but Carla tells him they don't have problems, and when they do they fix them. Bell says they are lucky people, and Carla Jean agrees. Carla Jean asks Bell if he thinks Moss has left her. He says he doesn't know, but Carla Jean is confident he hasn't, she knows him too well. Bell tells her she used to know him, but money changes people. Carla Jean insists that Moss never changes. Bell suggests that the money may change him if he lives long enough, and Carla Jean says Moss isn't dead yet.

The shifting of Bell's image in the coffee connects to his shifting beliefs around God, truth, and justice. His recent experiences inspire him to rethink his beliefs. Bell holds traditional values with regard to marriage, which distinguishes him from newer generations. Both Carla Jean and Bell have experienced strain in their relationships due to the situation at hand, and this provides a small moment of connection between them. Bell's aware of the way in which money can corrupt one's values, but Carla Jean continues to have faith in Moss to overcome the corrupting influence of greed.

Bell says if he turned the money in, they would put it in the papers. This may be Moss's only chance at survival. Carla Jean says they could put it in anyways, but Bell says he couldn't. Carla Jean corrects him, saying that he could, but he wouldn't. Bell agrees. He asks her how she thinks this will end. She says she doesn't know how anything will end, and asks if he thinks he does. He says it won't end happily ever after, and Carla Jean she should be more worried than she is. She says she is just as worried as she needs to be.

Being a man dedicated to truth, Bell is unwilling to lie in the papers to save Moss's life. Carla Jean's experiences, both recent and in her youth, have shown her that the future is unpredictable. Bell struggles to recognize this fact, as his Judeo-Christian view of justice and fate is more deterministic than Carla Jean's. Bell does not believe that Moss can overcome the forces of evil he is confronting with free will, but Carla Jean disagrees.

Bell and Carla Jean continue talking about Moss. Bell says he is going to end up killing someone. Carla Jean says he never has, but Bell asks about Vietnam. Carla Jean corrects herself, saying he has never killed as a civilian. She tells Bell that her grandmother is sick. She was raised by her grandmother and calls her, Mama. She tells him how lucky she was to have her. Bell asks if she has a gun, telling Carla Jean she is in a bad situation. She says she does. Bell tries again to convince Carla Jean to call him if she hears from Moss, but she says she would die and live in hell before snitching on him.

As a veteran, Bell understands the realities and outcomes of war in a way Carla Jean doesn't. He knows that Moss is capable of violence. Carla Jean's nontraditional upbringing points to changes in American society. In Bell's day, the nuclear family was the norm, but things have changed with Carla Jean's generation. Like Moss, Carla Jean is driven by an internal allegiance to her husband, as opposed to an adherence to structures outside of their relationship, such as the law. Ultimately, she is skeptical of the law's ability to fix the situation, and remains loyal to her husband.

Carla Jean tells Bell about the job she had at Wal-Mart before she met Moss. The night before she started the job, she had a dream that she would meet a man when she went to work. She had the feeling she would know the man when she saw him. She marks ninety-nine days on a calendar before Moss walks in. That day, Moss asked her what time her shift ended, and there was no question in her mind, then or now, that it was the man from her dream.

Although Carla Jean admits she cannot know the future, she believes that she was fated to meet and fall in love with Moss. This belief adds to her determination to wait for him and trust that he will survive.

Before they leave, Carla Jean asks Bell if he really cares about Moss. He says that the people of the county hired him to look after them. He gets paid to be the first one hurt, or killed if it comes to that. He insists that she recognize the trouble that she and Moss are in. Bell says he will have to live with himself if Moss gets killed, which he can do, but he doesn't want to have to. As they leave Bell asks Carla Jean how old she is. She tells him she is nineteen, and she has been married to Moss for three years. Bell tells her his wife was eighteen when they got married, and marrying her made up for every stupid thing he had ever done. Carla Jean tells him that nineteen is old enough to know that when something means the world to a person, it's more likely to be taken away. Bell tells her that thought is familiar to him.

Bell's sense of moral responsibility to his community is reflected in his comments to Carla Jean. He has experience with failure in this area based on his experience in the war (which is explained later). He knows he will feel immense guilt if Moss dies, so he continues to urge Carla Jean to work with him. Bell and Carla Jean find common ground with their experiences of marrying young, but Carla Jean's outlook on love and marriage is different from Bell's. Bell believes marrying Loretta was the best thing he has ever done, but Carla Jean recognizes the risk in loving someone because there is the chance of losing him or her. Bell understands this concern based on the loss of his infant daughter thirty years ago.

Bell is in bed that evening when the phone rings. The caller informs him about the shootout in Eagle Pass. Bell says it's just out and out war. He doesn't know what else to call it. He arrives in Eagle Pass the next morning and sits with the sheriff, looking at photographs of the crime scene. The sheriff tells Bell there are days he just wants to give the whole damn place back to the criminals. Bell understands. They go over to the crime scene, and look over the wreckage. Bell asks who was in the motel. The sheriff says it was a drug dealer. They examine the blood trail Moss left on his way to Mexico, and then inventory the guns involved—a shotgun and two machine guns. Bell asks if they were fully automatic, and the sheriff says they were, and asks why they wouldn't be.

The events in Eagles Pass are so violent and extreme that they remind Bell of war. Both he and the sheriff recognize their powerlessness as lawmen to prevent such events, and feel hopeless. The violence around the drug trade leads the sheriff to believe it was drug dealers; they are still unaware of the details of the situation. Bell is not used to the kind of artillery at the scene, but the presence of fully automatic guns is standard for the sheriff of Eagle Pass. The changing nature of crime and corruption along the border has made the presence of this kind of artillery the norm.

Bell and the sheriff go over to the motel and find the murdered night clerk. The sheriff says it's about as bad a piece of luck as one could get. Bell asks where he was shot, and the sheriff tells him right between the eyes. Bell says he wasn't shot. The sheriff asks him what he is talking about, and facetiously asks if Bell thinks the killer drilled into the clerk's brain with a Black and Decker. Bell tells him that's pretty close, referring to Chigurh's **bolt gun**.

Again, Bell clings to the idea of bad luck, but knowing Chigurh's philosophy about fate, the novel offers two different viewpoints around the issue, leaving it up to the reader to decide. Chigurh's strange method of killing is outside of the Eagle Pass sheriff's frame of reference, so he makes the joke about the drill. It is difficult for these old school sheriffs to get their heads around such heinous violence. Bell, however, understands Chigurh is a new kind of killer, and is completely capable of such strange methods of killing.

Bell goes to the courthouse and does some paperwork, and on the way home it begins to snow. He finds Loretta looking out the kitchen window when he pulls in. Inside, they eat dinner while listening to a violin concerto. Bell is surprised that the phone doesn't ring, and says the wires must be down. She asks if he remembers the last time it snowed. Bell says he doesn't, but Loretta says it will come to him. When it does, she smiles. Bell says it's nice to be home with her. Loretta asks if he thinks Carla Jean was telling the truth. He says yes. Then she asks if he thinks Moss is still alive. Bell says he doesn't know, but he hopes so.

The snow suggests a change in the typical West Texas landscape, which is arid and oppressively hot. This change reflects back on Sheriff Bell, as he is beginning to enter a new stage in his life, letting go of old philosophies, and beginning to consider retirement. The snow provides an opportunity for Bell and Loretta to spend time away from the recent events, and reflect on their relationship. Though the reader never finds out what happened the last time it snowed, it is clear that whatever happened was important to them, and shows a side of Bell's life that is overshadowed by his work. This moment is short lived, however, as Loretta's question brings Bell's thoughts back to Moss and Carla Jean.

Toward the end of dinner, Loretta tells Bell he might never hear another word about all of the trouble that has happened. He says it is possible, but that doesn't mean it will be the end of it. He says these people will just continue killing each other until a cartel steps in and starts dealing directly with the Mexican government. There is too much money in drug dealing. Loretta asks how much money Bell thinks Moss has. He says it's hard to say, but it could be millions. She gets him a cup of coffee and when she comes back she tells him not to come home dead some evening, she will not put up with it. Loretta asks if he thinks Moss will come back for Carla Jean, and Bell says he would be a damn fool if he didn't.

In his monologues, Bell continues to ponder the limits of the criminal justice system. He recognizes the evil and corruption in the world will not disappear; it will only get worse as the money involved leads to corruption at the level of government and politics. Loretta's jokes about Bell coming home dead, but this is a very real recognition of the danger involved in his work, and subtly acknowledges that she would support his retirement. Bell's comment about Moss returning to Carla Jean points to his value of love and marriage, which can be read as a respect for values that are changing in, and in some cases vanishing from, American society.

The narrative shifts to Carson Wells, a Vietnam veteran and hit man, as he goes up to the Matacumbe Petroleum Group office on the fourteenth floor of a building in Houston. The office overlooks the skyline, and in the distance the open low lands, a ship channel, colonies of silver tanks, and gas flares. The man in the office doesn't turn around in his chair; he simply watches Wells' reflection in the window. When the man turns in his chair, he asks Wells if he would know Chigurh by sight. Wells says he would. He last saw him on November 28th of last year. The man asks how he remembers the date, and Wells tells him he has a memory for numbers and dates. The man tells Wells that they are missing the heroin and the money.

The tanks of oil and gas flares foreshadow an American future that will see extensive violence over natural resources. The man's power is evident by the way he greets Wells. We learn that Wells used to work with Chigurh, but he sees the ways in which they differ. Wells is a man who does not believe in luck and chance, which is suggested by his attention to numbers. As the narrative continues, it becomes clear that Wells mistakenly believes he can overcome his fate through free will and paying close attention to each move he makes.

He gives Wells a credit card to cover his expenses. The man asks for Wells' opinion of Chigurh. Wells tells him nobody is invincible. The man says that, statistically, the most invincible man is out in the world, just as the most vulnerable man is out there. The man asks how dangerous Chigurh is, and Wells asks him compared to what, the bubonic plague? Wells states that Chigurh is bad enough for the man to have called him, Wells, for his services. They talk about the shootout at Eagle Pass, and the man tells Wells that Chigurh has killed two of his men, as well as three others at Eagle Pass. The man then tells Wells to leave, wishing him happy hunting.

The man's comment suggests that Wells may be underestimating Chigurh, which turns out to be true. Wells recognizes Chigurh's dangerous nature by comparing him to the bubonic plague—which killed 1/3 of the people in Europe during the 14th century—yet he believes he can overcome the threat. This conversation also clarifies the events in Eagle's Pass. The men in raincoats were not drug dealers, but hired hit men. Like Chigurh, the man does not value human life.

Before Wells leaves, he tells the man that he counted the floors from the street, and there seems to be a floor missing. The man says he will have to look into it. Wells smiles, and asks the man if he would be willing to validate his parking ticket. The man asks if that is an attempt at humor, and wishes him a good day.

The thirteenth floor is left out of the floor numbers because it is considered bad luck. Being a man who does not acknowledge luck, he does not understand the reason for this kind of superstition.

Wells goes to the hotel in Eagle Pass and asks for a room. While he fills out the paperwork, he asks what happened in the hotel the other night. The clerk says he can't discuss it. Wells asks if the clerk was there when the shootout took place. The clerk says he only started working yesterday. The clerk grows nervous, and his eyes dart around the lobby as if there might be something out there to help him. Wells asks when the man who was working during the shoot out will be back. The clerk says he is no longer alive. Then Wells asks for the newspaper, but the clerk says they threw it out. Before leaving Wells tells the man to send him a couple of whores and a fifth of whiskey. The clerk grows concerned, but Wells tells him he is just joking. He tells the clerk to relax. He guarantees the shooters will not be back.

