Custer, a play

Paul F. Treichler

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CUSTER
- A Play -

by

Paul F. Treischler

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

State University of Montana
- 1938 -

Approved:

Chairman of Examining Committee

Chairman of Graduate Committee
BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Principal Sources -


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CUSTER

- A Play -

Act I

Scene I  -  General Sheridan's headquarters, Camp Supply, Oklahoma, November, 1868
Scene II -  Outside Sheridan's tent, Camp Supply, December, 1868

Act II

Scene I  -  Custer's quarters, Fort Lincoln, February, 1876
Scene II -  President Grant's office in the White House, May, 1876

Act III

Scene I  -  Saloon on the steamship, Far West, June 22, 1876
Scene II -  Custer's camp on the Little Bighorn, 2:30 A. M., June 25
Scene III -  A knoll on the Little Bighorn, twelve hours later

* * * * *
President Ulysses S. Grant

Herb. Quater

Honor, a Reporter

Interpreter

Little Bear, Chief of the Kiowa Nation

Captain Tom Quater, Quarter’s Brother

John Bragg, Chief’s Brother

Commander of the Cheyenne Mounted

General, Chief of the Cheyennes

Captain Bennet, Officer of the Seventh Cavalry

tom smith, a settler

Lieutenant Wilson, an officer with Sheridan

Captain Mackenzie, an officer with Sheridan

Captain Price, Sheridan’s Adjutant

Huger, Reporter from an Eastern Newspaper

Peabody, Reporter from an Eastern Newspaper

Captain Cooke, Officer of the Seventh Cavalry

General Philip Sheridan, U.S. Army

Lieutenant-Colonel George A. Custer, Brever’s Hospital General

Pace, General Sheridan’s Secretary, a Citizen

california free, a Scout

characters IN THE ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE
Landorf, representative of the railroads
William Belknap, ex-Secretary of War
Davis, Grant's personal secretary
Brigadier General Terry, Custer's division commander
Cabin-Boy on the steamboat, Far West
Colonel Gibbon, U. S. Army
Charlie Johnson, a scout
Major Reno, officer of the Seventh Cavalry
Captain MacDougall, officer of the Seventh Cavalry
Mitch Boyer, a scout
Lloyd, a bugler
Captain Keough, officer of the Seventh Cavalry

Various troopers, stray civilians, mailmen, doormen, telegraph boys, and Indians.

* * * * *
ACT I, SCENE I

Camp Supply (present site, Supply, Oklahoma) about November 1, 1868. General Sheridan's headquarters, a large tent, is prominent stage left. The side facing the audience is cut off; the tent opening is right, facing an open field. Other tents behind Sheridan's are suggested. Directly in front of the opening to Sheridan's tent, a few feet from it, is a flag pole. Inside Sheridan's tent are two desks, a heating stove, and a few chairs.

For Sheridan and Custer, who appear later in the scene, see the many photographs available. The officers are in the U. S. Cavalry uniform of 1868.

As the curtain rises, Parks, an indifferent-looking clerk of about 40, in civilian clothes of the time, is seen writing at his desk. The time is about ten o'clock in the morning. California Joe, who enters almost immediately, is about 50, wrinkled, in the leathers of the scouts of the time.

Joe

Is this here General Sheridan's tent?

Parks

This is General Sheridan's headquarters. The General isn't in.

Joe

I knew him out in th' Oregon country when he was a lieutenant; so there's no danger o' me takin' you for him. (He sits down.)
Parks

Have you anything in particular to see General Sheridan about?

Joe

No. No. I jist expect he might remember me. Ain't he the old lightnin' though? . . . . . But this here General Custer's a man after ma own heart, too. He hired me up in th' Dakota country to come down here 'n jine these here scouts o' his.

Parks

That's interesting.

Joe

I expect he sails right into these red brethren o' ours that's so anxious to show their love 'n fondness fer us by their scalpin'. "We're gonna chase these Injuns mornin', noon, an' night," he says. "What we wanna do is give these Injuns exercise. They're gettin' soft," he says. "They ain't romantic any more. When they're in Washington tellin' lies about lovin' the Great White Father, they're so fat ya can't tell 'em from the senators," he says. If I'd known him better 'fore I'd seen him first, I wouldn' 'a ast him what I did, but you know some of these here generals goes ridin' around in these here ambulance wagons tryin' to fight Injuns.

Parks

That's interesting.

Joe

So when he just tells me what he wants me fur is t' ketch Injuns with 'im, I ast him if he chased Injuns on hossback or in ambulances.

"What do ya mean?" he says. "Jist what I say," I tells him. "Are you aimin' t' ketch Injuns on hossback or in ambulances?" "Well," he says,
"it's like this. What I'm amin' t' do," he says, "is to ketah Injuns. What the hell do I care if they're on hossback or in ambulances." Now, when a man talks like that - (He looks at Parks. Parks is writing. Joe rises slowly as he says, drawlingly): Wal, stranger, if ya got so much work t' do, I guess I'll be gittin' on. I expect I'll be runnin' into General Sheridan anyhow. I jist wanted t' tell him I knowed him when he was a lieutenant up 'n the Oregon country. I expect he might remember me.

(He goes out; Parks continues to write. Custer steps into the tent. Parks stands at attention.)

Custer

When will General Sheridan be in?

Parks

I expect any minute, sir.

(Custer sits at Sheridan's desk. Parks sits.)

Custer

I don't recall having told General Sheridan he could be out at this hour of the morning. He's roaming around on the prairie once so beloved by the Indians, I suppose, thinking his thoughts.

Parks

Sir?

Custer

I said I hadn't given General Sheridan permission to be roaming around on the prairie this morning.
Parks

(Indignantly): Yes, sir.

Custer

Did you tell him he could go, Parks?

Parks

General Sheridan is my superior, sir.

Custer

Oh, mine too, mine too. You may not think so, Parks, but he actually ranks me.

Parks

(Pointedly): Yes, sir.

Custer

And neither of us has given him permission to go roaming around the prairie?

Parks

No, sir.

Custer

And probably won't.

Parks

No, sir.

Custer

So here we are in the same boat. Neither of us has told General Sheridan what not to do; neither of us will. It's marvellous, Parks—moved by the same hopes, damned by the same fears, breathing the same
Have you ever tried putting the cart before the horse, and saying

"No, sir."

"I, sir."

"Just a Great Game, Parke."

"Duster"

"Thank you, sir."
What do you mean, 'inapprop-

I mean,

and how you'd take ginger and onion and

I see how I've been about how you'd taken being court-martialed,

(What if it got a lot about)

Oh, you did. (With an air of, 'Now interesting.' Would you mind

I thought the same thing when you came in last night and woke me up.

Here's what I think. I agree with you, even if the

You are still ill at the old plantery, aren't you?

he said, 'Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.'

more sensible. Most of that I told him and he agreed with me. Yes, sir.

I do entirely endorse the wind.

I don't believe it, but the doctrine of murder. Any murder means nothing at all. Placing Indi- any murder means anything about a hundred- less, and the reef white is not a good American name about a hundred feet deep.

the wind. Going up and down the world playing with the snow and the

and how I was menny about

now, I told him that he was by no heart. I told him the most moving dis-
I gave it to the grand maunt here. He took

Chapter

After a pause (I have you get that third

Sheridan

Well, aren't you going to

Chapter

these? I feel like passing you in command of this post right then.

Well, I take about a command in winter, I thought, "Well, I've take old

Well, thank God, they haven't hurt him any. Then when you began on your

me up, commanding officer, or commanding officer, I thought to myself,

in last night ten deep before any one thought it was possible, and made

what to still stange. I thought it would. When you got

Sheridan

thought myself

Chapter

Ah, I thought so.

Sheridan

West heard that in a railroad station.

and shoot them down at the very first. (Sheridan grunts.) Well,

the. Any whenever we get a guard-house full, we turn them loose

but I'm the worst. It helps pass the time away and gives us an uppe-

Well, I do shoot deserters. The rest of my officers do, too.

Chapter

that damn fool traitor of yours for shooting deserters.

Sheridan
around on Parks' desk, finds the list, and hands it to Sheridan.)

Sheridan

[Looking list over]: Where did I ever get the idea you'd be toned down. Twenty-five wholesalers - biggest ones we buy from. Shall we fight them all at once or one by one?

Custer

Do you really want some ideas?

Sheridan

Well - if you cut 'em in half.

Custer

Don't get within ten miles of a deserter. I know from experience how it will work. You'll take that list and send a copy of it to the chief of staff. These firms, you'll say, have been furnishing supplies to the army. Boxes they mark food are weighted with rocks. Bags marked sugar are filled with sand, and so forth. . . . . You'll soon find the wholesalers are passing the buck to the inspectors. Then you'll send on a list of inspectors. Then you'll find the inspectors are being protected by some of our lords and benefactors in Congress. Then you'll begin finding the congressman - and just at that time you'll be getting tried for shooting deserters. . . . . Do this for me, will you, Sheridan? Write my name somewhere in that report of yours where it will let these pigs know I've seen their teeth, and all I feel like doing is knocking a few of them out.

Sheridan

That's gonna do you a lot of good. For God's sake, Custer, now that you're clear. Keep clear.
some of duty nearby. You almost got me; but you didn't. I went out and said, "You almost got me," and you didn't. You almost got me; but you didn't. I went out and said, "You almost got me," and you didn't. You almost got me; but you didn't.

They didn't, and making the toast go up and down, (and looked out of the win-

He makes the motion of waving a grail on the root, expressing one knee over the other, nothing more to our hotel suite and rode down on my foot. He makes the motion of

We wanted to get away and down the street on

But I didn't. I waited out of the office waiting no longer.

and wanting to listen to his headphones. Go over the atrium.

loyalty—no, I'm going back to the market or a feim like that.

was what they deserved for their lack of loyalty. He talked to me about it as we were leaving, and when we got through, we walked out onto the street where they were still at our. We sat there in the market and

eating while they were still at our. We sat there in the market and

would get them too, and the then down on red hot coal, or every other

would get them, too! Some of them would get lost and they, the Indians

the food, and others would desert because they were hurt and tired, and

We had a lot of death about that time from scurry and cholera because of

My shoulders! I felt he was responsible for all my ill health.

Quarter

Quarter

Quarter

Quarter

Quarter

House of Representatives will never know how close he came.

make me almost kill one of them once. One of the member of the

I hate those men. I understand I hate them in any way.
overcame me, but it didn't. You won't sit around with dour faces and try me. Your representative is still alive. Go up and look at him in all his glory."

Sheridan

It would've been fine if you'd done it, wouldn't it? You'd be either hanged now, or sitting in a cell.

Custer

Dreaming about the wind, my brother?

Sheridan

Damn the wind, your brother.

Custer

That's what the jury would have said. (Lightly) Of course, I don't know whether it would have killed him or not. I only planned to throw him out his window.

Sheridan

I thought it was only a cock and bull story.

Custer

I can see that window opening up yet, and shaking - like this, (shakes his hands violently) all red and inviting, and the fellow in my hands as light as a feather.

Sheridan

I'll tell you the difference between you and me - and my scheme will work. I'm going to hold this thing up until Grant gets in. I'll get it all fixed up, and then when he gets in, we'll get some action.
You can keep things going for a few months more, can't you, so long as you can be sure there's an end in sight?

Custer

Yes, if I were sure.

Sheridan

There's not a doubt in the world about his being elected.

Custer

And that he'll stop it after he is?

Sheridan

The army's close to his heart. He's promised to let the army run their own affairs - especially in the West; and I'm willing to bet money he'll do it.

Custer

That will be a great day.

Sheridan

More than that, he's going to put all the Indians out here under the army instead of the Indian Department.

Custer

By George, I've never thought much about that. He'll be elected in two weeks. . . . . Do you suppose it's possible we won't have to fight the Indian Department along with the Indians?

Sheridan

Yes, I hear you've had trouble out here with the Indian Department, too.
the Indians have gone now - whole damn county.

On top of that, in just the two weeks I've been here I can tell that

Sheridan

they're getting men killed.

I've noticed they're all a little asleep around here. No wonder

Dunbar

In the summer, we're some strange anything in the winter.

They seemed to think you had trouble enough trying to light

winter seventeen or a couple of your officers, and they asked me if I'd

just mentioned an old story about something like that. I'm not sure about

Sheridan

if you want to get busy with this outfit

we're over with you. Are you going to let me get busy with this outfit

send out the supplies the agents get for us. We'll get them down.

they're white agents even do that for them - maintenance most of the

Don't even have to bother to think up their own murders.

Dunbar

That's the old story, all right. Great stuff.

Sheridan

Again.

puntes red, get new ponies and horses - get all set to start a row

deal with peace and go under the Indian Department. Get red, get their

results when we get the men who kick up a row in a tight place. They

under the Indian Department. Indians at war, under the War Department.

It works here the way it works everywhere. Indians at peace are

Dunbar
Custer

The more the merrier. We've got the whole Seventh Cavalry plus
the new band.

Sheridan

The band would do you a lot of good.

Custer

A band to play "Carrigowen".

Sheridan

In the snow --

Custer

I've always wanted to hear how it sounded with snow on it.

Sheridan

How deep does the snow get?

Custer

Oh, usually four or five feet, where it's drifted.

Sheridan

Four or five feet!

Custer

We won't go where it's drifted.

Sheridan

I suppose if it gets thirty degrees below zero, you won't go where
it's thirty degrees below zero. What advantage will you have, besides
taking them by surprise, that you won't have next spring?
Custer

In the spring the Indians can move a whole village—women, children, tepees, old dried scalps, and all—faster than we can move our wagons. The only chance we have to get a tribe together is to surround it, and we'd need three regiments for that. In the winter, the Indians can't move at all. When the snow's on the ground, the only feed they have for their ponies is cottonwood bark, and it doesn't make them strong enough to do much more than keep alive, let alone carry any one. Besides that, they have no equipment at all for traveling in winter, and if they did, we'd be able to follow their trail. In warm weather, when they've scalped some one and one chases them, they split up into groups, and spread out all over the country, and leave one barking his righteous indignation at the beautiful, beautiful sunset. And one of the best reasons of all for a campaign now is that they won't be able to sneak back to their reservations and claim they're at peace. As I said, we won't have to fight the Indian Department along with the Indians.

Sheridan

(Tentatively): Well—

Custer

It's the most reasonable thing in the world.

Sheridan

No. No. It's not reasonable. You know that as well as I do. You can't tell what you're likely to run into the first time you try anything as reckless as this. I was sleepy last night when I got enthusiastic.
Custer

Go to sleep again. If you're here when we get back, we'll have a parade for you. How would you like to review the troops on their way in?

