

# Part 18

Part 18 begins with the early morning departure of a group from the Yuma camp. They set off in the dim light, guided only by the constellations, such as Cancer and Cassiopeia, shining above the vast desert. The group's goal had been set the previous night, as they had worked alongside the Yumas to plan the seizing of the ferry. As dawn broke, the locals found an "idiot" trapped in a cage, creating a stir, especially among the women at the crossing. Their reaction, however, was not one of shock but of curiosity, as they gathered around the man to examine him. It was Sarah Borginnis, a woman known for her large build and striking red face, who took the initiative to help the prisoner. She questioned Cloyce Bell, who identified the man in the cage as James Robert, though he pointed out that no one called him by his full name.

Sarah's inquiries became more direct as she pressed Cloyce about James Robert's background, asking if he had a mother. Cloyce, without showing much emotion, responded that his mother was dead, but his tone suggested indifference, even lack of remorse, which prompted Sarah to scold him. Despite the awkwardness of the situation, the women began preparing to tend to the man. They moved him from the cage, washing and dressing him. Despite the care being given, James Robert appeared distant, as if lost in his own thoughts, giving little reaction to the actions of the women. As they carried out their task, the discomfort of the moment was palpable, with the man's erratic behavior drawing sympathy and concern from those around him.

Toadvine and a young boy watched the women work from a distance, observing how they moved the cart closer to the river. The women finally unlocked the cage, allowing James Robert to step out. Although he hesitated, Sarah coaxed him into the water, guiding him into the river with gentle encouragement. The women cheered as he slowly waded into the water, and Sarah, seemingly unaffected by her soiled state, insisted they burn the cage. As James Robert entered the water, he began grabbing at the skirts of the women, his behavior increasingly erratic, which prompted murmurs of sympathy from the crowd. Though his actions were unsettling, Sarah remained calm, taking on the role of caretaker, even as she navigated the discomfort of the situation with remarkable grace.

As the evening descended, James Robert, now clean and dressed, was seen sitting by the fire. His posture was slouched, and he seemed disoriented, lost in thought. Sarah continued to care for him, offering comfort in the form of food and warmth, trying to soothe his distress. However, as darkness enveloped the camp, James Robert slipped away from the group, aimlessly wandering along the riverbank. His erratic movements suggested he was still grappling with an inner turmoil that none around him could fully understand. Eventually, he ventured into the river, seemingly unaware of his surroundings, as if drawn by some invisible force. Just then, the judge, appearing from his nightly patrol, intervened. Unclothed like James Robert, the judge rushed into the water and lifted him out with surprising tenderness, as though rescuing him from a spiritual drowning rather than a physical one. The act, though practical, felt charged with symbolic meaning, restoring James Robert to the group with an unspoken acknowledgment of their shared fate. The judge's intervention seemed to signal not just the rescue of the man, but also a deeper, unspoken recognition of the fragility of life in this brutal world. It was a quiet moment that spoke volumes about the nature of the journey they were all on, both physically and existentially.