The societal reluctance to acknowledge violence is reflected in the clerk's unwillingness to talk about the incident, and also in the fact that they threw out the newspaper. It is clear that the clerk is nervous, and his glancing for something to help him, which could refer to the law or God, suggests a belief in some protective outside force. The events of the narrative have proven this kind of hope is futile. Wells' flippant comment shows that he does not recognize the sincere lack of ethics and morality he will confront with Chigurh. His guarantee that Chigurh will not return furthers this point, showing that his self-confidence is flawed.

Wells goes to his room and falls asleep with his gun beside him. He wakes at dusk, and goes to Moss's former room. He enters without disturbing the police tape and looks around. He checks the carpet under the bed and smells the pillows. Then he checks the wardrobe. In the bathroom, he takes note of what towels were used, and notices the soap in untouched. Then he goes to Chigurh's former room. The bed had not been slept in. The bathroom door is open, and he finds a bloody towel and bloody handprints. He hopes Chigurh is still alive, stating he would like to get paid.

Wells' crossing of the police tape shows his disregard for the law. His thorough examination of the rooms and attention to details depicts his skill as an investigator and hit man, but hoping that Chigurh is still alive shows his cockiness. He is driven by greed, and continues to underestimate Chigurh, believing he can overcome Chigurh, and in turn, overcome fate, through self-will.

The next morning, Wells walks through the center of Eagle Pass taking mental notes of the crime scene, noticing Moss's blood on the sidewalk, bullet holes in the buildings, and teardrop smears of lead bullets. Two bullet holes catch his eye in one of the building's second floor windows. He goes into the apartment, and finds an old woman dead in a rocking chair. He notices a bullet hole in a calendar behind the woman that is three days in the future. He takes a few photographs of the dead woman, and notes that this wasn't what she had in mind.

Wells' keen observations depict him as a skilled investigator, more skilled, in fact, than the police, who failed to notice that the woman had been killed in her apartment. The stray bullet in the calendar offers an opportunity for Wells to pay attention to the significance of that date. If he were superstitious, he would take this as a sign, but Wells does not believe in luck or chance, and this oversight later leads to disaster.

Moss wakes up in a Mexican hospital and finds Wells sitting beside his bed holding a bouquet of flowers. Moss asks who he is, and Wells tells him his name is Carson Wells. Wells tells Moss he can make Chigurh go away. Moss says he can do it himself, but Wells tells him that is unlikely. He tells Moss that if the men in the Cadillac didn't show up, he wouldn't have made it out so well. Moss says he didn't make it out well, but Wells corrects him, saying he made it out extremely well.

Wells brings flowers in attempt to feign concern and win Moss's trust, but it is already clear to the reader that Wells is in this for the money. As a man who is determined to achieve autonomy, Moss does not give in. He is confident he can overcome Chigurh on his own. Wells disagrees, and his comment about making it out extremely well shows that he understands the risk in dealing with Chigurh more fully than Moss.

Moss tells Wells he looks like an idiot sitting there with the flowers. Wells puts them on the table beside his bed. Moss says Wells must have nothing better to do if he is sitting there, but Wells says he likes to do one thing at a time. Wells asks if Moss knows who Chigurh is. Moss says no, and Wells tells him he is not somebody he wants to know. People who meet Chigurh have very short futures, Wells says, or no futures at all. Wells tells Moss that Chigurh won't ever stop looking for him, even if he turned over the money. Chigurh will kill Moss just for inconveniencing him.

Moss makes it clear he does not want Wells there, but leaving the flowers suggests that Wells is not going to give in so easily. His comment about doing one thing at a time reflects the comment by Moss earlier in the novel; they share the same belief that through careful action and attention they can survive. Wells clarifies Chigurh's philosophy and his role as the representative of fate. Once Chigurh decides someone has been fated to die, he feels an obligation to follow through.

Wells asks Moss how he knows Chigurh is not on his way to Odessa to Kill Carla Jean. Moss says Wells doesn't know what he is talking about. Wells hands Moss two pictures of the old woman killed in the shootout, telling him that the body is still there. Moss doesn't believe him. Wells then asks Moss if he took the heroin. Moss says no. Wells then asks Moss what he plans to do, but Moss turns the question back on Well. Wells tells him he doesn't plan to do anything but wait for Moss to come to him for help. He tells Moss he doesn't have a choice.

Wells uses the photographs to make his point about the danger Carla Jean is in. The photos work effectively as leverage, as shown through Moss's willingness to reveal that he didn't take the heroin. Through their interaction, Wells is establishing power in the situation; he does not need to do anything but wait until Moss is ready for help. He contrasts Moss's belief in free will by suggesting he doesn't have a choice in asking for help.

Moss tells Wells he may just disappear. Wells tells him it only took three hours to find him, and Moss won't be so lucky next time; Chigurh will catch him. Defiantly, Moss suggests he will just cut a deal with Chigurh. Wells tells him he is not paying attention to what he has told him. Moss tells Wells he doesn't believe him. Wells asks Moss if he is in pain, and when Moss says yes he offers to get the nurse. Moss tells him he doesn't want any favors. Wells tells Moss that he won't be able to make any deals with Chigurh. There is nobody on earth who has even had a cross word with Chigurh and survived. He tells Moss his odds are bad. Wells says Chigurh is a peculiar man, that he has principles that transcend drugs or money.

Moss attempts to reestablish his autonomy and gain power in the situation by stating he will cut a deal with Chigurh. Wells knows this will not be possible, as Chigurh has already decided Moss is fated to die. Moss refuses Wells' attempt to get the nurse, as this small gesture would mean a loss of autonomy. Wells talks about Moss's fate in terms of odds, which is in line with his attention to numbers and his philosophy of fate, chance and free will. Wells understands that Chigurh is not driven by greed the way other characters are, but by a personal philosophy and a belief that he must deliver Moss's fate.

Moss asks Wells why he would even tell him about Chigurh. Wells says that he is hoping to make his job easier. He says Moss is not cut out for this kind of situation. Wells asks Moss what he did with the money, but Moss says he spent it on whiskey and whores. Moss barely glances at a pitcher of water on the table, and Wells asks if he'd like some. Moss says that if he wants something from Wells, Wells will be the first son of a bitch to know. Wells tells him the tracking device is not the only means Chigurh has to find him. Again, Moss says he doesn't need any help. Wells offers water again, but Moss tells him to go to hell.

Realizing his feigned concern is not working with Moss, Wells is honest about his intentions, admitting he just wants to make his job easier. Moss comment about whiskey and whores is similar to the one Wells made at the motel, showing the similarities in their characters. This comment is not true, but it suggests an awareness of the immorality of the world in which they live. Wells attention to detail allows him to notice Moss glancing at the water, and twice he offers to help, using this opportunity to gain power. Moss continues to exert his autonomy, denying him Wells the opportunity to help.

Wells asks Moss what he does for a living. Moss tells him he is retired, but he used to be a welder. Wells shows that he has knowledge of the trade, and that he fought in Vietnam. Moss asks him if that is supposed to make them friends. Wells goes on to tell him he was a lieutenant colonel in the special forces. Moss doesn't believe him, and asks what he does for a living now. Wells tells Moss he finds people, and settles accounts. In other words, he is a hit man.

Wells takes a different approach in this moment. He attempts to connect with Moss through their shared experience in Vietnam. Wells continues to hold a position of authority by stating his high rank in the special forces, but Moss doesn't budge. Moss has been disillusioned by the war, and no longer cares about the structures and codes of respect within the military.

Wells tells Moss that he works for people who won't give up on finding the money. Even if Moss killed Chigurh, the people who lost their heroin and money in the deal will continue looking for Moss, not to mention the DEA and other law enforcement. Moss asks Wells if he is afraid of Chigurh, but Wells says he would use the word 'wary'. Moss brings up Sheriff Bell, but Wells calls him a redneck sheriff in a hick town, county, and state. He gives Moss a card with his phone number on it, telling him he doesn't think he will use it, but he will need it later. Wells tells Moss he will let him keep some of the money if he hands it over, and if he doesn't it will mean his life and also Carla Jean's. After Wells leaves, Moss looks at the photographs of the dead woman Wells gave him.

Wells attempts to gain power over Moss by frightening him. Moss is driven by an internal sense of morality, justice, and self-will, so Wells' scare tactics don't work. Wells understands that fear would cause him to make wrong moves, but being wary will help make him pay better attention to his actions. Wells' comment about Bell suggests that he does not respect the law, and sees its ineptitude in dealing with situations like the one at hand. Moss still refuses to help Wells, even after money is offered. In this moment, it becomes clear that Moss is no longer driven by greed, but by a desire for autonomy and freedom. It is no longer about the money, but who controls the money.

CHAPTER 6

Bell reflects on the way young people have a hard time growing up. He remembers his cousin who was a police officer and married with a child by eighteen. Another man he knew as a boy was a respected preacher by the age of twenty-one. Bell went to France to fight in WWII at the age of twenty-one, and was the oldest in his class at boot camp. He notes that grandparents are raising some percentage of the nation's children in modern America. He wonders about the next generation. Because these children don't have parents, their children won't have grandparents. He laments the state of the nation, thinking nothing can save the world but the second coming of Christ. He reflects on what a good wife Loretta is. She cooks for the men in the local jail, and sometimes they come back years later, married and doing well, to visit her.

Bell finds the changes he has witnessed during his life deeply disturbing. His examples show the way in which his generation took responsibility for their lives and society, but he worries the new generation is not capable of the same accountability. Bell's frustration leads to a sense of powerlessness, and in the face of this futility, he feels he has no choice but to put his faith in Christ. He does, however, find some hope in Loretta's moral and ethical sensibilities, and honors her for her work.

The narrative then moves to Chigurh. He looks up a veterinarian in the phonebook, and drives to Uvalde, Texas to get supplies to treat his wounded leg. He buys a sack of supplies and drives down the street before parking the car. He walks to a pharmacy, where a car is parked in front of the store. He slides some cloth in the gas tank, tapes a piece of cardboard over it, and lights it. He goes into the pharmacy, and the car explodes. Once everyone is distracted, he slips behind the counter and steals some pain medication, antibiotics, and a pair of crutches. He leaves through the back door, setting off an alarm, but doesn't look back toward the burning front of the building.

Chigurh chooses the veterinarian for medical supplies to avoid connecting himself to the shooting in Eagles Pass, but this decision connects symbolically to his view that human beings are no different than animals. Chigurh's philosophy of fate is demonstrated in his choice to create a distraction, as opposed to robbing the pharmacy. He doesn't want to be forced to kill those who are not yet ready to meet their fate. Chigurh does not look back at the wreckage, showing his lack of concern with the past or with the carnage he has wrought. He is only interested in continuing to move forward with his mission.

Chigurh gets a motel room, and fills the bathtub. He cleans his leg, finding the entry and exit wounds. He cleans and bandages his wounds. Then he injects himself with antibiotics. He lies back on the bed, and other than a bit of sweat on his forehead, there is little evidence that his labor cost him anything at all.

As the embodiment of fate, Chigurh acts entirely alone, and refuses to depend on anyone else for help. He refuses to recognize weakness or fear, as these things would make him vulnerable, so the injuries he has received cost him nothing psychologically or spiritually.

Chigurh stays in the motel for five days. He keeps the television on, but doesn't change the channel. He just watches whatever is on—the news, talk shows, soap operas. When the maid comes, he tells her all he wants are towels and soap. He hands her ten dollars, and tells her the same thing in Spanish. She nods and takes the money before leaving. On the fifth night he is in a café when two officers come in. The officers eye him, so he leaves. He collects his things from his motel room, and drives away.

Unlike other characters, Chigurh is indifferent to the suffering of others and comfortable watching programs that fixate on human suffering. The mystery of his nature and origins are highlighted in his conversation with the maid. Like fate, Chigurh is not confined or limited by language, borders, social structures or norms. Leaving after seeing the police officers suggests that while his actions disregard the law, he knows he is still at risk of being recognized, which would interfere with his objectives to kill Moss and find the money.