Sheridan

Ah, that's probably all you want to hurry for anyhow, to have a parade. That's it. Isn't it? You want to hear Garryowen in the snow, and then have a parade.

Custer

Yes.

Sheridan

Humph.

Custer

If the Seventh Cavalry hears Garryowen in the snow often enough, pretty soon the snow would be enough; we could forget Garryowen. I'd like to have a regiment like that—with the snow and the dust and the hail and the wind for battle songs. Remember I said that, will you, when you stand here in front of this tent, and get ready to review our column coming back? And when you see the men riding past you here, remember there's more to it than two-cent pride giving you eyes right—remember fifty years from then, those in front of you who are left, scattered all over, will see more in the snow than other men. Strange things'll happen in them when they look at a blizzard. Perhaps they'll know what it is, and probably they won't, but it's worth it. I'd go
mad with joy if I could hear one of my officers talking to me as I
am talking to you. . . . . You'll know more what I mean when you
see us coming back.

Sheridan

Humph.

Custer

Anyhow, it's better than trying to get enthusiastic about mani-
fest destinies. By the time I get through with this Seventh Cavalry,
they won't have to act solemn about any of that. . . . . Are we going?
(The bugler sounds officers' call.)

Sheridan

You know what I intended the officers' meeting for? Turn the com-
mand of this camp over to you. That wasn't only my idea. Sherman and I
both wanted to show you that even if they don't appreciate you in Wash-
ton, inside the army you're going to have your own way.

Custer

Thank you, sir - but what about the campaign?

Sheridan

Damn it, Custer --

Custer

That's the stuff.

Sheridan

If you can do it and get away with it. . . . . These Congressmen are
right, and you're wrong - well, not exactly - they don't expect too much,
that's it. . . . . But if you can do this and get away with it, there's
Chapter

You who do, how you can listen to counter

I'm not going to stand in the way of the one of
god-forsaken Indiana, so I'm not going to stand in the way

I don't know anything about the fighting those

Parker and I will be here for a month yet, but I don't intend to be any

The gentleman who commanded the post over to general quarter. I expect

I've been on investigation that I think every one here knows about, and

a couple weeks ago, that my business here is entirely a military one.

I've made no secret of the fact, since I got here

All right, gentlemen. They order the sentry. Well, what I have

Sentry

The officers have gathered outside. They listened.

But nothing. I only know what I'm going to do.

men, I'm begin writing poems about our immediate destiny. What do I ex-

and then says the congressman will leave me alone. If I expected that

Not more than people. (Perseverance.) He says I expect too much.

To Parker who has appeared at the tent opening, then started to

Quarter

To me thanking for sympathy. I'll thank at them.

not one of them can touch you. I'll be glad of it, and if they come around

some of them can touch you. You'll be up in the shades so high,
Cooke

(Pointing to another officer): I told you. I told you.

Custer

We ought to be down there and back in a month if we have any luck at all finding them. I think they're probably within a couple of hundred miles. If they're not, we'll find them anyhow.

An officer

This is going to be good. (He sits down on floor. Some of the others sit.)

Custer

I'll see you personally about your individual units. In the meantime, I'd like to remind you old members, and inform the new ones, that the Seventh Cavalry has always been a realistic institution. It's never had any illusions about the thanks it would get for its services. No matter what happens on this campaign, some one is going to find fault with it. If something goes wrong and the Indians whip us, blustering editorials will be written on how we bungle our jobs and get beaten by an ignorant tribe of savages. If we win, we'll be the savages ourselves, creeping up on innocent sons of nature and butchering them. So don't expect anything.

We're fighting a war on the fringe of a civilization that's forgotten us. Fair enough. It's forgotten a war's going on, and the less it hears about it, the better it likes it. Fair enough. All right - don't look for anything you don't get. Go in for whatever you can make
of it for yourself. Go in, among other things, for the memories that roll up in you when you're playing with the chance that the next five seconds may see the end of you. Manage it right, and make those memories stick. Come out of it with all you ever were living in you. See sights that you've forgotten, made over, by something that's gone on in you, into something better than they were. Find out that you're a longer, better story than you thought.

And on top of all that, we'll have a parade. -- I didn't want to do it, (he begins laughing) but General Sheridan here insisted on it. Well, I told him, we'll do the best we can.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.
Peabody

He the one whose wife they got back from the Indians.

Sheridan

We want to get that man's story. (He indicates Tom Smith.)

Peabody

I guess so. What do you want.

Sheridan

General Sheridan, Huggins and I wonder if we could use your tent for a minute.

Peabody

The camp. Did you ever hear anything like it?

Sheridan

The Battle of Washita. It made history. In history. In history. In history. In history.

Peabody

I read of one. And gave the Indians the worst beating they ever got in into the end of an Indian settlement with eight witnesses in it. Right in.

Sheridan

It was a dream. Took chance as he cutlame it to me. Then the fire

Peabody


Sheridan


Peabody

Also Peabody and Huggins. Reporter. Sheridans. And

Sheridan


Peabody. Outside Sheridan's tent. December, 1868. To right of the fire.
How do you know for sure that it’s your wife General Quarter Rounds?

Peabody

Mo. Tom Smith.

Smith

Thence Smith

Peabody

Inside the tent.

Smith

I’ve got the gaiting gun for the sallute. I mean I had a ten pounder.

Smith

Let me have the gaiting sallute in right. To the others on the right.

Sheridan

Yes sir.

Peabody

Gaiting gun ready, Peabody. Have you got the gaiting gun ready. Have you got the gaiting gun ready? (Judge: I meant hunters to the tent.) You’ll have to put those pads up. I’m not going to have you standing there. Well, yes. The men of the regiment. That’s quarter, motto. But

Sheridan

You during the regiment General Sheridan, do you suggest Peabody and I could stand with

Hugent

(a minute)

Peabody and Smith start toward the tent. Hugent hangs back for

All right, go ahead.

Sheridan
Smith

My brother-in-law said so in the report General Custer sent to General Sheridan.

Nugent

Is your brother-in-law one of General Custer's troopers?

Smith

No. He's a teamster. He'd o' paid his own way just to go along with the troops when he heard they might meet some Indians that might have taken Clara, but General Custer gave him a job when he found out.

Peabody

How long since you've seen your wife?

Smith

Two years ago. Do you think she'll like me just the same with my leg gone?

Peabody

You lost your leg the same time she was taken away?

Smith

Yuh. I guess they thought they killed me. They scalped me anyhow. I didn't know but what they'd killed her, too. I didn't know what was going on, o' course, after they hit me. I didn't even know she was alive 'till they told me last week. We only hoped so. . . . . . Do you think she'll like me - scalped?

Sheridan

Pierce, has the man on the hill there got a signal flag?
Pierce

Yes, sir.

(Nugent and Peabody come running out of the tent. They are trailed by Smith.)

Peabody

Are they in sight yet?

Pierce

They've been in sight from the hill for some time.

Sheridan

(To the reporters): I'm having a gatling gun fired as soon as they get into sight.

Nugent

I guess we'd better stay out here. Thanks, Mr. Smith.

Peabody

You haven't got a picture of your wife, have you? (He continues to converse with Smith for a while, but their conversation is lost in the crowds.)

Sheridan

I was tellin' 'em I wish I had a ten-pounder. I'd like to make a roar they'd hear in Washington.

Nugent

We'll tend to that, General. We'll blaze him across the front page just as soon as we get to a telegraph.

MacKenzie

(To Sheridan): We've been looking over the report he sent you,
sir. It reads like a fairy tale. The Battle of Washita! Nobody'll ever forget it.

Wallen

(To Nugent): The snow was over a foot deep, and they struck the village at dawn from four points at once.

Nugent

Yes, General Sheridan let me read the report where it described the battle. I'm surprised they had band music for a signal.

Wallen

"Carryown's" the battle song of the Seventh. Did you read what he said about making enough noise, as usual, to make the Indians think they really had enough men to lick them. Custer told me once he'd gotten so used to fighting ten men with five who made noise enough for twenty that he'd fallen in love with the idea.

Nugent

I'll write that down. When did Custer graduate from West Point?

Wallen

I don't know exactly. He went right from there into the Civil War. I do know that he was at the bottom of his class.

Sheridan

Yeh. They didn't know whether to graduate him or not. Be sure to put that down.

Wallen

And once they nearly put him out because he didn't stop a fight
while he was on guard. He said, "Come on, boys. Let's have a fair fight." I think he was court-martialed for it.

Sheridan

They court-martial him for everything. He won't have to worry about that any more.

Peabody

General Custer's married, isn't he, General?

Sheridan

Here they come! (The signal gun sounds a deep hollow boom. The staff group around Sheridan. An officer clears a space around them. There is silence.)

Sheridan

No one would have thought of having a review but Custer.

Wallen

You're right, sir. There's his band out in front. If anybody told me to end up a fight with a parade, I'd think they were joking, but now I see it, I think what it will do for the men marching in it.

Sheridan

The band's beginning to play. Can you hear it? (They all listen. There is a distant rumble. The salute gun fires again, and at the same interval for the rest of the scene.) I can't make it out yet.

Mackenzie

It's either "Garryowen" or "The Girl I Left Behind Me".
Wallen

Imagine how those men are feeling, with a fight like that behind them.

Sheridan

Who the devil is that behind the band?

Wallen

It's his Osage guides. They've got on their war bonnets, and war paint.

Sheridan

I'll be damned! I can hear the band playing now. (They listen.) It's "The Girl I Left Behind Me". (Music is heard. Cries are heard.)

MacKenzie

Listen, those guides of his are giving their war cries.

Sheridan

Is that what that is? There's Cooke and his sharpshooters that Custer gathered together for him from all over the plains. He told Cooke there wasn't a man among them that couldn't shoot the eye out of a squirrel at three and a half miles.

Wallen

There's California Joe among them. Look. He's still smoking his pipe. Those must be the Cheyenne prisoners behind them. Their horses are happy enough anyhow. They're dancing around. Maybe they've already made the treaty.
They broke into it. Here he comes running.
The columns taken up a trot. I guess he wanted to see them when

What a stoppage fort

... ... ... out of a parade, I pulled him out - regulations on no regulations.
Thank God, I'm not adjudicating. If I went to pull a man

Yea, sir. (He salutes.)

and get quarter. He can watch the tail-end of it from here if you hurry.

(He breaks off, the order being given.) Prepare, go out there

Tom Smith, marching. Sheatzen breaks out suddenly : Fifty years from

Oh ... he comes hard on his own as the girl I left behind me

There's a escort; what the devil was it he told me to remember?
"Pass in review", comes from the field. The officers and civilians come to attention. Custer comes to attention at Sheridan's side. The band is silenced except for the drum. A few seconds pass. The band strikes up "Carryown"; all come to salute. They hold the salute about ten seconds, time for the colors to pass. Sheridan breaks the salute; the others follow. The band is still playing "Carryown".)

Sheridan

(Sideways to Custer): What do you think of your outfit?

(Before Custer has a chance to reply, the band stops playing, and the crowd breaks. Custer is engulfed. Troopers surge onto the stage with Tom Smith's wife. The meeting with Tom is lost in the crowd. Noise of guns being fired into the air, toots of bugles. From the crowd Custer emerges. In his wake are Tom Smith and his wife. Custer has his hat off, and is shaking it, jingling coins.)

Custer

(To Tom Smith, as he passes his hat to every one on the edge of the crowd): What do you mean, money doesn't grow on trees? - Look.

(Here he pushed the hat up to some one, who contributes. Custer is followed by a small crowd of his own; every one is watching the proceedings in high glee.) What do you know about the world, Tom? Look -

(Another contribution.) You just have to know how. This world owes money. What do you think of that? (Another contribution.) What's a farm burning down mean to you - look. (Custer goes off stage, still
collecting money. Most of the crowd follows him. Mess call is sounded.)

A voice

Any of you civilians who didn’t bring anything to eat can share the soldiers’ mess down here.

(The crowd moves on. Peabody and Nugent go to Sheridan’s tent. They work on their stories.)

Nugent
The old boy says he’ll send a rider out with anything we want to send. I’m going to hang around for a while.

Peabody
That Tom Smith business is a whale of a story.

Nugent
There are a half-dozen others they got back from the Indians.

Peabody
Yeh. I’m going to get ‘em.

Nugent
How would you like to be Custer?

Peabody
Don’t speak.

Nugent
The old man said they’d probably be hearing from those first telegrams to Washington tonight.

Peabody
I’m going to watch for the rider. Read my paper’s congratulations for scooping you.
Nugent

Go drown yourself.

Peabody

Sure. (He gets up.) See you at the horse meat stand.

(Peabody goes. Parks comes in.)

Nugent

You want this desk? I'm all through.

(Nugent hurries off after Peabody. Parks sits at his desk, and addresses a letter. Custer enters.)

Custer

For this I have a parade. Parks, Parks.

Parks

Oh, I saw the parade, sir. I just came here a minute to address a letter. The mail's going tonight, and I wanted to get it off now so I can listen to what everybody has to say about the battle and all.

Custer

That puts us in the same boat again, Parks. I've got other plans for this evening, but I do want to get a letter off. It's to my wife, and I've got to finish bragging about myself. There's so much noise in my tent, I can't write. Tom's in there. Do you know my brother Tom? He's the only man in the service with two medals of honor, and he's never in all his life said anything which made sense. Imagine that, Parks. That's what our heroes amount to. I learn more about our country every day. Have you got your letter addressed?
Parks

Yes, sir.

Custer

Will you do me a favor?

Parks

Yes, sir. (He says this with so much enthusiasm that Custer looks at him wonderingly for a moment.)

Custer

Fine. I'd like you to stand at the opening there for five minutes, just five minutes till I finish with this, and keep everybody out. . . .

. . March up and down, Parks, like a sentry. Twenty years from now I'll remember the dim late afternoon of the Washita parade, and I'll see you in the fine dark haze, etched against the cosmos guarding me, marching up and down, up and down, up and down.

Parks

(Estatically): Yes, sir.

Custer

I'll tell my wife I have a guardian whom I told to etch himself against the cosmos.

Parks

(As before): Yes, sir.

Custer

Parks, what the devil's got into you?

Parks

General Custer - if you'll take no offense, I'd like to tell you
that my opinion of you isn't what it was. I think you are an extra-
ordinary man, sir.

Custer

(After a long pause in which he takes in the situation): Why?
Parks

It's a lot besides the battle and the parade, sir. Before you
left you were always saying extraordinary things.

Custer

Well, this is an extraordinary world, and one should keep up with
it.

Parks

Yes, sir. — I'll step outside now and keep them out.

