

Part Ten

In the aftermath of their encounters with the Gilenos, the travelers pushed deeper into the mountains, constructing fires with highland driftwood. The kid, seated cross-legged, mended a strap with the help of an awl borrowed from Tobin, the expriest. Tobin noted the kid's skill, implying that, while he seemed to lack the experiences of others, he had a natural talent for such tasks. Their conversation revealed a mix of admiration and curiosity about the judge, whom they observed with a mixture of wariness and awe. Tobin extolled the judge's abilities, marveling at his fluency in Dutch and his multifaceted talents, declaring that the Lord bestows gifts unevenly among men.

As they repaired their gear, Tobin reflected on the judge's complexities, expressing thoughts on divine intervention or guidance through the "voice of the Almighty," suggesting that God could communicate through the least of creatures. The kid, unconvinced, claimed he had never heard this divine voice. Tobin insisted that it would become apparent if it ever ceased, hinting at a deeper spiritual awareness.

In their stark wilderness surroundings, Tobin recalled a previous dire situation where the judge had saved their dwindling company with his unexpected resourcefulness. Just as they were on the brink of despair, the judge appeared alone, offering a supply of arms and a promise of resourcefulness. As the expriest described their subsequent journey through the treacherous terrain, he detailed the judge's meticulous collection of materials for gunpowder, showcasing both the judge's intellect and uncanny determination.

After days of toil, they reached the top of a volcanic mountain. There, Tobin vividly described how the judge concocted gunpowder, mixing sulfur, charred wood, and a peculiar twist of fate during the process, while simultaneously facing the encroaching threat of nearby Apache warriors. Under pressure, they executed an ambush, turning the odds significantly in their favor with their homemade ammunition.

This moment marked the first of many violent and pivotal encounters, encapsulating the judge's enigmatic influence on the group's fortunes, while raising questions about his true motives and the nature of his authority within their band. Their kill tally reached astonishing heights as they slaughtered members of the aggressing native group, a reflection of the brutal reality they inhabited, the judge becoming a central figure of both reverence and dread .