The narrative moves to Wells as he examines the bridge that crosses the river into Mexico. He studies Moss's blood marks on the sidewalk. He walks further along before finding blood on the chain-link fence. He realizes that if Moss had carried the money into Mexico it would be gone, but he understands Moss didn't bring **the briefcase** over the border. He figures out that it is in the cane on the riverbank.

Wells' investigative skills lead him to deduce the location of the money. He understands the corruption and greed involved in money, and knows Moss would be robbed if he brought it over the border. He depends on his deductive skills without recognizing luck or chance, and at this moment, he doesn't recognize that his actions are leading him toward his death.

The narrative switches to Bell as he gives his assistant a book of checks, and asks if she has any leads on the cars at the original crime scene. She says she doesn't. She tells him that McIntyre called and asked if he wanted to go to the crime scene. Bell says McIntyre is a certified government agent, and he can go wherever he would like. She asks what he plans to do with the cars. Bell says they will sell them at auction. He asks her if she would call Loretta and tell her he has gone to Eagle Pass. He says he would call her, but she might want him to go home, and he just might if she asked. He asks his assistant what Torbert always says about truth and justice. She says that Torbert says: we dedicate ourselves anew daily. Bell says he is going to commence dedicating himself twice daily, and maybe three times before this is over.

Bell recognized the hierarchy and the authority inherent in the structures of law, and knows that McIntyre can do as he pleases. In this moment Bell is torn between his duty as a police officer and his duty as a husband. He knows if he talks to Loretta, his duty as a husband will draw him home, but he feels morally obligated to continue searching for Moss. Bell's comment about dedicating himself to truth and justice twice or three times daily shows his internal struggle to uphold these ideals. He is beginning to feel like quitting, and needs to work hard to stay dedicated.

Bell gets a coffee, and as he comes out of the café he stops a flatbed truck carrying the bodies from the crime scene. Bell asks if the driver has checked his load. The driver gets out of the car and they look at the bodies wrapped in blue plastic. One of the tie downs has come loose so the plastic is flapping, and Bell says it's a damned outrage. Bell asks how many bodies he left the scene with, and the driver assures him he hasn't lost any. The driver asks if he is going to write him a ticket, but Bell tells him to leave.

As a man dedicated to morality and ethics, Bell has a deep reverence for the dead, even though he knows these dead men were drug dealers. By not writing the ticket, Bell shows the way in which the limits of the law are malleable and defined by the men who uphold it. This moment demonstrates the conflict between his power as sheriff and his goodwill as a regular human being.

Bell stops at the Devil's River Bridge, and gets out of his car. He leans against the rail and looks out at the sunset in the west. A semi passes, and slows down. The driver yells, "Don' jump, Sheriff. She ain't worth it." Bell smiles as the truck drives away, and says, the truth of the matter, is that she is.

Bell has been considering his marriage to Loretta and how his police work has interfered with their time together. The driver's comments represent the contemporary views of love and marriage, but Bell still holds onto the old values.

Meanwhile, Chigurh is driving toward Eagle's Pass when suddenly the tracking device beeps in the passenger seat. He pulls over, and adjusts the nobs, but nothing happens. As he pulls back out onto the highway the device begins beeping again. He goes to the hotel in Eagle Pass and gets a room. He can't understand why the tracker is back at the hotel. He assumes Moss is dead, so he thinks it's either the police or some agent from the Matacumbe Petroleum Group.

Chigurh shows his fallibility by assuming that Moss is dead, but he is right in supposing someone is there looking for him. The reader knows that Wells is looking for him, and an element of fate and free will is present in the looming encounter. He continues forward despite this knowledge, confident that the laws of fate will draw the person or persons to him.

Chigurh gets a room and takes a nap. He wakes at ten-thirty and goes to the lobby. He asks the clerk for the registration list. She tells him she can't show him because he is not a police officer. He says yes, she can. Afterward, he goes to the room Moss rented before the shoot out. Inside, he finds the tracking unit where Moss left it in the drawer of the bedside table. He thinks about it for a minute before placing the unit on the windowsill. He then he goes back to the lobby to wait for Wells.

Chigurh's comment to the clerk about sharing the information suggests that he does not recognize the law. In his mind, the power given to police officers is arbitrary. Chigurh's discovery of the tracking device in the drawer shows that Wells has not been as observant as he thinks. His cockiness has caused him to overlook the device that will lead to his demise. This oversight depicts the limits of Wells's belief that he can overcome fate through careful action.

Wells comes in at 11:13. Chigurh wraps his shotgun in a newspaper, and follows him upstairs. When Wells notices Chigurh in the hallway, Chigurh drops the paper and greets Wells by his first name, Carson. They enter and sit in Wells' room. Wells tells him he doesn't have to kill him—Wells could just give him money and go home. Wells refers again to the offer, but Chigurh tells him it's the wrong currency.

Wells enters the motel with his guard down, assuming that Chigurh would not return to the motel. His self-sufficiency fails in this moment, which reinforces the idea that fate is inevitable. Despite everything Wells said to Moss about Chigurh, he tries to reason for his life, but Chigurh is not driven by greed. He is there for one reason: to deliver Wells' fate.

Chigurh tells Wells getting shot by Moss changed his perspective. He speaks about an experience he had in a town by the border. A man started insulting him at a bar. He tried to ignore him, but the man kept going. Chigurh offered for the man to come outside, and when he came out, Chigurh killed him. He watched the man's friends gather around the body as he drove off. Chigurh was arrested an hour later, and let the deputy take him into custody. He wanted to see if he could extract himself from custody by an act of will, but he understands it was a foolish thing to do.

Chigurh's anecdote refers to his arrest at the beginning of the novel. The man's actions in the bar speak metaphorically to the testing of fate. The man could not see the way his actions were influencing his future. Chigurh's experience with his arrest and later with his injury have led him to understand that he is not exempt from the laws of fate. His decision to allow himself to be arrested was a foolish tempting of his own fate, and he has begun recognizing the risk involved in such actions.

Wells asks Chigurh if he knows how crazy he is. Chigurh doesn't answer, but asks Wells a question: "If the rule you follow led you to this of what use was the rule?" Wells says he doesn't know what Chigurh is talking about. Chigurh tells him he is talking about Wells' life, in which everything can be seen at once now. Wells tells him he is not interested in his bullshit. Chigurh says he expected something different from Wells, since the predicament he is in calls past events into questions. Wells tells Chigurh he knows where the money is located, but Chigurh is not interested. He tells Wells the money will be placed at his feet. Wells continues trying to reason with Chigurh, but Chigurh tells him it's not going to happen. Wells tells him to go to hell.

Chigurh's question to Wells conveys his philosophy of fate, chance, and free will. He recognizes the limits of self-imposed rules. As careful and determined as Wells has been, he could not account for the elements of chance and the power of fate that brought him to this moment. Now that Wells has reached the end of his life, Chigurh suggests he can see how all of his actions led him to this moment. Well's doesn't believe Chigurh, but Chigurh is able to see the way in which Wells' free will brought him here. Again, Chigurh explains he is not driven by greed. He believes the money is fated to come to him.

Wells stares Chigurh down, and Chigurh asks if he thinks he can stall his death with his eyes. Chigurh tells him he should just admit his situation, that there would be more dignity in it. Chigurh understands that Wells thinks they are alike, that he is driven by greed, but he is not interested in the money. Wells tells Chigurh to get it over with and kill him. Chigurh tells Wells to compose himself. If he doesn't respect Chigurh, how can he respect himself? Wells says that Chigurh he thinks he is outside of everything, but he is not outside of death. Chigurh says he is not afraid of death. He is different than Wells, who has been giving things up for years to end up where he is in this moment. Chigurh notes they are in the same line of work, up to a certain point, so how can Wells hold him in contempt?

Chigurh recognizes Wells' attempt to deny his fate, which is unacceptable and cowardly in Chigurh's mind. Chigurh points out the difference between he and Wells, suggesting that greed has caused Wells to make wrong moves. Chigurh thinks it hypocritical for Wells to condemn him for killing when Wells does the same thing. Chigurh does not perceive himself as outside of death, but he accepts death as a fact, which works to his benefit as he moves through the world. He is not attached to the material world, so he is unafraid. Driven by greed, Wells has made sacrifices and wrong moves that have brought him to this moment, while Chigurh operates without the influence of greed or attachment.

Wells asks Chigurh what time it is. Chigurh tells him it is 11:57, and Wells tells him that according to the bullet hole in the old woman's calendar he has three more minutes to live. He says he saw this coming a long time ago, almost like a dream. Again, he tells Chigurh to get it over with. He closes his eyes, and raises his hands in front of his face. Chigurh shoots through his hand, and the bullet enters Wells' head. Everything Wells ever loved or remembered drains from his head—his mother's face, his first communion, the women he had loved, the men he saw killed in Vietnam, a child dead beside a road. Chigurh takes the shell casing from the floor and leaves. He checks Wells' rental car, and as he looks around, Wells' phone rings. It is Moss calling from the hospital. Chigurh answers.

Wells remembers the bullet hole in the calendar, and knows he should have trusted it as a sign. The same is true with the dream; he has depended too heavily on his determination and self-will, believing he could overcome fate. Raising his hand before being shot can be read as a final attempt to deny his fate. The fading of the memories points to the idea that the past is carried forward into the present, and only vanishes in death. The call Chigurh receives from Moss immediately after killing Wells supports the idea of fate as inevitable. Had he called a short time earlier, he would have reached Wells, but he was fated to die.

From Mexico, Moss calls Carla Jean before calling Wells' phone. Carla Jean's grandmother answers, telling him she doesn't want to talk to him. Carla Jean's grandmother says she told Carla Jean this would happen. When Carla Jean gets on the phone, she tells him she didn't think he would do this to her. Bell has been there, and she was afraid Moss was dead. He tells her she needs to leave Odessa. Carla Jean asks what she should do with her grandmother, and Moss tells her she will be all right, nobody will bother her. Carla Jean starts crying and tells Moss that Bell told her he is going to get killed. She tells him she doesn't want the money, she just wants things to go back to the way they were. He says they will be, eventually. Carla Jean calls the money a false god, but Moss tells her it is real money. He tells her that everything will go back to the way it was if she just listens to him. He tells Carla Jean he plans to call Wells for help.

Carla Jean's grandmother is from an older generation. She has been skeptical of Moss from the start of their relationship because he does not ascribe to older modes of thinking and living. Moss operates in the world with a newer set of values—a lack of faith in God, a distrust of the law, and dedication to autonomy—that challenge the views of the older generation. Though Carla Jean seemed steadfast in her trust of Moss earlier in the novel, this moment suggests she her faith in him has waivered. She wants to go back the way they were, but Moss continues to be driven by his internal desire for autonomy. He finds the money more "real" than faith in God or religion, which demand faith in unobservable forces. He would rather put his faith in himself and his ability to survive than put his faith in God, a power that may or may not exist.

Moss calls Wells' phone and Chigurh picks up. He tells Moss he needs to come see him. Chigurh tells Moss that Wells can't help him now. He asks Moss where he has hidden the money. Again, Moss asks about Wells, but Chigurh tells him Wells is out of the picture, and Moss needs to deal with him. Chigurh tells Moss he knows he is in the hospital in Piedras Negras, but that he is heading to Odessa instead. He tells Moss he can save Carla Jean by handing over the money. He tells Moss he will kill him either way, but he could save Carla Jean. Moss tells Chigurh he will kill him before he can kill Carla Jean.

Moss understands Wells is dead, and that he must depend on himself from now on. In this moment, Moss is given a choice to exercise his free will, and save Carla Jean, yet he chooses not to, believing he he can overcome Chigurh and his fate. Chigurh will kill Moss either way, as he believes he has been fated to die, and in choosing not to work with Chigurh, Moss has also decided Carla Jean's fate.