(He goes out. Custer gazes after him thoughtfully. Parks steps back
into the opening, excitedly.) General, there's a wind out here. "Oh, ho,"
I say to it, "I know your brother."

(Custer after a moment goes to the tent opening and looks out.)

Custer

Parks, that's a wild horse to be riding.

Parks

I've never had such a ride. You said yourself once no man was
alive until he sat at his soul and played it like an organ. Just now I'm the
guardian of General Custer. He's just come from battles, and had a big parade.
Twenty years from now, I'll see him writing. "Oh ho," I'll say, "we under-
stood each other." There's some one coming.
(Custer goes to the desk and begins writing.)

Sheridan

(Outside): I want to see General Custer. He's in there, isn't he?

Parks

No, sir; General Custer never comes here at this time of day.

Sheridan

Why of course he's in there. What's the matter with you, Parks? I want to ask you something - (Sees Custer writing) - All right. I'll be just a minute. What officers do you want brevetted? Just got a telegram from Washington wanting to know who you'll recommend for brevets?

Custer

Are they going to take them away again, like the last ones, in a moment of pique? Tell 'em to brevet 'em all or none.

Sheridan

There you go again. (Starts to argue, but sees Custer is writing.)

I'll see you later. (He goes.)

(Custer continues to write.)

Sheridan

(Reappearing): What have you done to Parks? He wants to know if the prairie isn't rolling in my soul tonight. He's out there stomping up and down and told me you stationed him there. I asked him what he lied to me for, and he says, "The wind's in my blood. The very wind of this world. If everything wasn't turned upside down to-day, and he lied to me, I'd fire him. The damn' fool. . . . .(Sheridan goes out.)
Custer

(Finishing letter): Parks. (He goes to opening.)

Parks

I couldn't stop him. I'll have to resign.

Custer

Resign?

Parks

The wild horse has run away.

Custer

He'll come back. Never fear, Parks. One of these times you'll find yourself in the saddle again. That thing isn't understood well enough.

Parks

(Eagerly): Is it true, sir? Ho, ho. (He grins.) Well---

Custer

You see? Anyhow, it was a barge you tried to stop. There's no sense in trying to stop barges.

Parks

You don't mind?

Custer

Be like the Indians.

Parks

The Indians?
Custer

The first time the Indians tried to stop a train, they did it by stretching a rawhide rope across the track. Two braves tied the ends of the rope to their ponies and waited for the fun. They got it. But the second time the Indians ripped up the track. They they robbed the train. They got drunk on the whiskey and had races over the prairie with hundred-yard bolts of calico streaming out behind them. (Parks grins.)

Parks

There's some one coming. (He goes out.)

Custer

I'm all through.

Parks

(Reappears in opening. Custer looks up): It's the officer of the day, sir.

Custer

All right. (Parks motions in Benteen, and leaves. Benteen, officer of the day, enters and salutes. Custer returns the salute.) Hello, Benteen.

Benteen

Satanta and Lone Wolf have asked for a conference. Will the General see them?

Custer

What do they want?
Benteen
I guess they're finally ready to talk treaty.

Custer
Fine. Are they outside?

Benteen
They're in the guard-house. I'll bring them.

Custer
Will you do me a favor on the way, Benteen?

Benteen
I carry out any orders, sir.

Custer
Very well. I order you to mail this letter - I also order you to have two of my horses saddled and brought here. Do you want me to write it?

Benteen
That isn't necessary, sir. (He salutes and leaves.)

Custer
There's a man who'll never forgive me for being his colonel.

Parks!

Parks
(Appearing): Yes, sir.

Custer
Parks, you and I are going to have a parade all our own.

Parks
You and I, sir?
Custer

(Sitting down): Tonight. I've ordered the horses. - Sit down.

(Parks sits down.) What do you know about parades, Parks?

Parks

Well—no much, sir.

Custer

You've seen a lot of them?

Parks

Quite a few.

Custer

Well, you've never seen any like the one we're going on tonight.

Parks

(Grinning): No, sir.

Custer

Well remember that, Parks; keep that buzzing in your head. The most important thing about parades is what buzzing in your head.

Parks

Yes, sir.

Custer

No buzz, no parade.

Parks

No, sir.

Custer

The bigger the buzz, the bigger the parade. Do you think we can
have a better buzz tonight than we had to-day?

Parks

Yes, sir.

Custer

Fine. One can't have a parade without enthusiasm. Well now, let's get to what buzzed in our heads to-day - what we were knowing to-day - and what we'll be knowing tonight. What were we knowing to-day? (Parks scratches his head.) We had the bacon, and we were coming into Camp Supply; Sheridan was watching us, and we will never forget to brag about it around the campfires. Well, that's something, Parks. Don't ever get it into your head that isn't something. But it isn't enough. Tonight there'll be no noise, and we'll be out on the prairie - having a parade to find out what the other parade amounted to. What do you know about the prairie, Parks?

Parks

Not much, sir.

Custer

Well, the prairie stretches out for a thousand miles. If you get up high and look at it, it rolls like the waves of the sea - except that the waves are still, and never move - and except that over it all there's an immense silence. That's where we're going tonight on our parade--hear nothing but the horses crunching the snow. One, two, three, four; one, two, three four. Instead of Sheridan watching us, there'll be no one -
one, two, three, four; one, two, three, four, - if we can make something out of that kind of a parade, Parks, we've got something. This parade didn't start with a victory - you know where this parade started? Up North once when I saw a Sioux out riding in the moonlight all by himself. He was playing on his horse the way hawks play in the air. That's where I got the idea. Can you explain to the silence why you're out there tonight? (Parks is doubtful.) No, but you'll have a lot of fun trying. Then when you admit you don't know, the silence begins to soak into you - soak, soak. You hear the horse still going one, two, three, four. I'm a human animal, you say - one, two, three, four - what's a human animal? One, two, three, four. Oh, we'll have the real parade tonight, Parks. I'll show you a time.

Benteen

(Entering): They're here, sir.

(Satanta and Lone Wolf enter, followed by two guards.)

Custer

(Aside to Benteen): Get rid of those guards! (Benteen and guards go out, and Custer turns to Satanta): Satanta, Chief of the Cheyennes, I salute you. (He bows and shakes hands.) Lone Wolf, Commander of the Cheyenne warriors, I salute you. (He bows and shakes hands, and turns to indicate Parks.) This is Mr. Parks. (Satanta and Parks shake hands, and Parks shakes hands with Lone Wolf.) How shall we sit down? (They all take chairs. A long silence, while they all watch Satanta.) You wanted to talk to me?
Satanta

We have made many treaties with white men. They made us many promises. They did not keep their promises. We promise to come to our reservation. We come. They promise no white men will come to our reservation, but white men come. They tell us not to go for buffalo outside our reservation, and they will feed us. But they do not feed us, and our people starve. They promise they will give us rifles and blankets, but when rifles and blankets come, we must pay for them with hides. We do not like to make treaties with the White Father.

General Sheridan has said all my people must come into the reservation again, or I will be hanged, and Lone Wolf will be hanged. . . . . .

(Defiantly) They will not come in unless I give the word.

Custer

(After a pause): We've said all this before, Satanta.

Satanta

The White Father has told us not to fight, and he himself has fought in the South. The White Father tells us not to kill, and he himself sends white agents who whisper in the ears of our young men to kill other white men. Then these white agents lie and say they told our young men not to kill and our young men learn to lie. So many of our young men have learned to lie that if I say the tribe shall not come in, and the White Father hangs me, my people will find no chief who will not lie, and my people will believe one thing is as good as another. They will not know in their hearts when
the leaves are green and when the leaves are withered. They will not
know a sparrow from an eagle or know a swift eagle in their hearts.
They will not know rain from a storm or know a storm in their hearts.
(Silence) They will be like whites and believe one man is as good as
another.

Custer

(After a pause): That's a blame no one would ever dream would
be made against us. . . . . Well, Satanta - you, too, have been
known to lie.

Satanta

I still know lies when I tell them. You white men don't know
when you're telling a lie.

Custer

I gave you good terms, Satanta.

Satanta

But they were with the White Father. I will sign the treaty if
Yellowhair will do one thing.

Custer

What one thing must I do?

Satanta

If Yellowhair will sign the treaty for himself and not for the
White Father, I will agree to the terms.
They will come.

Chapter

You're late tonight.

Chapter

My people will come to the reservation by the oak tomorrow.

Chapter

Yes.

Chapter

Tell them you're my treaty writer.

Chapter

I will do what I can.

Chapter

Tell them what the government.

Chapter

A treaty with the white people is nothing.

Chapter

Tell them what the white people may not do.

Chapter

The white people may not agree to it.

Chapter

Make a treaty hold.

Chapter

Tell them to a great other. Moreover, he is, the power could

Chapter

That will do you no good. Suppose I'm sent away from here.
Custer

The moment they come in, Satanta and Lone Wolf will be free men. I would like to have you and your chiefs eat with me and my officers tomorrow.

Satanta

You are sure that you can feed all my people?

Custer

I will supply the food if you only supply the guests.

Satanta

(Grunts affirmatively): We still tell tales of one of our people who was a great chief, and a great haugher.

(The men all rise. Benteen steps in; the guards appear. The chiefs exchange ceremonious handshakes and depart.)

Benteen

I didn't expect you'd be through with them so soon, and told them there was no rush about the horses. I'll drop down there now and hurry them up.

Custer

That's quite all right. You heard - Satanta came through all right.

Benteen

Yes, sir. (Insidiously): I expect there'll be no hitch at Washington?

Custer

Surely not. Oh, yes. I'll have them all eating out of my hand at Washington. (He says the last doubtfully - with a realization of how much fighting he will have to do. Benteen goes out.) There is a man who'd
never share Satanta's conviction that my honor was worth more than my country's. It's against his mathematics. Well, truth is truth. . .
. . . Now, Parks - there's something more to buzz in our heads tonight. There's more than I let him think in what he said. What do you think of them? Wouldn't they be good stuff poured into the melting pot - that's our manifest destiny - all get to be a tenth Indian instead of butchering them off. One-tenth levers of eagles to give us some sense. Do you know what it says in the Bible, Parks? Three things are great mysteries - the way of a snake in the grass, the way of a man with a maid, and the way of an eagle in the air. We can mix that with our parade, too — (Two shots are heard, indistinctly.) What do you suppose that was?

(A trooper appears in the tent opening.)

Trooper

(Saluting): I've tied the horses at the end of the line, sir.

Custer

Thanks. You don't happen to know what those shots were, do you?

Trooper

No, sir. Probably something getting into some grub, sir.

Custer

Never mind waiting here. We'll take them to the stables.

Trooper

(Saluting): Yes, sir. (He leaves.)
Custer

(Returning the salute): What horse do you want, Parks? -

What's the matter, Benteen?

Benteen

(Enters running): Satanta and Lone Wolf have been shot -

Custer

Shot!

Benteen

The guards got excited about something they did, and shot them.

Custer

(After a silence): Both dead?

Benteen

Yes, sir.

Custer

There goes everything we've done for the last month. (Fiercely):

I thought we were going to give them a break, Benteen. - Where are those guards?

Benteen

I had them put under arrest.

Custer

Have them brought here.

Benteen

Yes, sir. (He goes.)
Custer
You can take one of those horses, Parks.

Parks

(Going out): I don't think I'll go, sir.

Custer
Don't be a fool. Take one and go. You'll get something.

Parks
Yes, sir. (He leaves.)

(The former guards appear, themselves guarded.)

Custer
What in God's name did you do that for?

One of the Guards
They resisted us, sir.

Custer
How did they resist you? They weren't armed. (Silence.) You got excited, huh? (Silence.) You thought they were just Indians, any-
how. Is that it? (Silence.) Been listening all your lives to how much better you were than they are?

Sheridan

(Coming casually into the tent): What's the matter?

Custer
Satanta and Lone Wolf have been killed by their guards.

Sheridan
Hell.
Custer

Ten minutes ago they were here talking about swift eagles.

Benteen

(Appearing): What shall I do about the other Cheyenne prisoners, sir?

Custer

Why - are they restless?

Benteen

Not much, sir. They seem numbed.

Custer

Sure. They're all through. I know 'em, and they're all through - thanks to you. (He motions to the guards. Benteen goes. Custer gets up restlessly and walks up and down. He turns again to the guards.) They're just going to die off with nothing left. (He walks some more. Silence.)

Sheridan

(Weakly - holding up a telegram): I was going to tell you Grant was elected.

Custer

Maybe that will do some good somewhere else -

THE CURTAIN FALLS.
ACT II, SCENE I

Custer's quarters, Fort Lincoln. February, 1876. The room is comfortably furnished. There is a bay window with a window seat in the center of the back wall. Door in the middle of the wall, stage r., leading from outside. Door at the rear of the wall, stage l., leading to the kitchen. Also another door, stage l.f. Piano between the two doors.

Custer and a striker are on the stage. The striker has a large suitcase in one hand, a hat box in the other. The couch is piled with a variety of feminine clothing from which Custer selects and throws over the striker's arms now a coat, now some bath towels, now a kimono.

Custer

What is it you're to say when you get to the door?

Striker

I'm to ask for Mrs. Custer, sir, and when Mrs. Custer appears, I'm to say, (In sing-song): General Custer wanted me to deliver these things. He hopes he's missed nothing, but since you evidently intend to stay for a long time, something's bound to be overlooked. He wants only to be notified about anything of that sort, and he will send it as promptly as a lonely, deserted husband can force himself to move.

(Tom Custer enters from door left front, sits on piano stool, and watches.)

Custer

Be sure not to give her a chance for any of her repartee until you say it all. (He slaps one of Mrs. Custer's hats on top of the striker's.)

All right, John, you're off. (He opens the door.)
Tom

May I ask what the meaning of this ceremony is?

Custer

Beth has left me.

Striker

(Who has been hesitation): May I ask what the meaning of "repartee" is, sir?

Custer

It's saying something to-day that you don't think of till tomorrow. (Notices striker is still hesitating): You just talk fast, John. (The striker goes out, puzzled.)

Tom

What do you mean, Beth has left you?

Custer

She's been gone since one o'clock.

Tom

Horrible.

Custer

This is the day the mail comes.

Tom

Oh, yes, this is the day you and she have to sit there in the window all afternoon. "Has he come yet, Beth?" - "No." Five minutes later - "Has he come yet, Beth?" - "No." - What fun.

Custer

(Taking out his watch): She's been gone three hours. She was just going to step over to the Benteens for a minute. (He sits down.)

Just for a minute!
Tom

How would you feel if some one had you parading around with a woman's hat on?

