

Part Eighteen

In the early darkness of morning, a group departed from the Yuma camp, their journey illuminated only by the constellations like Cancer and Cassiopeia shining above. Over the course of the previous night, they had conspired with the Yumas to seize control of the ferry. As day broke, the locals discovered an "idiot" in a cage, leading to a commotion among the women at the crossing. They were largely unfazed by the man's disheveled state and gathered around him, eventually enlisting the help of a woman named Sarah Borginnis to address him.

Sarah, described as a large woman with a striking red face, sternly queried the man, known as Cloyce Bell, about the identity of the imprisoned idiot. He referred to the man as James Robert, but emphasized that nobody used that name. When questioned about his mother, Cloyce revealed she was dead, showing little remorse, which led Sarah to chastise him. As the conversation continued, they moved to bathe the idiot and clothe him, while Cloyce offered little resistance.

As the women prepared for the task, Toadvine and a young boy observed their actions. The women pulled the cart closer to the river, eventually opening the cage to free James Robert. He hesitated but was coaxed by Sarah, who then led him to the water amidst cheers from the women. While she remained unbothered by her soiled state, she insisted they burn the cage. As he waded into the water, he grabbed at the skirts of the women and behaved erratically, eliciting sympathetic murmurs.

In the evening, after being cleaned and dressed, James Robert was seen seated by the fires, looking disoriented yet oddly fascinated. The Borginnis woman took care of him, providing comfort for the night. However, under the cover of darkness, James Robert found himself alone again, wandering aimlessly by the riverbank until he ultimately entered the water.

Just then, the judge, on his nocturnal patrols and equally unclothed, intervened to rescue him from drowning. He lifted the struggling man out of the water as though participating in a profound ritual, returning him to his companions and restoring him to their midst. This act bore the weight of both a new beginning and a somber acknowledgment of their shared existence.