Moss leaves the hospital before daylight, shoeless, and dressed in the hospital gown with his jacket over it. He tries to get a cab, but they pass by him until one eventually pulls up. Moss asks the driver to take him over the border. The driver asks if he has money, and Moss says he does. At the gate, the guard leans over and studies him in the back of the cab. He asks Moss what country he was born in. Moss tells him he was born in the U.S. The guard has Moss step out of the car.

Moss's appearance after leaving the hospital makes it difficult for him to flag down a cab. The drivers questioning, and later the guards distrust of him suggest a shift in identity. He lacks the signifiers of his American identity. His external appearance metaphorically reflects internal changes as well. Moss is no longer the moral and law abiding citizen he once was.

The guard brings Moss inside and questions him, making it clear that only some citizens get to go in to the U.S. and he decides who those people are. Eventually, Moss tells the guard he is a Vietnam veteran. The guard questions him about his service, and what outfit he fought with and the dates of his tours of duty. Immediately the atmosphere changes. The guard asks if Moss is alright, and whether he has money for a phone call. The guard asks if his wife knows where he is. Moss says yes, and the guard asks if they had a fight. Moss says they had a little fight. The guard tells him he needs to apologize, even if he thinks it was her fault. Moss says he will. The guard tells him that sometimes there is a little problem, but if you don't fix it, it turns into a bigger problem. Moss agrees, and then leaves.

The border guard immediately flaunts his power by stating that he decides who is allowed into the U.S. This demonstration of power draws a distinction between the two countries. While Moss only needed to pay a dime to cross into Mexico, crossing back is not so easy. Moss's status as veteran, however, gives him the upper hand in this situation. Americans hold a special respect for veterans, and though Moss struggles with this, knowing the unethical realities of war, he uses it to his benefit. The guard also holds to traditional American values regarding marriage. His comment on growing problems can be read ironically, as Moss's entire existence is now defined by a single wrong decision that has become a major problem.

Once Moss crosses into the U.S., he goes to a clothing store. The store is closed, but he knocks and asks the owner to make an exception for him. Because he is injured, Moss asks the man to find him some clothes, boots, and a hat. Before the man sets out to collect the clothing, Moss asks him if they often get customers like him without clothes on. The man says no. Moss goes into the dressing room and gets dressed. When he comes out he tells the man he hasn't been "duded up" like this since he got out of the army.

The man shows compassion for Moss by letting him in and finding clothing for him. In this scene, Moss regains his American identity. The comment about being "duded up" is a nod to the traditional Western genre. Moss has survived his near death experience, and is about to set out to rescue his wife, which suggests he still believes he can overcome Chigurh and maintain his autonomy. This scene contains a sense of triumph and hope, but it will be short lived.

Bell talks to the Eagle Pass sheriff. The sheriff tells Bell that they are closing the motel because a second clerk was killed. Bell says that the reason nobody knows what Chigurh looks like is nobody lives long enough to give a description. The sheriff says Chigurh is a lunatic, but Bell says he wouldn't call him that, though he doesn't know what to call him.

Bell understands that Chigurh is a highly principled and effective killer. He does not act out of insanity, but with a clear code, even if this code exists beyond Bells understanding of morality and justice.

Bell and the sheriff go back to the hotel and see the tracking unit on the windowsill. They examine the scene, noting Wells' death. The sheriff asks if there is something Bell isn't telling him, but Bell says they both have the same facts. The sheriff asks if Bell has a "dog in this hunt", and Bell says tells him about Moss and Carla Jean. The Sheriff asks if they are family. Bell says no, but they are from his county, and he is supposed to protect them. The sheriff takes the tracking device and shakes his head. They talk about the drugs involved. The sheriff notes that they sell it to school kids, but Bell says its worse than that. When the sheriff asks what he means, Bell tells him that school kids are buying it.

Neither of the sheriffs has witnessed this kind of violence, and both struggle to make sense of it. They must confront the limits of their power as lawmen. Even though Moss and Carla Jean are not family, they are members of Bell's community, and he feels a moral obligation to protect them. Bell recognizes that the drug problem is not just driven by the dealers, but by the young people creating the market. He sees the corruption on different levels, and understands that it will be part of America's future.

CHAPTER 7

Bell reflects on his service in WWII. He says he is supposed to be a decorated war hero, but he lost his whole squad in battle. He thinks about it every day. Some men came back from war with negative views of their families and community members, calling them rednecks, and looking down on their political leanings. Bell states that two generations in this country is a long time, and he used to try to tell these men that their ancestors' wives and children were scalped and gutted as they settled the land, which is enough to make anyone irritable, but the men didn't know what he was talking about.

In this monologue, Bell provides a glimpse of the guilt he feels about losing his squad in WWII, an event has shaped his identity, philosophy, and belief in justice in a significant way. Bell recognizes the role of history in the present moment. He does not look down on the people of his community because he understands their past. He tries to explain this to the returning veterans, but they are unable to see the people of their community in a larger context.

Bell states that the sixties sobered some of these men. He talks about a survey sent out to schoolchildren around the country after WWII. The biggest problems they faced were other students talking in class, running in the hallway, copying homework, or chewing gum. Forty years later, the same survey revealed children are dealing with rape, arson, murder, drugs, and suicide. When Bell says the world is going to hell, people just smile and say he is getting old. Once at a conference, Bell sat next to a woman bemoaning right wing politics. She tells Bell she wants her granddaughter to be able to have an abortion if she needs one. Bell told her not to worry, The way things are going, her granddaughter will be able to have an abortion, and she will also be able to euthanize the woman if she wants. That ended the conversation.

The surveys show the way in which American society has changed. Children are now growing up in a violent world, which is shaping their values and sense of morality. People don't want to recognize these changes, so they brush Bell off. Bell's moral and ethical orientation in reflected in his conversation with the woman. In his mind, if American people become lenient toward an issue like abortion, they are likely to open the door to other issues that he views as unethical, such as the euthanasia.

The narrative shifts to Chigurh as he goes to the Matacumbe Petroleum Group office to kill the man who sent Wells after him. He climbs the steps to the seventeenth floor, and walks down the hallway, noticing the doors are open. He thinks it's strange that the man does not see his own shadow coming through the door and rising on the hallway wall. Chigurh knows that fear of the enemy can blind men to other hazards, especially the shape they themselves make in the world. Chigurh steps into the room and shoots the man in the throat with birdshot. As the man bleeds out, Chigurh tells him that he is the guy that Wells was sent to kill. He tells the man the reason he used birdshot was to prevent shattering the window and sending glass down onto the street below. The man dies, and Chigurh leaves.

Chigurh thinks about his philosophy regarding fate, chance, and free will. The man does not notice his shadow, which metaphorically signifies the darkness that follows those who are driven by greed and corruption. While the man is focused on those who oppose him, he does not acknowledge the ways in which his own actions have brought Chigurh to him. Chigurh kills him with birdshot to prevent harm to those on the street below. He does not kill those who are not fated to die.

The narrative then moves to Carla Jean and her grandmother as they take a cab to the bus station in an undisclosed location. They plan to travel to El Paso. Her grandmother begins to struggle to get out of the cab, and out into the rain. Carla Jean tells her grandmother to wait, but frustrated, her grandmother tells her she knew it would come to this. Her grandmother tells the cab driver she is dying, and now she has no place to go. She tells the cab driver she doesn't know a single person in El Paso. Before they board their bus, Carla Jean's grandmother tells her that she doesn't know why she has to run from the law for something Moss and Carla Jean did. Carla Jean says they are not running from the law, but when her grandmother asks if they could call the police, Carla Jean says, no.

Carla Jean's grandmother's distress depicts the way in which Moss's actions have impacted those around him. Moss's greed and his foolish decision not to work with Chigurh have isolated Carla Jean and her grandmother. Her grandmother, holding traditional views of the law, thinks they should go to the police, but Carla Jean understands that the police will not be able to fix the situation, so she refuses.

That night, Chigurh goes to the house where Carla Jean was staying with her Grandmother. He searches the house, and in the kitchen takes a can of orange soda from the refrigerator. After drinking the soda, he sits in the recliner in the living room for a while before searching the rest of the house. Upstairs, he enters the grandmother's bedroom, and can smell the musty odor of her sickness. Then he goes into Carla Jean's room. He picks up some of her things, weighing them in his hand like a medium who might divine some fact about the owner from them. He pockets two photographs from a photo album. Afterward, he sleeps in Carla Jean's bed. In the morning, Chigurh cleans his wounds in the bathroom, and shaves. Then he eats a bowl of cereal as he walks through the house. He finds a phone bill, and discovers the Terrell County Sheriff's number on it. Then he moves to a mahogany desk, and finds more mail. He begins sorting through it.

The way in which Chigurh enters the house, invades the fridge, sleeps in Carla Jean's bed, and goes through the mail shows his complete disregard for societal structures, such as private property, and laws that prevent the crossing of these boundaries. Chigurh does not believe in God or divination, but believes that Carla Jean's fate will lead her to him.

Moss awakens in a motel room on the edge of Eagles Pass. He showers, shaves, and brushes his teeth for the first time in five days. After dressing his wounds and putting his clothes on, he calls a cab. When he gets into the car, he asks the driver if he wants to make some money. He takes five hundreds from his pocket and tears the bills in half. He hands sections of the bills to the driver. Moss asks the driver his name, which is Paul, and tells him he has the right attitude. Moss tells him to go down the river road, but the driver tells him he isn't willing to pick anyone up, and he is not willing to do anything concerning drugs. Moss tells him they are going to get a **briefcase**, but there is nothing illegal inside. The man says he likes money, but he likes staying out of jail even better. Moss says he feels the same way.

Money is used as a way to gain control and power in this situation. The man is worried about breaking the law, but folds under the temptation of the money. Moss says there is nothing illegal in the briefcase, even though it is filled with millions of dollars of drug money. Moss does not ascribe to societal conceptions of the law, his moral sensibility stems from a personal sense of right and wrong. In his views, the money is not illegal.

When Moss and the cab driver reach the river road, Moss takes the bulb from the dome light. Moss goes into the cane and finds **the briefcase** sitting upright, as if someone had simply placed it there. Back in the cab, the driver asks what is in the briefcase. Moss tells him there is a lot of money inside, and asks what it would cost to bring him to San Antonio. The driver says he will do it for a thousand dollars. The driver worries that the authorities will stop them, but Moss assures him they have more important things to deal with down the road. He say it isn't going to end here. Moss tells the man to trust him, but the driver says he hates those words. Moss asks if the driver has ever said them. The driver says he has, and so he knows what they are worth.

Moss takes the dome light out to limit their visibility and avoid being spotted. The position of the briefcase aligns with the idea of fate. It is resting as if the money has been placed there for him, and in a sense it has been placed there by fate. Again, the driver is persuaded by the promise of money. Moss is sure that they will not be stopped on the way; some part of him knows he will not yet meet his fate. The question of trust connects to the idea of chance. It is difficult to trust anyone because no one can be sure of the outcomes of any situation or relationship. The presence of chance makes predicting the future impossible. As shown with Wells, attempting to predict outcomes can have dire consequences.

Moss spends the night in the Rodeway Inn on Highway 90. The next morning, he realizes he can't buy a gun from a shop because he doesn't have an ID, but he finds a gun for sale in the newspaper. The man delivers the gun to the door, and afterward, Moss takes it out into the prairie along with a pillow and fires it to make sure it works. As he fires, he thinks about his life.

The ease with which Moss attains the gun highlights the ineffectiveness of the law and the willingness of citizens to break it. Thinking about his life while firing the gun shows the way in which his life has been influenced by violence, especially during his tour in Vietnam. This moment shows the way in which the past has continued with him into the future.