Custer

Tom, why don't you go out in the snow and say to yourself, "Every one in the world is unique; every one in the world is unique." Say to yourself, "It may conceivably be that John and my brother are different animals." Yes, go out in the snow. Have some experiences. Get some sense in your head instead of wandering here like a lost ghost groaning at people.

Tom

(After a pause, interested): Do I wander around like a lost ghost?

Custer

(Sighs, then with a sudden idea, gets up): I want to show you something - (he laughs) - about United States Grant. (He goes to the window seat and gets a rifle from it. Tom jumps up on seeing it.)

Tom

(Going toward Custer): Is that one of those new repeaters?

Custer

(Handing Tom the gun): Nice, huh? Six shots, one right after another.

Tom

(As he looks it over and handles it ecstatically): Don't shock me, (he holds up his hand), but are we finally going to get some of these things?
Custer

Don't be a child. These are for the Indians.

Tom

(Puts gun quickly on the table): Pardon me, I should have known.

(He gazes at it on the table.) Why Grant?

Custer

(Shrugs): Oh, just because it happens to be his great White

Fathership. - Perhaps you can tell me why I saw five thousand of them

stacked up in the depot this morning.

Tom

No?

(There is a knock on the door.)

Custer

(Calling out): It's all right, Mary. (He opens the door.) I'll

take it.

Trooper

A telegram, sir.

Custer

Thanks. (He takes it; the trooper goes; Custer turns the door, opens,

and reads the telegram.) Well, all right, damn 'em. You know that shipment

of flour that was sent us with Indian Department stamped on it as plain as

day? I telegraphed to Corps area headquarters about it, and I got word back

to accept it. That means it gets paid for twice.
Tam
They give you any reason why?

Custer
Since Balknap got in, they don't explain anything. (He puts telegram away in desk.)

Tam
Why don't you stage another Washita? That knocked 'em into line for a while. It's a good idea — stall 'em off for another six years. We'd have more fun up here with these Sioux than we ever did down there. (There is a knock on the door.)

Custer
(Shouting): I've got it, Mary. (He goes to door and opens it.) Well, come in, Little Bear, come in. (He motions Little Bear in. Once in, they greet each other ceremoniously after the Indian fashion, each holding up his right hand, then bowing, then taking both each others' hands, then bowing again. Custer accompanies his gestures as follows): Welcome. I bow to a Great Chief. I take the hands of Little Bear of the Minneconjou Sioux. I greet the Minneconjou Sioux. (Little Bear answers in the Indian language. They face each other. Little Bear gives a sign.)

Custer
(Nodding): I'll send for an interpreter. (He makes a sign. Little Bear nods, smiling. Custer goes to door left rear.) John! (No answer.) John hasn't come back, has he? (He laughs.) I'll send Mary. Mary! (He makes a sign to Little Bear.) Entertain him, Tom. (Custer goes.)
Tom

(Goes to Little Bear, who rises, holds up his hand, and goes through the same motions with him that Custer did. He accompanies these gestures as follows): Hello. You look like all the rest of 'em to me, you old son of a bitch. You're probably just itching to get those hands around my throat. I suppose we'll soon know what you came in here to beg for? (They beam at each other. Tom looks toward door through which Custer went, then turns quickly to Little Bear.) Have a drink? (He points to alcohol lamp, and makes the motion of drinking.)

Little Bear

(Griining): You bet.

Tom

(Looks at him quickly): You bet what? (Little Bear looks at him incomprehendingly; motions toward lamp.) My God, man, don't scare me like that! (Tom takes the top off the lamp, makes sure Custer isn't coming, and hands the base to Little Bear.) There may be some dirt in it, but it was fine alcohol once. (He watches the Indian swallow some. Little Bear offers him a drink.) I couldn't bear to take it from you. (He refuses with a polite gesture. Little Bear drinks the rest.) By God, Little Bear, if anybody told me they saw a walrus do that, I wouldn't believe it. - Give me it quick! (He gets the lamp in place just as Custer reappears.)

Custer

Let's sit down. (He motions to the chair again. Little Bear sits down. Tom and Custer sit.) He'll be here in a minute. (He makes a sign
to Little Bear. Little Bear nods. Little Bear sees the gun on the table, goes to it, and picks it up. He points to himself. He looks at the gun carefully.)

Tom

"Well, I guess he wants you to give it to him. Ante up, George. (Little Bear points the gun here and there in the pantomime of shooting animals. He does it with great gusto - moving the gun along as if drawing a bead on a moving target and making quickly repeated noises to illustrate the action of the shots.)

Custer

It isn't mine. I can't give it to him. (Little Bear lays the gun back on the table.)

Tom

As I live and breathe, he's putting it back.

(The interpreter, a half-breed, comes in through the door, l. rear.)

Interpreter

You sent for me, General?

Custer

Yes, Little Bear signed to me he wanted to talk. I think it's about some food I'm trying to get for him.

(The interpreter and Little Bear greet each other without ceremony. They talk for a moment.)

Interpreter

He says he saw them bring a telegram here. He wants to know if he can have the food for his village.
The interpreter and Little Bear talk.

The steamboat didn't get started before the ice.

Some in watching the three, it's covered with ice, that's the trouble.

Tell him the minute I know, I'll tell him. Tell him there's no

desire

time.

you promised him food, too, and he waits in the telegraph office all the

some. He says some of the visitors wash the river every day. He says

they have filled with food just for the visitors. The steamboat hasn't.

He says the Government promised to send a big steamboat up the

interpreter

(interpreter talks again with Little Bear.)

yes! yes! I know.

Chapter

he could have had plenty of butter,

standing on the reservation. He says if he's gone off the reservation,

Little Bear says the Government promised him plenty of food for

interpreter

i knew he was after something

for.

(interpreter and Little Bear talk)

on — there was something else. I haven't heard from it yet.

Chapter
Custer

I've got the food here. Tell him that was an Indian Department steamboat. Tell him the army and the Indian Department are different.

(The interpreter and Little Bear talk.)

Interpreter

He says if you've got the food here, why not give it to him?

Custer

Tell him he's much too sensible for this world. I explained all that to him before. That's extra army food, and I can't give it away without hearing from Washington. Tell him I'm expecting a telegram any time.

(The Interpreter and Little Bear talk.)

Interpreter

He says the telegram came. He says you told him how it would come from the telegraph office.

Custer

That was a telegram from St. Louis. This other has got to come from Washington. Explain to him that I could get a lot of telegrams besides his. But tell him there's nothing to worry about.

(The interpreter and Little Bear talk.)

Interpreter

He says in a few days his village won't have any food left. He says his people don't believe any food is coming. He says some of the best men have been going north to look for Sitting Bull's village.
He wanted to know what Captain Quarter said.

Interpreter

What's he talking about?

Quarter

...little bear goes somewhere, up the interpreter is sitting. He
said, the interpreter might hear off a moment or two, suddenly, in-
the interpreter and the electricians that he has reached the interpreter where
the interpreter and little bear talk more. Little bear seems sure
Do you want them all to join sitting there?

Quarter

...then the bear will be in the tree.

Tom

with the food anywhere.

After thinking it over...

Quarter

...he thinks you get the telegram already, and he's not going to get anything.

Laughter.

Interpreter

He's excited because no food came over the telegraph.

More talk.

Tell him I'm sure it will be all right.

Tell him I'm sure to hear within a day or two. Tell him it's...
Tom

Imagine any one being interested in what I had to say.

(Little Bear rising, talks more excitedly. The interpreter is silent again.)

Custer

What's the matter?

Interpreter

Oh, he's just talking.

Custer

(Snapping): What's he saying?

Interpreter

(After a pause): He wants to know what you're saying to each other.

Custer

Come on. Cut with it.

Interpreter

He suspects you're having him wait so you can attack his village.

He says he'll keep his village awake all night so you can't do it. He says they've got plenty of guns. He says he'll make it hot for you.

Custer

Get that idea out of his head.

(Little Bear has been talking steadily. Interpreter talks to him.)

Interpreter

He says the government is trying to starve the Indians everywhere this winter. He says all the Indians who've come in to reservations have
been trapped. He says Sitting Bull sent word to them last summer that they'd be trapped if they came to a reservation. He says he'll have a war dance tonight.

**Custer**

(After a pause): Tell him if I don't hear by tonight, I'll give him the food tomorrow anyhow. Tell him he can put a tepee up somewhere near the fort and watch us all night if he wants to. (Interpreter talks to Little Bear. Little Bear cools a little.) Tell him I don't understand all his suspicions - remind him I've given him a lot of firewood and axes and water barrels this winter, and helped him all I could.

(The interpreter and Little Bear talk. Little Bear calms down considerably.)

**Interpreter**

He says can he send some of his men for the food tomorrow?

**Custer**

Yes, if I don't hear. Tell him if word comes before the telegraph office closes, I'll send a load of it over myself, tonight, so they can have a good look at it.

(Little Bear cools down still more. He and interpreter talk.)

**Interpreter**

He says he'll go to the telegraph office again and wait.

**Custer**

Fair enough. (He rises, smiling. Little Bear is smiling now. They say goodbye ceremoniously. Custer goes to the door and opens it.)
Little Bear is about to step out. Custer turns to interpreter:

By the way, ask him what he said about that gun.

(Interpreter and Little Bear talk. Little Bear beams proudly.)

Interpreter

He says he's got one just like it.

Custer

Oh. (He bows Little Bear out. To interpreter): Can Mary find you again if he comes back?

Interpreter

(Grinning): I guess she can all right, General.

Custer

Why don't you wait in the kitchen?

Interpreter

I'll come back right after mass.

Custer

Make Mary get you something to eat.

Interpreter

All right, General. (He goes out L. rear.)

Custer

(Sitting down and looking at Tom): That was a pretty little interlude.

Tom

You think they're going to let you give him that food?
Custer

No.

Tom

Why, you dirty hypocrite.

Custer

I didn't realize it till he said he had one of those guns.

Tom

I don't see the connection.

Custer

You don't unless you understand the formula.

Tom

What formula?

Custer

Belknap's formula for treating the Indians this winter.

Tom

Well, what is it?

Custer

No food, no blankets, no anything to keep them happy - but plenty of guns and ammunition. . . . . . The only trouble is, I don't see what he gets out of it. Last year it was easy to see how Belknap made his hundred thousand. But this is more complicated.

Tom

I suppose you counted that hundred thousand?

Custer

I counted the twelve thousand from the trading post right here at Fort Lincoln.
Tom

The devil you did!

Custer

Of course, he knows he's the Secretary of War, and we mere soldiers
will keep our mouths shut.

Tom

You really sure about the twelve thousand?

(A knocking on the door.) What is this, old home week?

Custer

I've got it, Mary. (He goes to the door and opens it.) Well, if
it isn't the editor himself! (Koenig, without waiting to be asked, steps
into the room.) Look at that, Tom. That's how he's going to get on in
the world. (He closes the door.)

Koenig

General, you've been talking to Little Bear?

Custer

Yes.

Koenig

I came to find out what happened.

Custer

(Goes to chair and sits down): Oh - he just dropped in on us;
Tom gave him a drink out of the alcohol lamp there; and he left. (Tom
is non-plussed.)

Koenig

He was here longer than that.
Custer

Why don't you two up-and-coming young men get together and cook something up. Get Tom to tell you about his soul, Koenig - how it raises the devil with him - one winter after another. I tell him to go out in the snow and look at the trees, but you know, he won't do it? (Tom turns around on the piano stool and begins playing, "My Country 'tis of Thee", with one finger.)

Koenig

I came to see you, General.

Custer

Tom, that's what you need - Purpose. Koenig here oozes purpose. You should read his articles in the Bismark Tribune about manifest destiny.

Koenig

I want to know about Little Bear's village, General; that's why I'm sticking here.

Custer

Do you wait in the telegraph office, too?

Tom

He did till they kicked him out. He'd learned the code.

Koenig

Now I wait on the steps.

Tom

Do you look at the snow and wonder what it's for? (He is irritated.)
WELL, ALL RIGHT.

Henry

THE FOOD.

You mean you wonder what I'm about.

Casper

LET'S, AND THEY'RE WONDERING WHAT THEY'RE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT.

Everyone knows Helma, she's been sneaking from the Indian right.

Henry

LITTLE BERRY

Looking prematurely after you (Any all the sudden interrupted in their)

Casper

GOES OFF. (Frenzy)

If there's anything one remembers, I just can't take the eye and ear. He

sticking a knife into some one's head through one of his eyes - tearing

how they go and over the feature cowering open the corneas, beating on

I'm thinking about. I'm thinking about the square after a battle, and

itching: concentrating I think. I'll forgive you. Do you know what

HENRY:

Henry.

Play my country the old again, Tom.

Little Berry, and the sniped on the operation. Got on the wall watching

the telegraph. Little Berry watches the telegrapher. Henry watches

The telegrapher.

No. He's part of a pretty place. The telegrapher watches

Quater
Custer

I haven’t heard yet... Koenig, is it true that the Bismark Tribune is sending everything it finds out about Bolknap back to the New York Herald?

Koenig

Yes.

Custer

So that’s why you’ve become ambitious so suddenly. James Gordon Bennett’s got his eye on you.

Koenig

Sure. You don’t think I’d be sitting out in the cold for a one-horse outfit like the Tribune, do you?

Custer

No. . . . . Well, you might write Tom up.

Koenig

What’s he done?

Custer

He may make something of himself yet. Two medals of honor, and this about the squaws is the first promising sign I’ve ever noticed in him. (Knocking at the door. Custer rises.) I’ve got it, Mary. (He goes to the door.)

Trooper

The mail, sir. (Custer takes it.)

Custer

Thanks. Have a hard trip?
Trooper

No, sir. It was a little cold, but all right. (He goes.)

Custer

Well, if you really want some news, Koenig, you can put it in the paper that I receive my mail alone now. (He becomes gay and enthusiastic.) Yes, put that in, will you? That you went out to Fort Lincoln on the afternoon of the ninth of February, and found out that the commanding officer's wife had deserted him. Broke a tradition they'd observed, every mail day for two years. If you put that in, I'll buy a thousand copies and spread them all over the place. That'll teach her to desert me.

Koenig

I'll do it if you give me a story.

Custer

I've already given you one.

Koenig

I mean a story on what Washington's up to.

Custer

(Bitterly): Why, it's manifest destiny manifesting itself. Civilization spreading west. You, of all people, ought to know that, Koenig. (Custer begins to look through the mail.) Some day you'll be a Horace Greeley where once there was nothing but the wind - wonderful.

Koenig

Well - I guess I'll go over and sit some more.
Come to think of it, they are甲 lors.

