

Part Sixteen

In Part Sixteen of "Blood Meridian," the narrative unfolds in a stark and chilling landscape, where a group of horsemen ride through a cold morning, encountering silence and untouched snow. They traverse a desolate terrain, finding remnants of life in the form of abandoned agricultural fields and the skeletal remains of dried fruits. Their journey through a valley leads them to the meadows that house deer and the distant sound of cattle lowing at night.

The subsequent day brings them to the ruins of San Bernardino, where they encounter aging wild bulls, remnants of an earlier age marked by Spanish brands. A tension-filled moment occurs when a charging bull attacks James Miller; the chaos culminates with Miller having to shoot the bull before attending to his struggling horse. Their journey continues along the Santa Cruz, through the impressive cottonwoods, yet they find no traces of missing scouts or Apache signs.

Glanton's party rides to the mission at San Jose de Tumacacori, where the judge shares his knowledge of its history, dubious given his lack of prior visits. As they explore the church's ruins, they come across a dying man dressed in homemade clothes, who, in his feeble state, points seemingly towards eternity before dying. The mystery deepens when they encounter another hermit who turns out to be the deceased man's brother, who disregards his sibling's fate.

Continuing on their route, they pass through abandoned territories, noting the starkness of Tubac and the haunting presence of a blind man. The group sets up camp in the desert, where they maintain vigilance for Apache threats, eventually picking up their trail. Their horrific discovery comes when they find the bodies of the lost scouts hanging from a tree, gruesomely mutilated; this stark reality of violence permeates their journey.

As they approach Tucson, underlying tensions flare with the interaction between Glanton's party and Apache riders, setting up a confrontation brewing with miscommunication and hostility. The encounter brings cultural differences and the volatility of colonial and native relations to the fore, foreshadowing impending conflict.