After leaving the motel, Moss buys a 1978 Ford Pickup truck from a car lot, and pays for it in cash. At the onramp at Borne, he picks up a young woman who is hitchhiking. She gets in the truck, and Moss thinks she is about fifteen or sixteen. Moss asks if she can drive. She says yes, so long as it isn't a stick shift. Moss tells her it's an automatic, and gets in the passenger seat. As they drive off, Moss tells her hitchhiking is dangerous. She says she knows it. He tells her not to go over the speed limit or they could be in a world of trouble. Moss tries to sleep, but he is in too much pain. He stays awake, continuing to watch the speedometer.

Moss picks up the young woman so she can help him drive, but it is later revealed that he is also concerned for her wellbeing. Despite the fact that Moss breaks the law and is forced to act unethically in some situations, he operates from a strong moral center, and does his best to help those in need. He is aware of the law, which is why he watches the speedometer, but this awareness is not enough for him to obey it.

The young woman asks if Moss is running from the law. Moss asks, "what if I was?" If he was, she says, she thinks she ought get out of the truck. Moss tells her that's not true—she just wants to know where she stands. He tells her it would only take three days before he could have her holding up gas stations. She smiles. She asks if he robs gas stations, but he tells her no. He asks her when she last ate. She says she doesn't like people asking her that, but Moss asks her again. She calls him a smart ass, and pulls off the highway in hopes of finding a restaurant. Moss tells her there is a restaurant four miles out, and then asks her to hand him the machinegun under the seat.

Moss does not lie when she asks if he is running from the law, but he isn't completely honest about the situation. The desire to know where she stands is connected to the idea of fate and free will. She has to know more about the situation before she can make decisions. Moss's perceived sense of power is reflected in his comment about corrupting the young woman. This comment is counterbalanced, however, by his concern over whether she has eaten recently. The young woman, like Moss, values autonomy and does not like to let people help her, as shown through her response to his question.

The narrative cuts to Bell driving out into a pasture and parks his truck at a well. He looks up at a windmill, and watches the blades turning in the wind. He stands with the posture of a man who has just buried something, and says he doesn't know a damn thing. When Bell gets home, Loretta gives him a message from Carla Jean written on a piece of paper. Bell asks if she said where she was, noting the number is from West Texas. Bell calls her back, and Carla Jean tells him she is in a motel outside of El Paso. She asks Bell to promise that he will not harm Moss if she reveals his location. Bell gives her his word.

The presence of the well and the windmill point to a time in the past that is now gone. Their presence reflects Bell's personal feeling that he is becoming a remnant of the past in an evolving society. Bell's posture suggests a feeling of defeat, exhaustion, and despair. Bell is beginning to accept the frailties of his philosophy his inability to overcome the situation. Carla Jean has lost faith in her husband, and begins to feel that the getting the law involved may save him. She doesn't realize that Chigurh, like fate, operates outside of human constructs, such as the law. He will continue to hunt her and Moss until they are both dead.

Simultaneously, A Mexican man sits at a little plywood trailer, wearing a headset and writing on a pad of paper. He is somehow tracking Moss. He takes the headset off, and looks toward the rear of the trailer where another man is stretched out in bed. "Listo?" he asks, meaning, "Are you ready?" The other man asks if he got it. The first man tells him yes. They take machine guns from the kitchen cabinets. Outside they get into a Plymouth Barracuda, and leave.

Moss is preoccupied with Chigurh, so he is not aware of the others who are still looking for him. This can be read as a failure of self-will to overcome fate. Barracudas are ferocious predators, and the name of car signifies the dangerous nature of these men.

CHAPTER 8

Bell thinks about friends he has lost over the past few years, and is beginning to confront the idea of death. He thinks about the legacy one leaves behind, and worries that the nine unsolved homicides won't be solved. He notes that the men involved in the murders and drug dealing don't even consider the law, but worse than that, there are police officers on the border that are involved in the drug trade. He notes that the cartels killed a judge in San Antonio, and feels sad about the fact that the only reason he, Bell, is alive is that the dealers have no respect for him, he isn't even important enough to kill.

In the past, sheriffs were a symbol of law and order in American society, but Bell realizes that these men don't even consider his presence, which is difficult for him to accept. So much of his identity has been based on upholding morality, law, and order, and the fact that these criminals don't even consider him is devastating to his sense of self-worth.

A few years ago, Bell was part of an investigation of a plane found used for drug running on a makeshift landing strip. The Sheriff in charge of the investigation set up a sting to arrest the dealers, but they realized nobody was coming back for the plane. He tells about a bombing method used by the Mexican drug dealers in which they'd put a grenade in a mason jar and drop them from planes. Bell states that if Satan were looking for a way to bring the human race to its knees, narcotics would be the perfect means. He is not sure if he believes in Satan, but belief in Satan provides an explanation for things that don't have any answers.

The enormous amount of money involved in the drug trade allows the smugglers to abandon the plane. The makeshift grenade bombs show how violent these cartels can be. Here we see Bell's belief in God and higher law waiver. He has always believed that his job was to uphold God's higher law and fight against evil, but he begins to question whether the evil he is witnessing stems from human nature, and not some outside entity.

The narrative then moves to Moss and the young woman. They sit in a restaurant, talking. She asks him if he is injured because he can barely walk, and he says maybe it's an old war injury. She asks what he does for a living, and Moss tells her three weeks ago he was a law-abiding citizen, but things happen, and they don't ask first. They don't require one's permission. Moss and the young woman talk for a bit about where they are heading. Their conversation is flirtatious. Eventually, the young woman says she is going to California, but has no money. Moss gives her a thousand dollars. She asks him what she has to do for the money, but Moss tells her she doesn't have to do anything.

Moss's comment about things happening without asking again shows his awareness of fate. The woman believes Moss is trying to solicit sex from her, but he gives her the money out of general concern for her wellbeing. Her misunderstanding reflects her view of the world, and in a larger sense, the view of newer generations. It is difficult for her to understand altruism.

Moss and the young woman drive until after dark. They pull into a truck stop, and once inside they order steaks and continue talking. Moss asks her if anyone knows where she is. She says he's the only person who knows where she is, but he tells her he can't know *where* she is because he doesn't know *who* she is. Moss says there is always someone who knows where you are. She thinks he means God, but he says a person always knows where they themselves are. She says it would be a problem if someone didn't know where he or she was, but Moss isn't so sure. It is possible to not know where you were, but the real problem is that you wouldn't know where someplace else was in relation to you, which wouldn't change anything about where you were.

Moss can't know where the young woman is in her life because he does not have a frame of reference for her. He suggests it doesn't matter if you know where you are internally if you have no external reference against which to gage your position. The novel's larger themes of morality and justice are reflected in this comment. The events of the narrative have caused Moss's understanding of justice and morality to waver, as they have for Bell. Without a strong moral grounding, it is difficult to navigate the situations he is confronting.

The young woman says she doesn't like to think about the deep questions Moss is presenting to her. She says she doesn't know what the point is. Moss says the point is that there is no point. He continues by saying that it's not about knowing where you are, but recognizing that you are bringing your history with you. There is no starting over, he says, every step you take is forever. He tells her she can't escape herself.

The young woman does not want to think about these difficult questions. She is leaving for California to escape some unnamed difficulty, and Moss is asking her to confront the reasons why. Moss knows that the past continues with a person into the future, and he reminds her that running from her difficulties will not make the past disappear.

Moss and the young woman go to a motel in Van Horn, and Moss gets them each a room. Moss goes to a gas station and buys some beer. When he gets back, he offers one to the young woman, stating he knows she is not old enough to drink, but doesn't mind. He tries to go back to his room, but she convinces him to stay. They sit on the steps and begin talking about why Moss is on the run. He jokingly says he just got off death row, and when she asks if the law is still hunting him, he says everybody is hunting him. He tells her he took something that didn't belong to him, referring to **the briefcase** full of money. Moss tells her about Carla Jean. The young woman asks Moss if he thinks she should go to California, but he says he doesn't know what she is supposed to do.

Moss follows his own code of morality and law as opposed to external ideas of higher law, which is why he gives the young woman alcohol, but refuses to sleep in the same room with her. The fact that Moss began as the hunter and is now being hunted shows how the chance discovery of the money and his decision to take it has turned his life in a completely different direction. He understands how actions bear consequences. Despite his poor decision, he continues to believe in free will, which is why he does not give the young woman advice.

Later in the conversation, the young woman says she has a feeling she should be afraid of Moss, but she isn't. Moss says he can't give her advice about that, but most people will run from their own mother to hug death by the neck. She wonders where she would be if she hadn't met Moss that morning, stating she has always been lucky about meeting people. Moss tells her not to speak too soon. There is a lot of bad luck out there, and if she waits long enough she will get her share. He tells her that if there is one thing she doesn't look like, it's a bunch of good luck walking around. She stands up, and on her way to her room, she asks him if he has changed his mind about sleeping with her. He says he hasn't changed his mind; he likes to get it right the first time. Then he goes to his room.

As a man who believes in free will and personal choice, Moss doesn't want to tell the young woman what to feel, but his comment about individuals pursuing death shows his awareness of bad judgment. The young woman's comment about being lucky becomes deeply ironic after she is killed. A person's luck can change in an instant, and there is no way to predict the moment when luck shifts. Moss understands this, as his good luck in finding the money has completely changed. Moss maintains his morality by refusing to have sex with the young woman and remaining loyal to Carla Jean. He recognizes that he has choices, and believes he is making smart moves, but he will soon discover he cannot escape fate.

The narrative jumps to The Mexican driving the Baracuda. He pulls into a car wash. He has just left a shootout, in which Moss and the young woman were killed along with his partner. He gets some quarters from the change machine, and cleans blood from the car. Afterward he gets back in and begins driving down the highway, heading west.

Moss expects a confrontation with Chigurh, but he and the young woman meet their fate at the hands of the Mexican hit men. This fact reinforces the idea that fate is unpredictable, and can strike unexpectedly. The man's clean getaway connects to the idea of fate. Fate delivers death and leaves no trace. The escape also shows the failure of the law to prevent fated events and bring justice to those involved.

The narrative moves to Bell as he drives out to Van Horn, where Moss and the young hitchhiker were killed at the motel. On the way, he passes a car burning on the side of the highway. It makes him nervous, but he doesn't stop. At the scene, Bell finds the deputies questioning a witness. The local sheriff tells Bell there was a shootout. A woman has already died, and two men had been taken to the hospital. The witness told the sheriff that the Mexicans arrived and pulled the young woman from her room. When Moss saw the Mexican man with the young woman, he put his weapon down. After that, the Mexican man shot the young woman and then turned the gun on Moss. Moss fell down the stairs, then shot one of the Mexican men as they fled. Bell asks the sheriff if he will drive down to the hospital with him. They leave.

The anecdote about the killing reveals Moss's current sense of morality. He didn't want to kill anyone, but like bringing the water to the Mexican man in the desert, his morality leads to negative consequences. Acting morally does not guarantee safe passage through life. Moss is dealing with people who aren't concerned with morality or justice, so it's no surprise that the Mexican man does not honor his surrender. The young woman's death counteracts her feeling of being lucky, which shows the changing tides of fate.

At the hospital, Bell and the sheriff go into the mortuary. Moss is lying dead on the table, covered by a sheet. The sheriff asks Bell if Moss is a friend, but Bell says no. The sheriff tells Bell that Moss was shot several times in the face, but he has seen worse. He says the highway is a warzone. They pull back the sheet, and Bell identifies Moss. Bell immediately realizes he will have to tell Carla Jean. The sheriff tries to comfort him by saying there is nothing he could have done, but Bell says you always like to think there is. The sheriff says the young woman was "skankylooking," and Carla Jean isn't going to like the fact that Moss was with the young woman. Bell agrees. After leaving the hospital, Bell goes back to the motel to look around.

Bell takes Moss's death as a personal defeat. Until this point he hoped he would be able to save him, but now he realizes that justice will likely not be served. The sheriffs misjudge the situation between Moss and the young woman, suggesting Moss was soliciting sex from the young woman. The local sheriff is used to this kind of activity. He witnesses violence and vice on a regular basis, as shown through his comment about the highway being a warzone. Bell's decision to go back to the motel to look for leads shows that he is not completely defeated.