Canter

What, with the story about

Tom

his and went up both yesterday.

Tom, I got one from the ice, when I first saw them, I thought some

Gueret

Well, it certainly looks exciting. That attic

Tom

looks at it.

Yes, here. (He holds them in his hand in the same way as the two yesterday. Tom

Gueret

Well, don't tell me for a moment. New York and mail.

Tom

When Tom appears.

Connorate them then he opens one end and reads it. He is looking at it

Calling: Tom, (He looks at two of the letters simultaneously.)

Gueret

(He opens back in.)

Connor sees him out. Looking up and down the street from the door before

I will.

Connor

Keep yourself up well.

Gueret
I'm always remember that.

She smiles, the man's come and gone.

Her, Chester.

All kinds of wet, the man, come and gone.

Tom.

Chester.

I think, explained a bit.

They, open the door open and his Chester appearance followed by Tom, with suit.

And then both at once. The lawyer, interestedly. "Now, give him something."

"What is he going to eat your heart, Tom," you suppose he's going to eat.

Free. He thinks to Chester. "You say you got one of the heavy tons, Chester,"

Old man, Mater foreign - he show with that lovely mane, hair-in-the-

Which gradually spread into a wide beam. "Well, it is James, and

More laughter, he opens the letter, a snails comes over his face

With you sending there, watching. I need to have some sort of a bite.

I suppose the option thing for me to do is to open this.

Tea.
Custer

That was the idea - especially on mail days, please.

Mrs. Custer

I'll do better than that. I'll borrow an idea from you and etch you against the cosmos. Come on, John - we'll put them all away.

(She starts off l. front.)

Custer

And how long will that take you?

Mrs. Custer

Oh - five minutes. (She stops on seeing the letter in Tom's hand.) Did I get any mail?

Custer

Yes, here. (He gets letters off table and gives them to her.)

Half a minute's gone already.

Mrs. Custer

See, how sorry I was? I'd forgotten all about my own mail. (She looks at the mail hastily on the way toward the door. She turns): I got a valentine! You had some one take it all the way to Fargo to get it stamped.

Custer

And it got here on time, you notice. (Mrs. Custer laughs, sticks all the rest of her letters under John's arm, and goes out opening the valentine. John follows.) Those letters were stamped at Fort Peck. Rain-in-the-Face must be with Sitting Bull.
Tom

So that's where he gets all his confidence.

(Knocking at the door. Custer goes to it. Mary opens the door i. rear, but closes it, and disappears when she sees that Custer has gone. He opens the door.)

Trooper

Telegram, sir.

Custer

Thanks. (Trooper goes.) Now, maybe we'll see if they know what they've been doing. (He reads.) Well, Tom - they do. They do from 'way back, I guess. - And this is the way they put it - this is the way they put it: "Obvious Secretary War cannot embarrass Secretary Interior by infringing on his functions." Ever since Grant got in, they've been so God damned careful not to embarrass each other! They know as well as we do what it means to refuse to feed a village this year.

Tom

What - a row? What have they got to gain by a row?

Custer

I don't know. Let's play manifest destiny - you be the Indians, and I'll be Grant's cabinet. I get you half-starved, and then give you a lot of guns; now how do I feel?

Tom

I can't see that you're getting anywhere.
(There is a knock at the door. Custer goes to it.)

Custer

That's Little Bear. (He opens the door. Little Bear stands in the snow, addled drunk.) Come in, Little Bear. (He motions him in. Little Bear trips on the threshold. Custer catches him and gets him into a chair.) Can you talk? (Little Bear looks up.) All right, wait a minute. (He starts toward kitchen.)

Tom

(Jumping up): I'll get him. Let me get him.

Custer

(Without stopping): I'll get him.

(Tom sits down; looks at Little Bear. Little Bear's head falls forward. Tom crumples the letter in his hand. Custer returns with interpreter.)

Custer

Little Bear! (To interpreter): Wake him up. (The interpreter goes to Little Bear and shakes him. He lifts his head.) Ask him if his people are destitute. (The interpreter looks quizzically at Custer.) How much food have they got?

(The interpreter talks to Little Bear. Little Bear with effort answers him slowly.)

Interpreter

He says hardly any.

Custer

I want to know exactly - how many days?
(The interpreter and Little Bear talk. Little Bear gets alarmed.)

Interpreter

He says you told him tomorrow.

Custer

(Shouting): For his own good, how many days?

(Interpreter and Little Bear exchange a few quick words.)

Interpreter

About ten days.

(Little Bear breaks in with a single phrase, and repeats it two or three times with as much bitterness as he can muster.)

He says he's been cheated again.

Custer

Tell him I've never cheated him. Tell him if I had my way, he'd have his food, and we would visit each other all winter the way we have before. Tell him they've told me I can't give him the food. Tell him I'm very sorry. (Interpreter and Little Bear talk.) If he wants to know why, tell him God knows why.

Interpreter

He says they'll starve.

Custer

No, he won't. Tell him to start now to find Sitting Bull. I'm not going to do anything to stop him.

(The interpreter and Little Bear talk. Little Bear nods.)
Interpreter

He says it's cold, but he'll go. He says he won't come back.

Custer

Tell him he ought to hurry. He ought to let his village know tonight so they can start tomorrow. (Little Bear's head falls forward.) He doesn't get a damned thing. Tom, get on your coat and take him back to his village. (Pointing to interpreter): Take him with you, and tell the rest of them the sooner they get going, the fewer are going to starve. (The interpreter runs to the kitchen. Tom takes his hat and coat from the coat tree, and puts them on.) It'll take 'em three weeks to get up there. (The interpreter comes back. Little Bear lifts up his head. He tries to rise, but falls forward to the floor. Tom and interpreter go to him.) That had to happen, too. (Raging): It wouldn't be enough to starve him, would it? (He picks up a chair and smashes it against the table.) You've all had a hell of a lot of God damned poor fun. (Tom and the interpreter have got Little Bear to his feet, and his arms around them.) Yes - start your parade.

Mrs. Custer

(Coming in left front): George, what's the matter?

(Custer goes to the door and opens it for them. Koenig is sitting in the snow outside; he rises.)

Custer

(To Mrs. Custer): They're having a parade. Come on in, manifest destiny. (Koenig steps in; Custer closes the door, and turns to Mrs. Custer.) We're going to have a celebration, too.
Mrs. Custer

What are you going to do?

Custer

We're going to blow up Belknap - blow him all over the country.

(He and Mrs. Custer look steadily at one another.) Don't remind me that he's the Secretary of War, and I'm an officer in the army, because I don't care if he's forty secretaries of war. - Are you afraid?

Mrs. Custer

(Absolutely): No. (She goes to chair, and sits down.

Custer

Fair enough. Sit down, Keenig. I want to do a good enough job so when Belknap tumbles, we can see what else tumbles, too.

(Keenig starts for a chair.)

THE CURTAIN FALLS.
ACT II. SCENE 3

Grant's office in the White House, about ten o'clock in the morning, May, 1876. There are two large windows in the center of the back wall, a divan against the back wall, a desk to one side of the divan nearly in the center of the stage, and some other chairs about. On each side of the stage at the rear are two doors, one leading outside, and one to an inner office.

Present are Grant, Belknap, Landorff, and Grant's secretary, Davis. Custer, Sheridan, Terry, and a doorman appear during the scene.

Grant

The trouble with you, Landorff, is that you don't understand military discipline. Belknap knows. He was Secretary of War long enough to find out how this thing works.

Landorff

And I've been living in this world long enough to know it doesn't do you a bit of good to cry over spilled milk. That's the whole business. Belknap's out, and you're both crying about it.

Grant

You're all wrong, Landorff. All you can think about is your railroad. But I'm thinking about the country. And I'm thinking about the army. And I know what happens to an army when it gets an any officer who takes it into his head can air his personal ideas about a Secretary of War and get away with it.
Lendorf

I suppose you're thinking about the welfare of the country, too, Balknap?

Balknap

Can't a man still think about an organization it took him years to build up?

Lendorf

And it took some one else just an hour's talk to a newspaper reporter to tear down.

Balknap

You think it's all so personal with us to get rid of him; what do you want to keep him for?

Lendorf

Personal reasons. I want to build a railroad, - and I don't want to be waiting ten years for you to whip those Sioux.

Grant

You think Custer's the only one who can do it?

Lendorf

He looks like a good man to me.

Grant

Well, you're all wrong. You ought to read this stuff, Lendorf. (He points to the pile of papers on his desk.) That trial of Belknap's wasn't the only time he's forgotten who he was. We've got a case of
insubordination against him a mile long. "He's an awfully good man. Just a wonderful officer!" - If you knew how to run an army as well as how to pick out driving teams, you'd know what you were talking about. You should see the team of horses he took me out driving behind yesterday, Belknap.

Landorf

You liked those, didn't you?

Grant

Finest team I ever saw in my life. Look at 'em out the window here, Belknap. (He goes to window.)

Belknap

Landorf doesn't take me driving any more.

Landorf

I've settled with you, Belknap.

Grant

What d'ya mean, you've settled with him?

Belknap

I suppose he means I'm out, and so that's all. That it, Landorf?

Landorf

You can put it that way.

Belknap

All right then - keep your nose out of this Custer business.

Landorf

You telling me what to do?
Belknap

I always had more to lose than you did, didn’t I? Let me remind you, that doesn’t work any more.

Landorf

Grant, (Grant who has been watching out of the window, turns), tell me something and tell it to me straight. Can you win this campaign without Custer, or can’t you?

Grant

(Coming back and seating himself): Of course, we can win the campaign! That’s the whole damn trouble. You and everybody else think he’s indispensable. No wonder he’s got the big head. Well, we’ll see if he’s indispensable or not. (To secretary): You work that up as soon as you get a chance. He’ll be here in a minute, Landorf – why don’t you stick around and hear what I’m going to tell him?

Landorf

(Rising): No, thanks. Gentlemen, good morning. (He goes, door l.)

Grant

Belknap, whenever I talk to anybody but you, I’m not sure we’re going to get him.

Belknap

Why?

Grant

Did you hear Landorf? “I think he’s a good man.” That’s what everybody thinks. It’s going to take twice as much to convict him as it would anybody else. And just because he’s who he is.
Belknap

That's just it. (To Davis, the secretary): That's just what you want for your case. That's your insubordination. Everybody thinks he's a hero. It's gone to his head. When he wants to make a treaty, he makes it whether Washington likes it or not. When he doesn't like an Indian Department rule about ammunition, he puts it aside. When they steal grain from him, he doesn't cooperate with the Bismark police; he breaks into the warehouse and takes it back—see? Go right through every one of those things just like that.

Grant

Did you have him looked up in the newspapers the way I told you?

Davis

Yes, sir. They're not wholly for him by a long shot. He was criticized a good deal at the time of his court martial for the death of that deserter, and some papers mention him consistently as being typical of the army officers who are responsible for keeping the Indians stirred up.

Grant

There's some consolation in that.

Belknap

(Looking at clock): I'm going to stick around till you get through.

Grant

I'm going to tell him a few things.
Belknap

Where can I wait?

Grant

(Pointing to door, right): In Davis' office there.

Belknap

(Taking up his hat and coat from divan): I love this sneaking around. They didn't want to let me in here this morning.

Grant

Who didn't?

Belknap

Oh, those runts out there. (He waves to door, left.) They didn't do anything, but they acted as if I was mud or something.

Grant

Belknap, this place is open to you any time. Whether you're in or out doesn't make any difference to me. (He goes to door, and says to some one without): Come here. (A doorman appears. Grant comes back into the room. He turns.) This is for you, and all the rest of them around here. (Pointing to Belknap): As far as you're concerned, Mr. Belknap's still a member of the cabinet, and whenever you see him, don't forget it.

Doorman

Yes, sir.

Grant

(Hurriedly): Get out, and close the door. Don't let Custer in
for a couple of minutes. (The doorman goes. Grant turns to Belknap):

He's here.

Belknap

I've got an idea. (To Davis): You get in your office and sit. Don't close the door all the way, and keep your pencil ready. Do you know what for?

Davis

For what he says, sir?

Belknap

For anything he says that sounds like insubordination. Do you know what that means?

Davis

Yes, sir.

Belknap

Whenever he forgets he's an officer in the army talking to his commander in chief, you put down what he says.

Davis

Yes, sir.

Belknap

And you can put at the top of the paper - (He takes a pad from the desk.) Write this - The President, knowing the character of Colonel Custer——

Davis

Colonel Custer?
Grant

Of course, Colonel - Lieutenant Colonel, at that. What have you been reading all that stuff for? Everybody thinks because they were fools enough to make him a brevet major-general, that he's a real one.

Belknap

Where was I?

Davis

The President, knowing the character of Colonel Custer -

Belknap

All right, - the character of Colonel Custer, and his - habit of insubordination, directed me to write down some samples - that the President through past experience knew Colonel Custer would be guilty of, and probably, afterward, would deny. If there's ever a courtmartial, remember that he told you that, and had you write it down. All right, Grant?

Grant

(To Davis): Yes. That's just my idea, too.

Belknap

All right. Keep your ears open. (They go, leaving the door a few inches ajar.)

(Grant goes to his desk and sits, watching the door left. He shifts impatiently in his chair. He stands up, behind the desk, still facing the door, as if deciding that was a more formidable post. There is the sound of Custer's voice, words indistinguishable. Grant bangs on his desk with a paper weight. The voice continues. Grant moves toward the
door, then turns, goes to other door, and opens it.)

Grant

Davis, go out in the waiting room, and have 'em send Custer in here.

Davis

Yes, sir. (He appears, starts across stage.)

Grant

And get back in a hurry.

(The secretary goes to other door, opens it part way, nods, and hurries back, leaving the door ajar once more. Grant, meanwhile, has taken his place behind his desk. Custer's voice offstage: "I'll do it.")

Custer

(Enters and salutes): Good morning, sir.

Grant

(Nods curtly): Sit down. (He points toward the divan. Custer sits squarely in the middle of it.)

Custer

(Feeling Grant's unpleasantness, he says the following half out of a desire to mock, half out of genuine feeling): I've just found you have a doorman who looks like Conner.

Grant

Who the devil is Conner?

Custer

A ghost who would have passed out in my arms, if he hadn't taken me for his wife. (Custer sits back moodily on the divan. Before Grant has
When you wanted to tell me what to do,

you said,

- they wish abandon everything the Lord

be interested in order to express the purpose of happiness - spread

does follow from the destruction of independence that the President would

What do you want, my country? I've never thought before, but it

came.

I wouldn't be surprised if you'd had too good a time.

