

Part Fifteen

In the chilling dawn of December 5, a group of men, including Glanton, Carroll, and Sanford, rode north from Sonora, carrying a contract for Apache scalps. Among them was Sloat, a young boy abandoned by a gold train weeks prior. They wandered across the arid Sonoran desert aimlessly for weeks, chasing rumors of Chiricahua raiders. Their violent encounters led to the massacre of a pueblo near the Nacozari River, which attracted the attention of armed Sonoran cavalry under General Elias. A fierce clash resulted in several casualties, with Glanton's party suffering three deaths and seven injuries.

As the dawn light broke, the company prepared to ride out, though tensions were palpable, especially when the wounded demanded water. The Delawares, part of their party, expressed their own foreignness in this hostile land by holding their ground in silence. Glanton meticulously counted arrows from his quiver and prepared for battle. The atmosphere was one of heavy dread; the judge and the men exchanged wary glances.

Soon enough, Tate broke the icy silence, making ominous inquiries about what to do with a Mexican captive. Discussions of torture and death ensued, reflecting the moral decay amongst the group. The kid, exuding a mix of guilt and shame, chose not to engage directly but let his fellow men speak their brutal truths. Shelby, another member, lay wounded, contemplating the fractured lives surrounding him.

As the circumstances grew dire, with hunger gnawing at their insides, Shelby's desperation became palpable, leading to an uncomfortable confrontation with the kid. The exchange turned into a cycle of taunts and unearthly demands for violence, all revealing the brokenness of their bonds.

The narrative shifts as the riders led into the wilderness, where merciless cold set in. Snow began to swirl around them, as the group struggled onward through the drifts, unwilling to turn back despite overwhelming hunger and cold. The barren landscape soon buried their tracks, erasing all traces of their passage. Exhausted, they pushed through until nightfall, where ambush and despair lay thick.

New dangers awaited them in the snowy expanse as they navigated the harsh terrain, towards Santa Cruz—an unwelcoming settlement that felt monkey-like and absurd compared to their hostile surroundings. Their journey only intensified their bond with brutality and survival, marked in blood and hardship throughout each encounter .