Later that evening, after the officers have left the scene, Chigurh goes to the motel where Moss and the young woman were killed. He knocks the cylinder out of the doorknob and enters the room where Moss stayed. He finds **the briefcase** in the vent, and brings it to his truck. Just as he is about to turn the truck on, he sees Bell pull his cruiser into the parking lot. Bell goes into the room Chigurh left moments earlier, and finds the vent unscrewed. He looks out into the parking lot where Chigurh is waiting. He finds the cylinder Chigurh knocked out of the doorknob with his **bolt gun**. Bell takes his pistol from its holster and says he doesn't know what is out there. Immediately, he disagrees with himself, stating he knew what was here when he came here.

Unlike Moss, Wells, and Bell, Chigurh is patient and trusts fate to guide his actions. Bell does not triumph in this moment, but doesn't accept fate in the way Chigurh does. He denies that Chigurh is present at the hotel, but immediately recognizes this denial. The complexity of this moment for Bell can be read as a refutation of free will. He doesn't want to accept responsibility for placing himself into a situation he knows he cannot survive. Denial allows the fault to be placed elsewhere, on the influence of luck or chance, for example.

As Bell walks to his car, he asks himself if a person can feel when someone is watching them. He notes that some people think so. He drives down the highway a little ways and calls for backup. He pulls forward again, and watches the motel parking lot while he waits, deciding that if a car pulls out he will run it off the road. After the deputies arrive Bell goes back to the parking lot and checks the cars with them. They find nothing, and Bell tells the deputies they have been "outgeneraled." It is unclear how Chigurh escapes, but he likely drove off while Bell was away from the scene, calling for backup.

Again, Bell denies the feeling of being watched by projecting his feeling into an abstract question. Instead of going after Chigurh, he calls for backup and leaves, a move that allows Chigurh to escape. This decision suggests Bell understands he is outmatched. As sheriff, Bell's character stands in symbolically for the law, so in a large sense, this speaks to the futility of law to overcome the corruptions and evils of American society. The term "outgeneraled" brings forward the military metaphor for their situation; in this war they are fighting, Chigurh comes out on top.

Bell spends the night in a motel on the east side of El Paso, and goes to a café the next morning. He searches the newspaper, but finds they have not written about Moss and the young woman yet. He asks the waitress when the evening paper gets in, but she says she doesn't read the paper, and made her husband stop reading it as well. Bell says he doesn't blame her. She says they call it news, but asks Bell when the last time he read about Jesus Christ in the news.

The lack of religion in the newspaper shows the absence of faith in American society. Because of the complexity of the violence and corruption people are witnessing in the community, people turn to biblical conceptions of good and evil to provide answers. The newspaper, however, provides secular reportage of the facts without exploring answering the question of why these things are occurring.

Bell goes to Carla Jean's motel room and knocks on the door. He tells her he is sorry, and Carla Jean staggers back in the room and falls to the floor, saying, "Oh, God." He goes in and closes the door. He tells her he is as sorry as he can be. She yells at him, saying her husband is dead, and if he says sorry one more time she will get her gun and shoot him.

Carla Jean does not believe that Bell can understand what she is feeling. Through Bell's monologues and scenes, the reader understands Bell's concern for Moss and Carla Jean, and knows he is experiencing grief along with Carla Jean. Moss's death also connects back to his experience in WWII. Both Bell and Carla Jean accept the failure of justice in this moment, on both a societal and spiritual levels.

CHAPTER 9

Bell, once again issuing a monologue from the present, wishes he could have told Carla Jean that Moss didn't sleep with the young woman he picked up, and was instead just trying to help her. He called Carla Jean to try to explain all this, but she hangs up on him. The reader is told that Chigurh kills Carla Jean before Bell gets the chance to explain, though the scene of the murder is not dramatized until later. When he got the call from Odessa that Chigurh had killed Carla Jean, he drove out and tried to get some fingerprints from the scene, but the FBI database drew a blank. Bell says that Chigurh is a ghost, and tells himself that maybe it is over, but he knows Chigurh is out there somewhere. Bell then tells about his father, who told him as a young boy to always do his best and tell the truth. Nothing will set a man's mind at ease like waking up and not having to decide who you were. Bell says that the truth is always simple, that it needs to be simple enough for a child to understand, or it would be too late by the time you figured it out.

Bell values morality, and doesn't want Moss's death to be tarnished by the belief that he was acting immorally. His continued effort close the case is the only way he feels he can rectify his failures, but deep down he sees the futility of his wish. He tries to make it easier on himself by saying it is over, but he can't fully accept this knowing Chigurh is out there. In a deeper sense, failing to capture Chigurh represents the failure of the justice system to contain crime and violence. Bell understands this as a simple truth, and is beginning to recognize the deep denial that has allowed him to become invested in a futile goal.

The narrative moves away from the present tense, and back to the events of the narrative in the past. Chigurh returns the briefcase and its money to its rightful owner, an unnamed man working in an office in an undisclosed location. The man grows worried that he is in danger, but Chigurh tells him nobody else is coming—Chigurh is in charge of who comes and who doesn't. Chigurh says he wants the man to consider his services in the future. He suggests the man consider how he lost the money in the first place, whom he listened to, and what happened. Chigurh says they will be dealing with new people now. The man asks about the old people, and Chigurh tells him they have moved onto other things. Not everyone is cut out for this work, Chigurh says. The old people made the mistake of pretending they were in control of things they weren't. One's stance on uncertain ground invites attention from enemies. The man asks about Chigurh's enemies, and Chigurh says he has none; he does not permit such things.

Dozens of people are dead as the result of the drug money, yet it ends up in the hands of the criminals at the end. This culmination of the novel's events offers a bleak view of the world—those who lack morality and possess power through corruption come out on top. The man, however, does not hold power over Chigurh. Chigurh's authority comes through his philosophy and principals, which are based on his understanding of fate. Chigurh's philosophy concerning fate and free will allows him to see the ways in which the money went missing in the first place. He recognizes that the feeling of control leads to missteps and death. Chigurh does not make the same mistakes because he is deeply aware of the pitfalls.

Carla Jean's grandmother passes away, and she goes to her funeral. She is surprised by the number of people who show up, and stands with her family members. The entire time she feels like someone is watching her. She gets home after dark and sits at the kitchen table crying over her grandmother. When she goes upstairs, she finds Chigurh sitting in the bedroom. She tells him she doesn't have **the briefcase**, but Chigurh tells her it is too late. She says she hasn't even paid for her grandmother's funeral. Chigurh tells her not to worry about that. Carla Jean tells Chigurh that he has no reason to hurt her, but he tells her that he gave his word to Moss that he would kill her, and he intends to stand by it.

The other deaths in the novel, including Moss's, do not include traditional mourning, ceremony, or respect. Carla Jean's feeling of being watched echoes Bell's feeling at the motel earlier in the novel. She wants to believe the struggle has come to an end, but a part of her is aware of her approaching death. When she meets Chigurh, she believes he is after the money, but for Chigurh it is about principles. Chigurh stands by his word, and because of Moss's refusal to cooperate, he believes she has been fated to die.

Carla Jean tries to reason with Chigurh. She tells him that her husband is dead, and the promise Chigurh made to Moss to kill her should no longer matters. Chigurh disagrees, saying that his word is not dead, and nothing can change that. He tells Carla Jean that Moss had the power to remove her from harms way, but he chose not to. Carla Jean doesn't understand what she has done to deserve this, but Chigurh tells her there is a reason for everything.

Moss had the choice to save Carla Jean, but chose not to cooperate with Chigurh on his own. Even after death, Moss's actions have left a lasting impact on the trajectory of Carla Jean's life: the past, present, and future all influence one another. Chigurh believes that at some point in the past, Carla Jean made a choice that led to this moment, sealing her fate.

Chigurh asks Carla Jean if she has any final words. She says she has nothing to say to him. Chigurh tells her not to worry about dying, that it doesn't make a difference whether she thinks he is a bad person or not. Death is hard to understand, he tells her. He has seen many people struggle with it. They all tell him he doesn't have to kill them, but he does. He tells her it is not her fault; it is just bad luck.

Chigurh acknowledges that death is a fact of life. It is not good or bad—it's just a fact. Because he considers himself an enforcer of fate, he doesn't perceive himself as good or bad either. He sees no point in fighting this fact.

Chigurh pulls **a coin** from his pocket and holds it up for Carla Jean to see. He wants her to see the justice of it. He flips the coin and puts it down on his wrist. He tells her to call it, but she refuses at first, saying God wouldn't want her to do such a thing. Chigurh says of course God would want her to try to save herself. She calls heads, but the coin reads tails. She tells Chigurh that he makes it out to be the coin's fault, but he is the one making the choice. Perhaps, he says, but the coin arrived the same way he did.

Chigurh and Carla Jean have two different philosophies with regard to fate, chance, and free will. Chigurh believes in free will, but the outcome of any choice is beyond one's control. For Chigurh, the chance involved in choosing constitutes justice, but the eventual end is always death. Carla Jean believes in God's will, but in calling the coin flip she goes against what she imagines God's will to be.

Before shooting Carla Jean, Chigurh tells her that every moment in her life is a turning and every one a choosing. At some point, she made a choice and all of this followed. The accounting is scrupulous. He tells her he could have told her how all of this would end, but he wanted to give her a glimmer of hope before killing her. She begs him to spare her, but he says that would make him vulnerable, and he can never do such a thing. He tells her this is the end, despite her belief that things could have turned out differently. He asks her if she understands, and she says she truly does. He says that is good, and kills her.

Chigurh explains the way in which choice determines fate, and how the past influences the present. Because Chigurh believes Carla Jean has been fated to death by his hand, he knew that she would lose the coin toss. Free will only exists until a person reaches their fate in death. Chigurh recognizes that even he is not powerful enough to stop fate. Once Carla Jean accepts her fate fully, Chigurh delivers.

As Chigurh drives away from the house, a Buick runs a stop sign and strikes his truck. His arm breaks in two places, ribs break, and he is cut on his forehead and leg. Two teenage boys stand there looking at him. He asks one of the boys what it would cost to buy his shirt. One of the boys, David DeMarco, gives him his shirt for free. He asks the boy to tie the shirt in a sling around his arm. Chigurh takes some money from his money clip and gives it to the boys. He tells them not to tell anyone what he looks like. One of the boys tells the other that part of the money should be his, and they squabble over who gets what. As they walk away, they see Chigurh's pistol lying on the floorboard of the truck. They steal the gun, and leave.

The accident shows that even Chigurh is subject to chance and fate. DeMarco's willingness to give Chigurh his shirt suggests he has a sense of morality, but the extent of his morality is limited by greed. The boys are willing to break the law for the hundred-dollar bill. The conflict around who gets what portion of the money is a micro example of the larger conflicts over the money in the novel.

The narrative jumps to Bell as he visits his Uncle Ellis who still lives in the family homestead. His uncle Ellis is a former sheriff, and someone who Bell looks up to. The house smells of bacon grease, wood smoke, and urine. Ellis is sitting in his wheelchair the kitchen. He was shot in the line of duty, and now must use the wheelchair. He looks at Bell with one clouded eye he lost years ago after being thrown from a horse onto a cactus. Ellis tells Bell that Loretta has been writing him letters, and he has heard that Bell is thinking about quitting his job as sheriff. Ellis rolls a cigarette and lights it with a zippo lighter that is worn through to the brass. Bell tells Ellis he looks older, and Ellis says he is older.

Ellis and the family homestead are Bell's connection to the past. Bell looks up to Ellis as the embodiment of the values he hopes to uphold and sees fading with the new generation. Ellis's wheelchair and clouded eye subtly suggest that the past was not as romantic as Bell believes, and stand as reminders that the past determines the present.