The country's spoiled to the point of happiness.

myself.

dear, he sits down: well, certainly, you've had a good time.

Pulling the chair, the senseless seat in every farm behind the

I've had him2 unattachment.

saw here: and what did you do?

week.

for possession, continue working they gave the same bank. He got them

wore back and threatened to quit all the partners in the possession

where he used them for waterers. Then he said the rest of the plantation

at the door was about the time corners went through the frontier. He got his

a chance to express what he never meant, he continue his (I've been telling)
Custer

(Sharply in return): I don't know what you mean with this prattle about my having a good time.

Grant

Well I'll tell you! You win in the Shenandoah, at Gettysburg, at Yellow Tavern, at Fisher's Hill, at Appomattox. You graduate from West Point, and you're a general in three years. What you want, you get. You want the table that Lee signs his surrender on, and you walk off with it. You whip a tribe of Indians and make your own treaty. You want to build a set of army quarters at Fort Lincoln; so you make your own plans. You don't like the regulation uniform; so you design one of your own. You don't like the Secretary of War; so you get rid of him. And now you're all set to go back and lead a campaign against Sitting Bull, whip him and his Sioux that no one's ever whipped before, and blazon all over the front pages in another big burst of glory.

Custer

You know what I did all that on, thanks to your particular friend, Belknap? Mule meat.

Grant

You're proud of getting rid of Belknap, aren't you? Well, the picnic's over, Custer. You're not going on that campaign. You're going to stay here and face the music. About the time you thought you'd be making another of your treaties with Sitting Bull, you're going to be losing those fancy things on your shoulders.
Custer

(Jumping up in a cold rage): I shall remember precisely how you put that.

Grant

(Also rising): You'd better remember all you can. I've got a case of insubordination against you a mile-

Custer

Insubordination, is it? All right. Try me for insubordination.

(He turns to go and gets a couple of steps.)

Grant

Come back and sit down. I'm not through with you yet.

(Custer turns and stares at Grant. For a moment the killer emanates from him, then he goes quietly to the divan. His eyes travel up and down Grant with an infinite whimsy. Grant repeats mechanically and with no point, as he, too, sits down): I'm not through with you yet.

Custer

(With a good deal of point): No.

(They sit in silence for some moments in a profound sympathy that Grant does not understand, and that Custer does.)

Grant

(Coming to earth): You stole two rifles.

Custer

(Laughs as a man does when he comes from a better world back to this one): What rifles?
Grant

Army rifles.

Custer

If I want to steal any rifles, I'll not choose army ones that jam every third shot. I'll steal the nice, new, up-to-date repeaters you're letting them sell to the Indians.

Grant

Who's letting them sell?

Custer

Your administration - in spite of a hundred warnings from every army post west of the Missouri.

Grant

You still don't like the laws of this country, do you? That's another thing. (He slaps a pile of papers on his desk.) Here's a pile of stuff that begins with some damn' fool thing about, "If I were an Indian" - (He takes the pile.) Here - This is the sort of stuff you write in your books, "If I were an Indian, I often think that I would greatly prefer to cast my lot among those of my people who adhered to the free, open plains, rather than submit myself to the confined limits of a reservation, there to be the recipient of the blessed benefits of civilization, with its vices thrown in without stint or measure." - That's at the top, and here's (he runs his thumb along the edge of the papers), some other stuff to show you're a damn' sight more careful of the Indians than you are of the whites. Why don't you join 'em?
him whom.

part of the United States. Yes? I don't suppose the constitution permits supplies Mexican Indian Department up there in Fort Peck. Don't you, sir? What part of the constitution is it that allows him to sell.

Custer

are you saying what to my lord.

Custer

need not.

The constitution does President Grant's brother have a particular fond-

so that is what the military makes use for an argument. What part of

My dear, I have been made efficient since this morning.

Custer

beer aren't. Still don't like the laws.

You hear very of the constitution and the right of the people to

Custer

Without suspicion: I think I was queer enough.

Custer

(He looks furiously toward the door.)

Say that again, Mr. Grant.

Custer

(Angrily): How much does it take for the military makes to bite a

Custer
Grant

By God, Custer, I'll have you **jailed**!

Custer

The supplies start off to the Indians up the Missouri in steamboats. Who's in charge? Who sells the stuff to all the logging camps along the way, and then bribes the Indian agent to sign for it? Did Orville Grant, Indian agent at Fort Peck, ever sign for anything he didn't get? And who looks the other way here?

Grant

What are you doing, getting to me now?

Custer

I'll be as vague as what's happening out there, but don't think we're all hog blind. (He stands up.) I've found out something since I got here that I've always wanted to know. Who is it trying to build a railroad through that nice, rich country that the treaty of '67 gave forever to the Sioux - and who's giving them hopes?

Grant

You know all about it - suppose you tell me.

Custer

Sure, I'll tell you. What was I sent in there for last year? Not my business to know, I suppose. Some one got fooled, didn't he, when that didn't start a row. It would have been easy to explain - "Why, we sent a sight-seeing expedition up there, nothing but a sight-seeing expedition - and they attacked us. Of course, we have to fight
Grant

"Look under your nose, and sometimes I think you'll even know it. You mean, I mean we're to believe, you look in a hundred thousand a year, or, I don't think you'd ever know it. Sometimes I think we're done if, I don't think you'd even know it. Sometimes I think there's a punitive expedition and a band of land for a retaliated. If you - any volunteer were interested for them to work in there - get a line sighted - did all the9d uaa9 o hapter 111, the middle of Pentapty - and they get restlessness, and their state of things, or their, I'll be a punitive expedition. Some of them don't seem to have good luck. Then they're all ordered back by the first of the year to make good, to then have even more of their restlessness, don't get good, get restlessness. Some of them even more of their restlessness. Supply some don't want on time, and get frozen in the water. That there was plenty of excuse for punitive measures this year. The too much water. It's damp, it will work. But this year in all work, won't.

Custer

receipt, any says that, mean, for a retaliated.

beak, and, of course, an punitive measures, we take a band of land,
asked how much it took to buy a conference.

First, he made several changes against the administration. He

Devin

did you get

and now you can meet him right down to see (to secretary): what

Bolitho

Just what he is, Bolitho - a small man.

anybody who calls another man a damn fool is. Any kid knows that. That's

By God, we've got him now. He's a small man, Bolitho. (Impassively)

What's all this? Bolitho appears. Great times to him! We've got him now!

at secretary! Realizes what has happened, but turns and goes about

quarter looks, quarter. 

Get the customary thing when leaving a supporter of yours. (quarter)

Did you intentionally for -

He sees the secretary. He looks at quarter. (quarter) quarter at the door. Manager

doesn't see him, nods, and edmonds: quarter! quarter at the door. (quarter)

keeper: you're in charge! Quarter. you're in charge. (the keeper)

Grant

is a god-damned two-cent snitch. (he stands out the door)

you're a damn fool. you're a god-damned fool. the whole thing

Quarter

I'm what? I'mwhat?

Grant

crap. you're a fool.

Quarter
The doorman goes.

Oh, All right. I'll see you in a minute.

Grant

General Sherman and General Terry, sir?

(The doorman appears.)

Bellman (with interpolation): Just a small men.

Grant, I got on here in the head about the expansion of this country.

You'd think building a railroad was a crime he may be tailed. He

did you hear that. In the head, he had to tell about a railroad?

Grant

He couldn't carry at the time that Paris was where he could hear it.

I tried to push Paris in at the time, for that was darn fool.

Bellman

Just as you carry your hair.

Grant

When he do that.

Bellman

It up to him.

I can't see him. You didn't see him refuse to salute me even after he put

in control of this I will we have that time. (To Bellman.) He refused.

On what a witness you'll make. Darn it, I'm going to make you up

Grant
Belknap

What are they here for?

Grant

Well, Terry's Custer's division commander, isn't he? Sheridan's his corps area commander. I'd planned to tell 'em Custer wasn't going to run that campaign. Things are fixed enough now so I can tell 'em what else is going to happen.

Belknap

Why don't you let some one else tell 'em?

Grant

By God, Belknap, I guess I can do my own talking.

Belknap

Oh, they'll fix it all up, and Custer will be scot free and leading that campaign.

Grant

Oh, you think so, do you? Do you know Custer said some things about my brother in that article?

Belknap

Well, remember that, will you?

Grant

Belknap, you've got awfully queer ideas about me. Go in and listen if you want to.

Belknap

All right. I will. (He goes into inner office.)
No text is visible in the image.
and need it bad.

Sheridan

What do we need?

Grant

I'm going to start on Custer. And you mind your P's and Q's, or I'll get to you, too. (The doorman appears with three glasses on a tray. Sheridan reaches for it silently.) Never mind taking that, Sheridan. (Sheridan takes the tray; the footman goes. Sheridan walks to the desk with it. Grant is choleric): By God, Sheridan —

Sheridan

(Putting the glasses and bottle on desk, but making no move to open them, quietly): Oh, all right, Grant; but you don't have to let the bell-hop know all your business. (He walks away from the desk. Grant cools somewhat.)

Grant

I thought for a minute you were going to open it up there in front of me.

Sheridan

What are you going to do to Custer?

Grant

The least I'm going to do is get him a dishonorable discharge from the army for insubordination. I may hang something else on him.
I worry about it now. (Sherridan gets up, goes to desk, picks up

Grant.

They respected you or not. And you didn't have to worry about it coming.

I've seen the time. Grant, when you didn't give a damn whether

Sherridan.

It's a wonder you remember the respect.

Grant.

 Damn, shame.

To Grant: With all respect to you, sir, I think it was a

erry.

How would it seem to you, Grant, to have quarter out of the army

Sherridan.

Don't try to mix up in that thing, Sherridan.

Grant.

You're not rid of him yet.

Sherridan.

Damn Fool. He's a mean man, and we will rid of him.

Grant.

If hasn't got a thing to do about salveyour. He called me a

Grant.

Think more about that, you'll come out worse then the does.

business, you haven't got a thing on quarter, and if you did up any-

Jesus Christ! - Grant, if it's anything about this salveyour

Sherridan.
Sheridan

Hell, Grant. You don't care if I have one by myself, do you? By God, I need it. (He pours himself a drink.) Have one, Terry? (He gives Terry a look.)

Terry

(To Grant): Well, if you don't mind, sir. (Sheridan pours another.)

Grant

(Getting up impatiently): No, of course not; I don't mind.

Sheridan

Oh well, Grant. All right. (He puts his back.)

Grant

(Who has walked away, turns quickly, and almost screaming, shouts): Drink 'em! Drink 'em!

Sheridan

(Giving Terry a glass and taking one): I didn't expect to see the day when you'd really try to make Terry and me a couple darn' secretaries. Well - here's to Sitting Bull, Terry.

Grant

What's the idea of that?

Sheridan

Custer going on that campaign before you're going to try him?

Grant

No.
Sheridan

Well - long live Sitting Bull.

Grant

I suppose you're going to tell me nobody can whip him but Custer?

Sheridan

Can any one, Terry?

Terry

(To Grant): You see, sir, Custer's the only man who knows the country. He went over the very ground on the Yellowstone Expedition last year. Only one who's ever been in there.

Sheridan

How many Sioux have you ever fought, Terry? And how many men under you know anything about 'em?

Terry

The only men besides him who've fought any Sioux all got licked in '68 -

Grant

Besides Custer, I suppose. Why don't you say so?

Terry

Well, sir -

Sheridan

The Seventh Cavalry's going to be the guts of that campaign. Who's going to run it?
Grant

Well, who's second in command?

Sheridan

(With roaring satisfaction): Reno! (Grant is silent.)

Thanks to Custer, there's never been a defeat at the hands of the Indians during your administration. I suppose you remember what happened during Johnson's — and some of the others.

Grant

This is a hell of an army. (He goes to desk, pours himself a drink, and takes it.) All right — we won't have a campaign.

Sheridan

What do you mean, we won't have one?

Grant

(Laughs): There won't be any. (He takes another drink.)

Sheridan

Let Custer go — just in charge of the Seventh. Let Terry run it, but let Custer go in charge of the Seventh.

Grant

Sure — but there isn't going to be a campaign.

Sheridan

But he can go if there is one?

Grant

He's indispensable, isn't he? (He laughs.) Put him on the roster. (He laughs again.) Put him in command of the Seventh. (He takes another drink.)
Sheridan

He can be back here the minute it's over.

Grant

You're God damned right he'll be back here. He'll be back here all the time.

Sheridan

It's all settled then?

Grant

What's all settled?

Sheridan

That if there is a campaign, Custer goes.

Grant

You still think there's going to be one?

Sheridan

There's got to be one.

Grant

Oh, there has?

Sheridan

Yes, because if we don't start it, the Sioux will. If you don't believe it, write to any one on the border and ask 'em.

Grant

It's what I say, not what they say.

Sheridan

Somebody around here got everything fixed for a row. Well, they're
goint to have it.

Grant

That's what you know, is it? Well, I know everybody around here's been taking this whole thing too much for granted anyhow.
That's what I know. I've just been waiting for a chance to show 'em how much they're running me. And this is it. This is it, Sheridan.
I'm going to get 'em all in here right now.

Sheridan

(Rising): That's a good idea. All right - if you can call it off - Custer doesn't go. Come on, Terry.

Grant

You don't think I can, do you?

Sheridan

(With Terry at the door): Of course, he comes back here the minute it's over; but if there's a campaign, Custer goes in charge of the Seventh -

Grant

Yes, if - if - if - (He laughs. Sheridan and Terry salute and leave. Roars): Davis! (Belknap comes in from right, the doorman from left. Davis waits by the door. To Belknap): I'd forgotten about you.

Belknap

You've forgotten everything else, too.
Grant

Belfnap, you're not going to run me any more. (To doorman):

What do you want?

Belfnap

They did just what I said they'd do.

Doorman

Mr. Landorf came in to see you again, sir, but he wrote this instead, and told me to hand it to you.

Grant

What is it? (He takes it.)

Belfnap

Yes, see what it says - because Landorf isn't going to run you any more. (Grant reads.)

Doorman

He said there wouldn't be any answer, sir. (He goes.)

Grant

(Going to window, he looks out): Belfnap, look! (Belfnap is sulking; Grant turns to Davis): Davis, come here. (He points out the window.) He left those horses. He's going to give them to me.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.
ACT III, SCENE I

The salon on the steamship, Far West, June, 1876. Door to
deck in rear. Windows at rear and both sides. During the scene there
is a constant movement on the deck, visible through the windows and
door. A member of the crew has just finished polishing the windows of
the cabin and is moving toward the door. Custer enters.

Custer

Have you been on this boat ever since it came up the river from
Fort Lincoln?