Bell asks Ellis what his biggest regret in his life is. Ellis tells him he does not have many regrets. He thinks by the time a person is grown, he or she is as happy as they are going to get. Despite good and bad times, you end up as happy as you were before the good or bad times. Ellis tells Bell that if he quit because he didn't know where the ride would take him, that is one thing, but if he quit because it was rougher than he thought, that would be another. Ellis asks what it would take for Bell to lose his marriage to Loretta. Bell says it would take a lot more than things getting a bit rough.

Bell has lived most of his life with immense guilt about his role in WWII, but Ellis chooses not to live that way. The values of the older generation are reflected in Ellis's distinction between quitting because things are hard and quitting because the job has taken him someplace he didn't expect. Ellis understands that everyone is responsible for their own decisions, and resilience in tough times is of the highest value to him.

Bell and Ellis continue talking while they drink some coffee out of the same porcelain cups that had been in the house before Bell was born. Bell asks if the man who shot Ellis died in prison. Ellis says he died in a prison called Angola. Ellis says he wouldn't have done anything to the man if he were released. Ellis tells Bell it wouldn't have been worth it, that while you are trying to get back what has been taken, everything else is leaving out the back door. After a while you just need to get a tourniquet on it.

The family homestead and the objects inside, such as the cups, connect Bell to his family and familial history. Ellis' moral and judicial orientations are depicted in his comments about the man who shot him. He believes justice was served by the man's incarceration, and he knows retaliation doesn't change anything. Anger would just take his attention off of what is important. The tourniquet analogy relates to the idea of acceptance. Instead of lamenting and resenting the loss, the only thing to do is move forward.

Ellis tells Bell that his grandfather did not ask him, (Ellis) to become a sheriff. Instead, Ellis signed on because he had nothing better to do, and it paid as much as being a cowboy. He was too young for WWI and too old for WWII, so policing became his outlet. Ellis states that you can be patriotic and still see the costs of war and disagree with it. He tells Bell to go talk with the mothers that lost their children in battle, suggesting they paid too much.

Bell perceives the older generation as more righteous and moral than younger generations, but Ellis challenges this idea. He did not become a sheriff for the reasons Bell thought. On one level it was for the money, and on the other it was the next best thing to joining the military. Ellis is critical of the American propensity for war; he does not feel the sacrifice of lives is justified.

Ellis tells Bell that he thought God would come into his life when he was older, but he never came. Ellis doesn't think God has a good opinion of him, but he doesn't blame God. He doesn't feel worthy. Bell says Ellis doesn't know what God thinks, but Ellis tells him he does know. Bell asks Ellis if he ever thinks about his brother Harold who was killed in WWI. Bell has been reading some letters that Ellis's mother wrote to his brother. Ellis says his mother never got over his brother's death, and that he still can't make sense of his brother dying in a ditch at the age of seventeen. Ellis says he expects God knows what is happening in the world, but He can't do anything to stop it.

Ellis and Bell have a different view of God's role in human affairs. Bell has always believed that God is the source of higher law and looks after human beings, but Ellis, while believing in God, feels God is indifferent toward human affairs. Ellis's comments about his brother Harold show the way in which war not only impacts soldiers, but also their families. He and his mother could not see the justice in his brother's death. This loss has contributed to Ellis's belief that God does not intrude on human affairs.

Ellis tells a story about another relative whom Native American's killed in 1879. This story clears up the untruth of a family myth. The story suggests the man was heroic in battle, but the truth is that he was killed on his porch, and his wife buried him the next day. She couldn't pay the taxes on the land, so she left. The house burned down, but the chimney remained standing. Bell doesn't remember the woman, but he wishes he could. Ellis tells him this country is hard on its people, but people do not criticize the country for it, they remain loyal. This country will kill a person in a heartbeat, Ellis says, but people still love it. He admits that he still loves it, but he also admits he is as ignorant as a box of rocks.

Ellis's stories complicate Bells romantic view of the past. Ellis's story shows that violence was present in America from the start. A propensity toward greed and corruption has always existed in America. Despite his awareness of unjust elements of America's past and present, Ellis continues to loves his country. In his old age, Ellis realizes his patriotism is foolish, and challenges Bell's conception of the older generation, and his own love of America.

Bell tells Ellis about how we got his decoration as a war hero. He was in an abandoned farmhouse in Europe with his squad. They were listening for the enemy with a radio, and could hear nothing but the rain. Suddenly a bomb exploded, and Bell woke up outside the house. His men were buried in the fallen structure. When he looked up, a group of German riflemen were approaching from the woods. He fended them off with a .30 caliber machine gun. Once night fell, Bell abandoned his men and ran to safety. Ellis asks whether running seemed like a good idea at the time. Bell says it did, that he would have died if he stayed.

Though Bell acted heroically by fending off the Germans, he feels immense guilt over abandoning his men. This experience has shaped his identity, and conceptions of justice and higher law. It remains difficult for him to understand why he was spared and his men were killed. Ellis is able to see the experience with more objectivity, and suggests that Bell made the best choice he could to save his life.

Bell tells Ellis about the shame he feels about receiving the bronze star for his heroics in battle. He tried to refuse the medal, but the sergeant would not let him turn it down. Bell guesses the military had to make it look like the death of his men, and the war in general, counted for something. So, he accepted the medal.

Bell feels he didn't deserve the medal because he was unable to rescue his men. He believes that the military forced him to accept the medal to cover the true extent of the tragedy, which has impacted him morally and shaped his view of justice. Bell's comments reflect the way in which war is romanticized, while society refuses to confront the true horrors of war.

Ellis tells Bell he didn't have a choice, but Bell says he could have stayed behind. Ellis reminds him he couldn't have helped the men. Bell says he thought after all of the years the shame would go away, but he has realized it won't, so he tries to make up for it other ways. Ellis tells him he ought to ease up on himself. Bell says that going into battle is a blood oath to stick by your men, and he didn't. He believes that if he was supposed to die and had given his word to stick by his men, he should have died. He feels like he stole his life, and though he has done his best to live well, his life is not his.

Bell recognizes the element of free will involved in his decision to leave his men. The shame has shaped his personality, and it becomes clear to him that his dedication to saving Moss was driven by this experience. Bell made an oath to stick with his men, and based on his dedication to truth, his decision to leave broke his moral code. He feels like he has cheated fate by his decision to leave his men, which has continued to haunt him for years.

Bell asks Ellis what he thinks his father would have done in that situation. Bell thinks he would have stuck it out and died with his men, and Ellis agrees. Ellis asks if Bell thinks that makes his father a better man than he. Bell does. Ellis says he could tell Bell some things about his father that might change his mind, but Bell doubts if he could. Ellis says Bell's father lived in a different time, but if he had been born fifty years later Bell's father might have had a different view of things. Ellis asks if he is going to tell Loretta he is quitting. Bell says yes, and Ellis says it will likely go better than he thinks.

Bell returns again to his idealized view of the past in his comments about his father. Ellis recognizes the way in which changing times have created the need for different views of the world. This comment suggests that it is not valid to judge the actions of one generation against the actions of an older generation because the reference points for morality, ethics, and justice change with time. Ellis recognizes the way in which Bell's duty to the community has impacted his marriage, and he knows that Loretta will be happy if Bell decides to retire and spend more time with her.

CHAPTER 10

Bell reflects on his conversation with Ellis. They talked about growing old, and how being hard on oneself is a sign of aging. Bell then states that he can't understand why Chigurh killed Carla Jean. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, the police have a Mexican man in custody for shooting a police officer in Huntsville and lighting the car on fire with the officer in it, but Bell knows they have the wrong man, and wonders whether he is obligated to try to get to the truth of the situation. Bell reflects on the way his experience in WWII has driven his career, and led him to believe that if he lived in a strict way, he would not experience that kind of regret again. Now he is about to quit his job as sheriff, and he understands that part of the reason why is so he won't have to pursue Chigurh.

Bell is beginning to confront the idea of mortality and the legacy he will leave behind. Bell's choices and failures, which will constitute his legacy, can't be changed. This understanding is hard on him. Even as Bell considers retirement, he is still dedicated to truth, justice, and morality, as shown by his desire to help the convict. As an older man, Bell has begun to realize that trying to live with strict codes and careful attention to actions has not prevented chance and fate from interfering with his plans. This realization leads to his understanding that he cannot overcome Chigurh; something that Moss and Wells never fully acknowledged.

Bell thinks about what Ellis said about waiting for God to come into his life. He comments that God comes to those who must need it the most, which is not easy to accept, particularly as it applies to someone like his wife, Loretta.

Bell's understanding of God has changed through the novel. He does not see the justice in God's plans. He knows he has put his wife through a lot, and feels she needed God, but he has not been there for her.

Bell then discusses the letters his great aunt sent to his Uncle Harold. She was the one who raised Harold, and it is clear in the letters that she knew the world he would return to after the war wouldn't be the same. It is clear to Bell that this is true, that the world has changed, in light of all he has seen. He realizes there is nothing he can do about it. He reflects on the medal he was awarded in the war, and realizes that Harold didn't receive a medal, and neither did his great aunt because she was not Harold's biological mother. She also didn't receive Harold's war pension, but Ellis feels she should have.

Bell recognizes the way in which war and violence have changed the world. He also understands that as the world changes, it becomes more difficult to uphold the older values. Bell sees injustice in the fact that he was given a medal, but his uncle Harold was not recognized, and his great aunt didn't receive his pension.

Bell notes that he went back out to the family homestead where Uncle Ellis lives one more time. While he was there, he thought about the United States, and the strange and bloody history of the country. He mentions that sometimes he talks to his deceased daughter, who would be thirty now. He says he doesn't care if people think it is superstition. He has tried to give her the heart he always wanted for himself, meaning he constructs his imaginings of has around the idea that she is a more courageous, ethical, and moral person than he. He claims to hear his daughter communicating with him, and doesn't care how that sounds to others. He listens to her, and trusts her voice.

Bell's recognition of the United State's strange and bloody history complicates his romantic view of the past. His conversation with Ellis helped him understand that this nation has always experienced violence, greed, and corruption, even if the nature of these things has changed. Bell projects the values he hopes to uphold onto the memory of his daughter. He uses her memory to help him be a better man, almost as if she stands in for his conscience. He is not concerned with what people think about this, as it helps him to be a better man.

The narrative then moves back to the past, a short time after Carla Jean has been murdered. Bell gets a call from a detective with the Odessa Police Department. The detective tells Bell they have found the weapon used to kill Carla Jean. The boy who took the gun from Chigurh's truck sold it, and it ended up in a robbery in Louisiana. The detective tells Bell to call another investigator, and when Bell calls, the man tells him about the car accident, saying three Mexican men were smoking marijuana and ran the stop sign before hitting Chigurh. Two of the men died, the third lived. Bell asks if he can come talk to David DeMarco, the boy who stole the gun. The investigator tells him he can try.

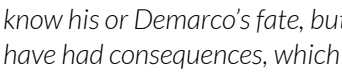
Like the coin Chigurh gives to the gas station proprietor, the gun travels to Louisiana, and is involved in a robbery, another example of fate taking its course. DeMarco couldn't have known the consequences of his decision to sell the gun, but couldn't stop them once he made the decision. Though Carla Jean and Moss are dead, Bell continues searching for answers. This last ditch effort to crack the case suggests that Bell remains dedicated to justice, and is continuing his search for closure.

Bell meets David DeMarco in a café. DeMarco doesn't seem worried as he sits down. Bell orders a coffee for the boy, and asks if DeMarco remembers what Chigurh looked like. DeMarco says he doesn't remember. DeMarco pours a quarter cup of sugar into his coffee when it arrives. Bell asks DeMarco if he is aware of how many people Chigurh has killed, but DeMarco claims to know nothing about him. Bell continues to ask questions, but Demarco is uncooperative. Bell understands DeMarco is not going to help him, so he leaves.