Cabin-boy

Yes, sir.

Custer

Have you seen Mrs. Custer anywhere on it.

Cabin-boy.

Yes, sir.

Custer

(Excitedly): Where is she?

Cabin-boy

Oh, she didn't come with us. She just came on the boat for a
while at Fort Lincoln.

Custer

Oh, just for a while. You all tell me the same thing. I said
she could take the boat, didn't I? And now you're going to say Captain
Marsh wouldn't let her come.
Cabin-boy

I don't know anything about that, sir; I only know she visited for a while, and she was on the dock crying when we pulled out.

Custer

You're sure she didn't tell Captain Marsh, and you, and every one else on the boat that she wanted to surprise me, and that she isn't hiding somewhere here?

Cabin-boy

Yes, sir - I'm sorry, sir.

(Custer steps out of the doorway. The boy goes out. Custer gazes after him. Then he looks about the room. He sees the chest and goes to it quickly. He opens it slowly as if expecting to find some one. He closes it with a slam. Tom Custer appears in the doorway. They look at each other.

Tom

I just heard some more about it.

Custer

More about what?

Tom

Your courtmartial.

Custer

Please forget about my courtmartial.

Tom

Terry's got an order to put you under arrest the minute the campaign's over.
Custer

Well — you can't courtmartial a man unless you've got him, can you?

Tom

Terry says he'll not do it — the only thing he'll do is have you put yourself under arrest.

Custer

(Laughing): How the devil am I going to do that?

Tom

That's pretty decent of Terry.

Custer

Decent? I'm no magician. You talk as if putting yourself under arrest was a simple matter. Did you ever do it? Do it for me. (Tom is silent. Custer laughs, then suddenly changing his manner): Tom

Tom

(Eagerly): Yes?

Custer

Have you seen Beth?

Tom

Why, she didn't come. I was with you when Marsh told you he wouldn't let her come.

Custer

Marsh is another man who doesn't believe a woman can grow up.

He's got to protect them all. Beth is three hundred years old compared
to him. What does he know about the gales that cross this world
being real gales? What business has he got telling her what to do?

Tom

Well, he's the Captain of this boat, that's all.

Custer

I wish he understood more than river turns and sand bars.

Tom

What do you mean?

Custer

He might have known I'd like to see her again.

Tom

A lot of other officers might want to see their wives again, too.

Custer

Marsh might have remembered how many times Beth's been with me
on campaigns when the other officers' wives chose to stay home.

(Terry and Gibbon appear at the doorway. Tom salutes. They return the
salute. Tom steps outside the doorway, but does not go. Terry and Gibbon enter. Custer salutes, and they return the salute. Terry is carrying
some papers.) Good afternoon, gentleman - is there some more?

Terry

I've had the orders written out. Let's sit down. Gibbon's got
a few things to ask you about, and then I want to talk to you.

Custer

Oh - you want to talk to me. (They all sit down.)
Terry

Yes. - There's not much new in your orders - they're about what we decided this morning. (He reads):

"June 22

"Colonel Custer:

"Brigadier General Terry, commanding, directs that as soon as your regiment can be made ready for the march, you will proceed west in pursuit of the Indians whose trail was discovered by Major Reno. General Terry places too much confidence in your zeal, energy, and ability to wish to impose on you precise orders which might hamper your actions when nearly in contact with the Indians. He will, however, indicate to you his own views of what your action should be. The column of Colonel Gibbon will soon be in motion, proceeding northerly, for the forks of the Big and Little Horns. Your own regiment, proceeding southerly, should advance toward this same point. Through these movements it is hoped that the Indians, if in the vicinity of this point, (as there is every reason to expect) may be so nearly enclosed by the two columns that their escape will be impossible. It is expected that these movements can be completed in four days. Thus, if circumstances permit, you will report to General Terry, who will accompany the Colonel Gibbon, on or about June 26." - Nothing new to you there, except my opinion of you.

Custer

Thanks. Thanks very much. You're not going with me, then?
Terry
No. I've decided to go with Gibbon.

Custer
You'll get the devil from Grant.

Terry
Why?

Custer
Didn't he insist I wasn't to be boss of anything? And here you are, turning me loose.

Terry
I can't see what harm it can do.

Custer
I'm always out for a good time, you know. I might take it into my head to march on Washington.

Terry
Ask him your questions, Gibbon.

Gibbon
May I have the map, sir? (Terry hands him a map. Gibbon spreads it out. To Custer): You said something about the route on my third day being better around this way. (Indicating.)

Custer
If there's water enough. You can tell from the other creeks whether or not to try.

Gibbon
The other way's shorter.
Custer
Yes, but the longer way you see the whole country. Strange

country - make you find God, Gibbon.

Terry
This isn't a sight-seeing expedition.

Custer
All right. Go the long way because you can watch better for
Indians - find God incidentally. (He laughs.)

Gibbon
Here's another thing. The way we decided, I cross this creek
here. It looks all split up and marshy. I've got some Gatling guns -
do you think I can get them through without getting them stuck?

Custer
Oh. Let me see - (He closes his eyes.) I can remember that
creek. If you've got a good man, he can get them through the marsh all
right. (He laughs.) That big, red-headed sergeant of yours can do it.
The one who was unloading the boat this morning.

Gibbon
Tues?

Custer
Yes.

Gibbon
(Laughs): He can if any one can. You think I can risk it then?
I'm not sure they are.

Gibbon

You mean, how many other times did you know round are read-

Quarter

I wish we knew more than that.

Gibbon

No.

Quarter

When did I find any actual indication

Gibbon

men and they'll probably get to sitting Bull before we do.

To find the Indians, it was a bit strange of about sixty inches. It
was only a day that, and without a doubt we're heading to the place we plan
that early morning and followed it till late afternoon. It
help yourself, but I can tell you all they know. They found a

Quarter

scouts who were with some who discovered that the
size of sitting Bull's village. Do you mind if I talk to some of your
scouts don't seem to know what to expect. They don't agree at all on the
well - I'll let him fly anyway. Here's one other thing. My

Gibbon

They can do it. (He shutting his eyes.)

Quarter
Custer

We'll find out - all in good time.

Terry

Is that all, Gibbon?

Gibbon

Yes, sir. (He rises.)

Custer

Gibbon, I've been thinking more about this Tsey business.

Gibbon

You don't think he can do it?

Custer

No - nothing like that. (He laughs.) I want to make a bet with you about him.

Gibbon

(Sitting again): What's the bet?

Custer

I'll bet I can tell just how he'll go about sending those Gatling guns across that marsh. There's a little rise just above where the creek spreads out, and I'll bet twenty-five dollars he'll boss the job from that rise, and that he'll go marching back and forth on it, kicking at the scrubby cottonwood and squawking and shaking his red-head in the peculiar brownish-yellow light that hangs over the place. Are you on?

Gibbon

You're willing to bet twenty-five dollars you can tell just where a man will stand?
is that six hours. It's a tremendous wonder, with possible complications. When you don't do what you're supposed to do, it's a tremendous wonder, with possible complications. It is an extraordinary process, you know it? He takes the head. You are shooting us or not. To be paid in about four days when we meet—whether the intervals are a half-dozen other places where he might stand, but
his arms in circles along his body.) Even that's not all of a man.
But that's some of him. What did Grant let me get away from Washington for?

Terry

Because Sheridan and I told him we couldn't get along without you.

Custer

And why couldn't you get along without me?

Terry

Because you know the country.

Custer

That's just a dull way of saying I'm a lot of pictures. That's what I was getting at. Pictures of all the creeks, and all the plains, and how Sioux form for battle - and Grant's the boss of all my pictures, is he?

Terry

Now be careful.

Custer

I'm just getting the thing clear. I've had a particular fondness for pictures ever since I first fought in a battle, and got close enough to my end to have pictures start coming up in me. Now I've got 'em a million miles along - hail, wind, snow; a knife stuck in a dead man's eye strained through the soul of my brother, Tom; Custer three years old; Custer having parades, witnessed and unwitnessed - you don't
I'm very glad.

What I just want I wanted to talk to you about.

the streets. (He vegetables with omnitious appearance.)

This is a go to walk in on all my photographs and pull believe in that. You fight for duty and because it's...
Terry

No other administration has been successful against Sitting Bull.

Custer

No.

Terry

But Grant's will be.

Custer

And Grant's will be - is that the connection?

Terry

He'll be tickled to death. (Custer glowers.) He won't realize what this victory will mean until he sees it in the papers. There are a half-dozen reporters up here, right now.

Custer

And do I care what Grant realizes or doesn't realize?

Terry

You ought to. - If you do a good job on this campaign, and I know you will - Grant'll forget that courtmartial.

Custer

(Jumping up): And what will I do then - thank him? God damn it, Terry -

Terry

What's the matter? Sit down.
Custer
You think I'd fight to get into his good graces? You ought to be able to see further than that, Terry - are you blind?

Terry
I'm trying to help you, Custer.

Custer
(Sits down, leans across the table): Where do you stand, Terry?

Terry
I'm trying to make you see light.

Custer
You're trying to make me see light! Where do you think I've been all the time? Were your eyes shut about Belknap? Well, they should be open.

Terry
I'm not talking about Belknap. I'm talking about Grant.

Custer
So am I.

Terry
I haven't any illusions about Grant, but no matter what he is, you lost your head, and put yourself where he can fix you for good unless you're careful.

Custer
I lost my head -

Terry
Tone down. You don't know Grant. His bark's worse than his
bite. You should have seen Sheridan handle him.

Custer

And I'm going to handle him? You're barking up the wrong tree, Terry.

Terry

Sheridan told me you'd blow up.

Custer

That's all you see? I blow up. That's all you see? You're like all the rest of them, Terry.

Terry

Custer, you're in this jam, not me. Now I want to do my best to get you out of it.

Custer

How?

Terry

By fixing it so the whole thing blows over. If this campaign is successful, Grant's going to know you planned it, not me.

Custer

Will you shove that down his throat, or will you beg him to consider it?

Terry

How am I going to shove anything down his throat?
Custer

(Utterly impersonal): Turn the reporters loose. Let the country know what a great man I am—have the country howling for me about the time Grant would like to be showing me what it costs to tell the truth about a frump like him.

Terry

(Severely): Custer, I want to tell you a few things. This country business is one of them. You'll let that go to your head until it ruins you.

Custer

You're beginning to sound like Grant.

Terry

Yes, because I can see just how Grant felt. You think you're all right—but you've got to see yourself a little as others see you. Look at it yourself. Sheridan's had to get you out of one scrape after another. Well, were you always right and everybody else always wrong?

Custer

Yes.

Terry

That's just it. Nobody can ever tell you anything.

Custer

Not till they know what they're talking about.

Terry

Are you telling me I don't know what I'm talking about?
Custer

Yes. Haven't I made myself plain enough?

Terry

I'm trying to help you, Custer.

Custer

Thanks, I don't need any help.

Terry

(Rising): All right – you won't get it.

(Tom Custer is seen moving rapidly away from the door through the windows. Terry goes to door, stops, turns, looks at Custer's back for a moment, starts to say something sympathetic, decides not to, and goes. Tom Custer opens the doorway slowly, steps in quietly, and closes the door behind him. His face is set. Custer listens, his body growing tense.)

Custer

(Sharply): Beth!

Tom

(Shrieking): God damn it!

(He turns quickly, throws open the door, and gets out. Custer continues to sit without turning. Charlie Johnson, a scout, appears on the deck after a moment. He sees Custer and approaches the doorway.

Johnson

Hello, General.

Custer

(Without turning): Hello, Charlie.
Johnson: (Coming in) You ain't seen me for six years, and you know my voice?

Custer: (Shakes hands.) How in hell are you? (He holds up a bandaged left hand.) Getting' doctored.

Johnson: What's the matter?

Custer: Infected.

Johnson: Bad?

Custer: Yes.

Johnson: Will it take me for a week anywhere?

Custer: Yes, sir.

Johnson: Right. How are you, General?

Custer: Yes, sir. How are you?

Johnson: They're doing a lot of dam', worrying about me. Sit down, Charlie; you're just the man I want to see. (They sit.) How many men are there in Sitting Bull's village?
Johnson
I don't know. They've kept me out all year.

Custer
You've got ideas, haven't you?

Johnson
How many do the others say?

Custer
Six or seven hundred.

Johnson
Double that.

Custer
Fair enough.

Johnson
I hear you're splittin' in two, General. Gibbon goin' one way an' you another.

Custer
Yes. We're both starting tomorrow.

Johnson
I'm goin' along. Where am I goin' to find the most excitement?

Custer
Better come with me, Charlie.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.
ACT III. SCENE 2

Custer's camp two nights later, two o'clock in the morning.
The officers' tents are lined up, stage left, the men's, stage right,
so that they face each other. The tents on each side farthest up-
stage are lighted. Downstage there is a small campfire at which is
seated Charlie Johnson. A sentry, as the curtain rises, just makes
his turn and starts following his beat upstage past the men's tents.
From the lighted tents during the scene comes the spasmodic but in-
distinguishable chatter of men at poker.

A voice

(From one of the men's dark tents): God damn it--

Second voice

What's the idea?

First voice

You woke me up just when I got to sleep.

Second voice

Well, you don't have to wake everybody else up.

Third voice

Why don't you both shut up?

Sentry

(Coming alongside): What's the matter in there? (He says it
in passing without waiting for an answer. Quiet in that tent.)
A voice

(From the next tent the sentry passes): What's going on, Sentry?

Sentry

Get to sleep. (He passes on.)

(Just before the sentry gets to the lighted tent, a figure appears, right.)

Who's there?

Tom Custer

The officer of the day. (He comes through the light of the tent to the sentry.)

Sentry

Recognized, sir. (He salutes.)

Tom

Everything all right?

Sentry

The men are slow settling down.

Tom

Only natural; we've been pushing hard. Is the card playing disturbing any of them who want to sleep?

Sentry

I don't think so, sir.

(Tom crosses to lighted officers' tent, watching in from outside. The sentry continues his beat. Custer steps out from one of the officer's tents. He looks around, slowly. He goes toward the line of march of the sentry. He waits there until the sentry draws almost to him.)
Custer

Duval?

Sentry

Yes, sir.

Custer

Where is Brewster's tent?

Sentry

Brewster, the general's striker, sir?

Custer

Yes.

Sentry

I think--

Brewster

(Apparing in the opening of the second one of the men's tents):

Here, sir.

(The sentry passes on.)

Custer

What's the matter, John; couldn't you sleep?

Brewster

No, sir. Does the general want me, sir?

Custer

Yes. Take up your things.