DeMarco's demeanor and refusal to cooperate with Bell conveys the younger generation's views of morality and disregard of the law. He sides with Chigurh because Chigurh paid him to do so. Like several other characters in the novel, he is negatively influenced by greed. The amount of sugar he uses represents the excesses of the new generation, a small symbolic example of the larger social issues driving the drug trade.

The next morning, Bell goes to DeMarco's school and gets the names of his friends from his teachers. He tracks down the second boy who was at the accident scene and questions him. Bell asks if Chigurh is Mexican. The boy says, he doesn't know, but he had dark skin. Eventually, the boy tells Bell that Chigurh gave them one hundred dollars to keep his identity secret. Bell asks what Chigurh looked like again, and the boy says he was medium height, medium build, in good shape, dark complexion, but he can't quite pin him down. He didn't really look like anybody. He says that when Chigurh talked, you damn sure listened. Before leaving, Bell asks the boy if he know where things will take him in the future. The boy says no, but he has learned his lesson, though he can't speak for David DeMarco.

Bell continues to search for answers, and remains dedicated to justice and truth. Through this dedication, he hopes to rid himself of the guilt he feels over Moss and Carla Jeans' deaths, and also the long-standing guilt from WWII. Like others who have confronted Chigurh, the young man is unable to provide a description. Like fate itself, Chigurh is mysterious. The generic description could be applied to any number of people, and metaphorically speaking, suggests Chigurh's violence and lack of morality are more common than one might think. The young man recognizes that he cannot know his or Demarco's fate, but he understands that his actions have had consequences, which is one element of the message Chigurh attempts to teach to his victims.



CHAPTER 11

Bell tracks down Moss's father and goes to visit him. They sit on the front porch and drink iced tea while Bell tells Moss's father about what happened. Moss's father tells Bell that Moss was the best rifle shot he'd ever seen, and he was a sniper in Vietnam. Bell assures Moss's father that Moss was not involved in drugs, and his father says he wasn't raised that way. Moss's father tells Bell that he fought in WWII, and explains that when Moss came back from Vietnam he visited the families of the men who had died in the Vietnam. Later, Moss told his father that when he visited those family members that they had wished he, meaning Moss, was dead instead of their loved ones. Bell says he can understand that, and Moss's father says he can too.

Bell's assurance that Moss was not involved in drugs is meant to set Moss's father at ease. Bell's visit reflects Moss's actions after Vietnam when he visited the families of the men who were killed, demonstrating a shared guilt in their failure as soldiers and the guilt they experienced as a result of their failures. Being veterans themselves, Bell and Moss's father understand the anger felt by the families of the deceased. Both men struggle to understand the lack of justice in who dies and who survives in war. The seeming randomness of the universe makes it difficult to put faith in any kind of higher law.

Moss's father tells Bell about the difference between WWII and Vietnam. When the Vietnam veterans came back they were treated poorly for their involvement in the war, but he suspects it is worse than that. The country that the Vietnam veterans came back to was in pieces, and it still is. Moss's father says that it wasn't Vietnam that brought the nation to its knees. The U.S. was in bad shape before the war. A nation can't go to war without God, he says, and he worries about the next war to come.

Moss's father notes the way in which war has impacted American Society, and how it was difficult for veterans to return to a changed nation. Vietnam was different than WWII in terms of the moral objectives and nature of the warfare, and Moss's father suggests that the nation had lost its faith in God and moral compass before the war, and believes this will lead to war in the future.

On the drive home, Bell reflects on his career as sheriff. He realizes that some part of him always wanted to be in charge, but another part of him just wanted to protect and save people. People aren't prepared for what is coming. He notes that the old people would have never guess that young people would be walking around Texas with green hair and bones in their noses. He'd always thought that his role as sheriff would allow him to set these problems right, but he understands now that he can't. He states that he is standing for something he doesn't have the same belief in anymore.

Bell realizes that his decision to become a sheriff was more complex than the simple desire to serve the community. A part of him wanted to experience the power granted by his position. He sees the way the world, and especially the younger generation, has changed, and thinks it is only going to get worse. He admits defeat in this moment, fully understanding the failure of the justice system.

Bell tells Loretta that he is quitting his job as sheriff. He doesn't feel right taking the people's money. She says he doesn't mean that, but he says he truly does; he just can't do it anymore.

Now that Bell has developed new views of the justice system and sees the corruption involved, he does not feel it is morally right to continue his work.

Bell goes to Ozana and talks to the district attorney about the Mexican man they are charging with the murder of the police officer. The D.A. tells him he can testify at the trial, but that was all he could do. He testifies, but the man is given the death penalty anyways. Before the man's execution, Bell goes to the prison to visit the man. The man asks what Bell brought him. Bell says he brought nothing, and the man says he should have brought him some candy or something. Bell tells him he didn't come to be insulted, but came to tell the man that he tried to help him, and he is sorry. The man laughs, and suggests that he didn't think there were people like Bell out in the world. He then admits to the murder.

Before leaving his job, Bell tries to get the man off death row. Because his views of higher law and morality have changed, he considers the death penalty immoral. As a single individual, however, he does not have the power to fight the larger structures of society and the criminal justice system. The way the man treats Bell after the case is closed shows the absence of morals in the new generation. The man does not appreciate Bell's help, and does not regret his actions.

On the way out of the visit, Bell runs into the county prosecutor. The prosecutor tells him when he got out of law school he had been a defense attorney, but he grew tired of being lied to. Bell tells him a lawyer once told him that in law school they teach you not to worry about right and wrong, but to simply follow the law. The prosecutor agrees, stating that if you don't follow the law, right and wrong won't save you.

Bell's conversation with the county prosecutor shows how the law in the U.S. does not take morality and ethics into account. Likewise, the law isn't adjusted for a changing society and changing times. The structures of law, designed by corrupt individuals who hold immense power, have become the reference point for right and wrong, as opposed a sense of morality defined by God's higher law.

Bell asks the prosecutor if he knows who Mammon is. The prosecutor knows it's in the Bible, but doesn't know exactly what it is. He asks if it is the devil. Bell doesn't know either, but he is going to look it up. Before Bell leaves, the prosecutor asks him what he knows about Chigurh. Bell says he knows nothing, calling him a ghost. He knows that Chigurh is out there somewhere. The prosecutor states that if Chigurh is a ghost, they have nothing to worry about. On the way out, Bell reflects on this statement, noting that sometimes you encounter something that you are not powerful enough to overcome, and he believes Chigurh is one of those things.

Mammon represents greed. The fact that Bell brings Mammon up in this moment shows his awareness of the greed and corruption everywhere. The prosecutor does not see the significance of spiritual forces in the world, and is unable to understand the true extent of Chigurh's power. Bell believes there are underlying causes for the violence, greed, and corruption he witnesses in the world. His experience with Chigurh has been humbling, proving that there are things beyond his power to control, and beyond the reach of the law.

When Bell gets home, he notices that Loretta has taken her horse out for a ride. He worries that maybe she has been hurt, and gets his horse. He rides out and sees Loretta in the distance riding along a ridge. He says, "That's my heart yonder…it always was." They meet, and get off their horses. They sit beneath a cottonwood tree, talking about the decision he has made to quit. She says she is glad he will be home with her. Bell worries about his decision to quit, but Loretta tells him not to worry, it's just nice to be there with him.

During the investigation, Bell has not had much time to think about Loretta, but now that he has surrendered he worries about her. He recognizes the importance of Loretta in his life, and acknowledges his love for her. Bell has worried about what she would say about him quitting, but this worry is a projection of his own self-criticism. Ultimately, she is glad they will have time to spend together.

CHAPTER 12

Bell reflects on his relationship with Loretta, noting that she is more spiritual than he is. For a long time, he thought being older than her meant she would learn from him, but he is beginning to see the opposite is true. He considers the power of money. He notes there are fortunes being made that this nation's people don't even know about, fortunes that can buy whole countries, but end up putting a person in bed with people they shouldn't be in bed with. He notes that the drug trade isn't even a law enforcement problem; people don't just decide to do drugs for no reason.

Bell respects Loretta's sense of ethics and morality. His recognition of her as more spiritual than him signifies a change in his character, a new humility he has gained through recent experiences. He has also begun to acknowledge the greed and corruption that exist on a large scale in American society. He notes that the drug problem and the greed involved cannot be fixed through incarceration, but must be addressed on a deeper level.

Once, a reporter asked Bell why he let crime get so out of hand. He told her it starts when you begin to overlook bad manners, that it is a societal issue. He told her that there can't be a drug trade without drug users, and drug users come from every walk of life. Bell asks Loretta if there is anything in the Book of Revelation about the kids with green hair and piercings. She comes up behind him and bites him in the ear, and he notes that she is young at heart, and he doesn't know where he would be without her.

Bell believes that crime is the result of a society's movement away from morality and strong values. He understands that this is not a law enforcement issue, but a cultural and societal issue. Bell continues to look toward God to explain what is happening in American society, but Loretta doesn't answer him when he asks about Revelation. Her youthfulness counters Bells judgment of young people. Through the novel, Bell has worried about aging and moving into a future that he can't navigate, but Loretta's youthfulness gives him hope.

On his last day at his job, Bell walks out of the courthouse for the last time. He feels sad, but there is another feeling he can't quite identify. He knows he has felt it before, but not in a long time. He realizes the feeling is that of defeat, which is more bitter to him than death. He tells himself he needs to get over it.

Bell finally confronts his failure to bring justice to the situation. This failure compounds the guilt he feels around failing to save his men in WWII. His acceptance of his fate is shown through the fact that he does not change his mind, and sticks to his decision to retire.

CHAPTER 13

Bell recollects the house where the men in his squad died in Europe. Behind the house there was a trough that someone had chiseled out of a rock. He reflects on the fact that someone had sat there and chiseled away at the rock, which would last 10,000 years, and wonders why. He wonders if the man who did the chiseling had faith. The only thing he can think is that there was some kind of promise in the man's heart. Bell wishes he could make that kind of promise.

After retiring, Bell continues to struggle with faith and his choice to retire. Bell uses this as a metaphor for his work as a sheriff. The permanence of the rock depicts the way in which the labor of the past can continue into the future. Bell is beginning to accept that he did not have the fortitude to bring Chigurh to justice.

Bell notes that in his telling of his story, he has not done his father justice. He is older than his father was when he died, and in a sense he is looking back at a younger man. His father was a horse trader, and was good at breaking horses, but Bell notes that his father never broke him, and he is grateful for that. By the world's standards, Bell would have been perceived as a better man than his father, which has been hard for him to live with. He realizes he has thought of his father less than he should have.

Bell continues to compare himself to his father. As an older man, he has the perspective to see his father's life in a new way. Society would view Bell's work as a sheriff as more important than his father's work as a horse trader, but Bell understands that the way society views his work gives him undue respect, without taking his character into account. His father, despite his job, was a moral man, and Bell respects and appreciates him for it.

Bell had two dreams about his father after he died. He doesn't remember the first dream well, but he remembers that in the dream his father had given him some money, but he had lost it. In the second dream, he and his father are back in the old days. Bell was riding through the dark on a horse. It was cold and there was snow on the ground. His father rode past him carrying fire in a horn the way people used to in the old days. In the dream, he knew his father was going ahead to make a fire somewhere out in the dark, and Bell knew his father would be there when he got there. Then he woke up.

Throughout the novel, Bell has struggled to live up to the high standards he sets for himself. These standards are based on the lives of his predecessors, primarily his father, which leads to the presence of his father in his dreams. The first dream suggests guilt around his lack of responsibility in connection to WWII and in his role as sheriff. The setting of the second dream ("in the old days") shows his longing for the past. While the dream points toward Bell's hope for the future, he does wake up, leaving the reader to wonder if his hopeful dream will come true.

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