Brewster

Yes, sir. (He disappears inside the tent. Custer waits. 

Reappearing with a pack, Brewster comes to Custer.)
Custer
You know my father?

Brewster

Yes, sir.

Custer
And where he lives?

Brewster

Yes, sir.

Custer
You know my horse, Dandy?

Brewster

Yes, sir.

Custer
Take Dandy to my father.

Brewster

Well—now, sir? A thousand miles?

Custer
The faster you go, the quicker you get there. Dandy's on the
picket line.

Brewster

Yes, sir. . . . . Yes, sir. . . . . Thank you, sir.

Custer

Thank me for what?

Brewster

Thank you, sir. — Goodbye, sir.
Custer

Goodbye, John.

(He turns his back, and waits for the sentry. Brewster goes off right rear.)

Sentry

Yes, sir?

Custer

None of the scouts have come back?

Sentry

No, sir.

Custer

All right. (He goes to the fire.)

Johnson

Expecting something'll happen soon, General?

Custer

(Sitting down): Wouldn't be surprised, Charlie.

Tom

(Coming up from officers' tent): Why don't you call off these poker games?

Custer

I never expected to see the day when you'd want to call off a poker game.

Tom

The men have had about six hours' sleep since we left the boat.
Custer

If they needed any more, they wouldn't be playing, would they?

Tom

We've been pushing and pushing and pushing so hard, they're too tired to know what they're doing. (A shot is heard off left.)

Custer

Go and see what that was. (Tom hurries off left.) You hear that shot, Charlie?

Johnson

Yup.

Custer

Army gun, wasn't it?

Johnson

I think so. (Silence.)

Custer

You know why I'm letting 'em play poker?

Johnson

I've kinda wondered. Looks like a carnival.

Custer

They haven't had any fun for five months. Their pay was held up since January, and then when it did come, it was held up again 'til they all got out of Bismarck and every other place where they could spend it. The idea was they'd have too good a time celebrating, getting five months' pay all in a lump.
Johnson
You ain't saring if the Indians see the lights?

Custer
I want them to. I want them to know we haven't got too many men, or they'll run.

Johnson
There's something in that, General. (Silence.)

Custer
I wish they could think of better things to do than play poker.

Poker, poker, always poker.

(Koenig comes from the lighted officers' tent to the fire.)

Koenig
Good evening, General.

Custer
Good morning, Manifest Destiny, good morning - it's half-past two.

Koenig
I understand that things are expected to happen tomorrow.

Custer
To-day, Koenig, to-day. (He laughs.) Charlie, you know the old saying, dog eat dog? I set Manifest Destiny here on the Great White Father, but he got him only half swallowed. You don't mind my figurative language, Koenig? Sit down and talk to us. - You going to do a better job this time?

Koenig
Better job of what?
Custer

Better job of eating. You've got to gobble up this battle, Koenig - and then be eloquent.

Koenig

I've already started.

Custer

Fine.

Koenig

Started on you.

Custer

Splendid! What have you got to say about me?

Koenig

A man possessing electric mental capacity, a brave, faithful, gallant soldier, the hardest rider, the greatest pusher, overcoming seeming impossibilities, and with an ambition to succeed in all things he undertakes.

Custer

(Laughing): Koenig, you're a masterpiece. Where are you keeping it?

Koenig

(Pointing to a leather case slung over his shoulder): Here.

Custer

Don't let it get away from you. - What do you think of that, Charlie?
Johnson

That's you, is it?

Custer

I've never gone in much for seeing myself as others see me. For one thing, they don't agree - you can't tell them so, but they don't agree on what one is - so I'll stick to my pictures.

(Tom Custer hurries in to them. He has a rifle in his hand, and a dripping scalp. He throws them both on the ground before the group.)

Tom

Couple souvenirs I got from one of the pickets. Nice repeating rifle and a scalp.

Johnson

(Picking up the scalp): This is an Indian scalp.

Tom

And an Indian gun. The picket shot the owner while he was looking us over.

Custer

Where had the Indian gotten the scalp?

Tom

He was born with it. The picket took it from him.

Kosmig

A white picket?

Tom

Well, he's supposed to be white.

Custer

But red at heart, Tom?
Tom

Well, why not?

Custer

In white man invented scalping.

Koenig

General, do you mind if I have that? (He points to the scalp.)

Custer

It's Tom's scalp - ask him.

Tom

(Picking it up): I'm going to bury it.

Custer

Going to bury the Indian, too, Tom?

Tom

Take the damn' thing. (He tosses it to Koenig.)

Koenig

Thanks. (He goes off to one of the tents with it.)

Custer

He's thinking of the time when the country's spread to the Pacific, and he's a big editor and can hang that in his office. You used to be like that, Tom.

Tom

Never mind telling me what I am - or used to be. (Custer is silent.)

Johnson

General, remember the time we rode into Jim Dunn's cabin and found him scalped, and he'd cut his hair like an Indian so if they did
I'm asking you, do you think that gets you anywhere?

Tom

We're going to hear Tom's explanation now.

Chapter

Do you think you're talking deep enough.

Tom

"...with one hand would, only they don't have to live alone..."

Johnson

...more than needed. I'm Dunn's in her outnumbered army..."

W., on dark nights she still moves westward without much

Chapter

Tom

Remember

I had something to say about the strange of liberty. If

Chapter

Indians. That's an important factor..." You said,

and he was red. He was red so bad, he needed rest. He

looked so bad. And you said, "He was trying to make into the happy

seemed with, they could only take out of little pattern, and he wouldn't
Custer

Haven't budged me an inch. I've seen a piece of my soul come out of that grizzled hide after being carried there six years and come back to me. I saluted it as it came back and swore to myself it was quite real. And I haven't budged an inch from my spot by this particular fire under this particular sky with the poker players there and there, and a scalp there, and a repeating rifle there, and a brother there who wants to tell one that black is white and white is black. He's just discovered that life is serious, and he wants to take it out on me. Well, hold it up for a while, Tom. - Are all the officers in?

Tom

What are you going to do?

Custer

I don't object at all if you want to stick around and find out. Get me Reno and Benteen and MacDougall and Cooke.

(Tom hesitates. Custer starts off in the direction of the officers' tents.)

Tom

I'll go. (He starts off.)

Custer

Thanks. (He comes back to the fire.) High old talk in the Sioux camp tonight, Charlie. Who do you suppose are giving speeches and spitting out their souls besides Sitting Bull?
Johnson

Cull's probably there. Maybe Crazy Horse and Little Bear.

(Tom returns with Reno, Benteen, MacDougall, Cooke. They salute.

Custer, standing, returns their salutes.)

Custer

I've made a change in the distribution of troops. Reno, I've

assigned you A., M., and G. Benteen, take H., D., and K., and Mac-

Dougall, you organize a troop for a pack train. Take a dozen men from

each organization. I'll take the rest. Here's the list, Cooke. Write

it out in the form of an order. You all get that? (They nod with in-

dividual "Yes, sir's"). If we run into anything tomorrow, we'll split

in three ways, Reno, Benteen, and myself. You know the scheme - we make

plenty of noise -

Reno

Are you expecting to meet anything tomorrow, sir?

Custer

We might. Anyhow, don't do any drinking in there tonight.

Reno

Any of the scouts come back yet, sir?

Custer

No, I'm waiting for them. When we start in the morning, Reno -
you'll go first, I'll come second, and Benteen last. You remember the

layout of the village on the Little Big Horn last year. If it's the

same, Reno'll hit the east end, I'll move round and come up from the
My congratulations.

The attendance, except for a relative and rose. To tom, do they know now about

Have you gentlemen anything else you care to know - all right, dismissed.

We usually start when the Burke Row "poor and saddles" hand.

Chapter

What time in the morning do we start, sir?

Here

- Any and all from the day were

Chapter

We're not waiting for Terry and Blumen, sir.

Because you could, were all right, there's nothing to be gained or opposition.

We'll tell you what you could ask all, haven't. I'll get what

not if we keep hitting from here, thence, and the other place. I've al-

though it all out, and it's not too many. Not if we keep them, executed.

Thank you, Cooper. - I don't think it's too many either. I've

Chapter

We did better than that at Royston.

Cooper

about two thousand men. (Professor) is that too many.

matter how much bigger it is. I'm not interested in that they're got

30 to see if it's the same. Of course - but it probably will be - no

west end, and Bennett will take everything to the south. We'll have
Tom

They've heard rumors, I guess.

Custer

They act it. They act as if I'd been dishonorably discharged already. (He sits by the fire, throwing off his irritation.) I'm not through yet.

Tom

How far are we from the Indians?

Custer

I'm waiting to find out.

Tom

And then you expect to go on - to do alone what Terry and Gibbon and you might not be able to do together. (Custer is silent.) Two days ago something happened that hit me like a pile driver.

Custer

Like the knife sticking out of the man's eye?

Tom

What are you talking about?

Custer

Oh, one of your former pile-drivers. Have you forgotten it so soon? I haven't forgotten it. I hoped it would eat into you till there'd be something else across your sky than gingerbread.

(Charlie Johnson gets up slowly, and moves quietly off left.)
Tom

Two days ago something happened that made me think I saw how much you cared for Beth.

Custer

But two days are too long for you to hang on to anything. Why don't you go to bed, and leave me alone?

Tom

If you care for Beth, what are you committing suicide for? And taking every one else with you. It doesn't matter who they are, or how long they've fought for you -

Custer

Do I look like a suicide to you?

Tom

Two thousand to five hundred -

Custer

As Cooks says, we've done better than that.

Tom

These two thousand are Sioux.

Custer

We'll make twice as much noise.

Tom

They've got repeating rifles.

Custer

I hoped you'd say that.
Tom
I don't see that it helps us any.

Custer
Not physically - but spiritually. (He laughs without bitterness.) Since when have you cared about four-to-one odds - or ten-to-one odds?

Tom
Since I can see how the ten-to-one odds come about - because one person is so God damned proud - because he's so much better than other men that he won't face a courtmartial. You're too good to be courtmartialled. (Mitch Boyer, a huge half-breed, comes in stage left. Custer looks up. Tom continues): No one can tell you anything.

Custer
None of you have anything to say. (Custer rises as Mitch Boyer comes to him.) Hello, Mitch. Find 'em?

Boyer
Big village, General, big village.

Custer
On the river bank?

Boyer
Yes. Four - five thousand men, General. Minneconjou, Ogallala, Uncpapa, Cheyennes -
Custer

All right! (He goes toward sentry): Where is Lloyd?

Sentry

Second tent, sir.

Custer

(Going to it): Lloyd!

Lloyd

(From inside): Yes, sir.

Custer

"Boots and Saddles", Lloyd.

Lloyd

Yes, sir. (A moment later he steps out with a bugle in his hand.)

Tom

You're crazy.

Custer

Blow away!

Lloyd sounds "Boots and Saddles" as

THE CURTAIN FALLS.
ACT III, SCENE 3

A knell on the Little Bighorn. Custer, Tom, Cooke, Keough, and three or four other officers, and many men are lined up in battle formation. Custer is on the line just behind a company of men at the top of the knoll. Cooke is with him. This line faces stage right. Tom and Keough are behind another line of men at the base of the knoll, facing more in the direction of the officers. The men are lined up behind the carcasses of horses. Keough and Cooke are squattting just behind their men, who from time to time during the scene pass their guns back to them. With knives Cooke and Keough eject the shells which have jammed in the rifles, then pass the rifles back — if the man is still alive. The scene is obscured by dust. Firing is always loud enough so that the men must shout to be heard.

As the curtain rises, there are cries from the Indians offstage, and spasmodic firing from them. There is excitement among the men on the stage, but order. They are all watching off right, their rifles ready. Firing from the Indians increases. Some of Tom's men fire.

Custer

(Screaming): Hold it up down there.

Tom

Hold your fire.

Custer

(Laughing): Wait till you see the pattern on their faces. (Firing increases.)
Kecugh

Get down deep, man. (The men get set behind the horses.)

Custer

They're kicking up more dust; they'll be coming in a minute.

You all loaded, men? Pick your men now.

Tom

Pick your men. - All right. (Firing breaks loose.) That's the way - give 'em hell. (Steady rearing fire for a minute and a half.

The dust gets thicker. Men come running up from below, some of them falling.)

A trooper

(Digging in by Custer): We're catching hell down there, General.

Custer

Have you seen anything of Reno down there?

Trooper

No, sir - not even any firing. (The firing slows up.)

Tom

They're getting out of range again. Hold your fire. - Hold your fire. (Firing stops from troops.)

Custer

Can you see below from there? (Men come running up from below.)

Ask them if they've seen Reno. (The dust gets thicker, firing from the Indians increases.)
Tom

Get—let 'em have it. (There is another wave of firing. All men running up from below, fall. Men everywhere die, shrieking. After two minutes of firing, only half the men are left. Firing dies down.)

Custer

Bring 'em up here, Tom, quick!

Tom

Up to the top. Get going fast. (The men make a sudden rush for the top, and get down with Custer's men. Some of them fall.)

Custer

Shoot at the ones who've got their guns up.

Keough

There's no sign of Reno.

Cooks

Tom, there's Rain-in-the-Face.

Custer

(To Keough): What about Reno?

Tom

He's not in sight. (The dust increases, the firing increases. One man after another is killed, Cooks and Tom are wounded. The charge is finally repulsed. About a dozen men are left.) That was short and sweet. (He looks about him.)

Custer

I guess Reno isn't coming.
Tom

How do you like it, George.

A trooper

If we had repeaters, we'd lick those God damned bastards.

Custer

Hole in there - we'll whip 'em anyhow.

A wounded trooper

(Laughing sardonically): Hell, yes.

Another wounded trooper

We'll all see pretty pictures.

A trooper

Shut your God damned mouth, or I'll knock your head in.

(The firing increases. Custer laughs. Tom falls with a cry. Custer turns for a moment and sees him. Cooke falls. All of the men, except Custer and one trooper, are killed in a withering fire.)

The trooper

(Firing from a kneeling position beside Custer): By God, General, (he waves toward the Indians), they'll pay for this. They'll get run out of this country for good. (The firing stops altogether.) - They're trying to get us alive.

(Custer loads his pistol.)

Custer

No, they want to kill us by hand. (There are three quick shots.

The trooper falls.) - Oh, only me?
(Custer watches steadily close to him. An Indian comes running at him, stone mace uplifted. Custer shoots. The Indian drops. Two more Indians come at him in the same way. He shoots three shots at one before he kills him. He shoots the other. He pulls the trigger of his revolver. There are no more cartridges. He laughs. Firing breaks out suddenly. He dies.)

THE CURTAIN FALLS