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### Custer, a play

Paul F. Treichler

*The University of Montana*

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C U S T E R

- A Play -

by

Paul F. Treichler

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

State University of Montana

- 1958 -

Approved:

*Edmund L. Freeman*

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Chairman of Examining Committee

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C U S T E R

- 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 - Salon 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

\* \* \* \* \*

CHARACTERS IN THE ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE

California Joe, a scout  
Parks, General Sheridan's secretary, a civilian  
Lieutenant-Colonel George A. Custer, Brevet Major General  
General Philip Sheridan, U. S. Army  
Captain Cooke, officer of the Seventh Cavalry  
Peabody, reporter from an eastern newspaper  
Nugent, reporter from an eastern newspaper  
Captain Pierce, Sheridan's adjutant  
Captain Mackenzie, an officer with Sheridan  
Lieutenant Wallen, an officer with Sheridan  
Tom Smith, a settler  
Captain Bentzen, officer of the Seventh Cavalry  
Satanst, Chief of the Cheyennes  
Lone Wolf, Commander of the Cheyenne warriors  
John Brewster, Custer's striker  
Captain Tom Custer, Custer's brother  
Little Bear, Chief of the Minneconjou Sioux  
Interpreter  
Koenigs, a reporter  
Mrs. Custer  
President Ulysses S. Grant

Laudorf, 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 Rene, officer of the Seventh Cavalry

Captain MacDougall, officer of the Seventh Cavalry

Mitch Boyer, a scout

Lloyd, a bugler

Captain Kecugh, 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 knowed him out in th' Oregon country when he was a lieutenant; so there's no danger o' me takin' you fer 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 Ginerel Custer's a man after ma owa 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 knowed him better 'fore I'd seen him first, I wouldn' 'a ast him what I did, but you know some of these here ginerals goes ridin' around in these here ambulance wagons tryin' to fight Injuns.

Parks

That's interesting.

Joe

So when he fust 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 aimin' t' do," he says, "is to ketch 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

(Indignantlly): 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

air, fighting the same good fight for civilization, pushing west because it's our manifest destiny. . . . . (Pointedly) Made brothers by our manifest destiny.

Parks

Yes, sir.

Custer

Feeling the same wind.

Parks

Yes, sir.

Custer

No, sir. We no more feel the same wind than we fly. Put it in your pipe and smoke it, Parks, that I have adopted the wind for my brother, and I won't have you going around telling people you and I feel the same wind. The wind's nothing to you but a pious abstraction. There's a difference between a pious abstraction and a brother, isn't there?

Parks

Yes, sir.

Custer

This brother of mine roars and bellows up and down the world bawling a high old time. I'm proud to have him in the family. Imagine having a brother who sprays the ocean over cliffs, plays with hawks, and waves tall grass over dead bodies.

Parks

Yes, sir.

Ouster

You're doing nothing of the kind. You are a fine person to have manifest destiny put me in the same boat with. . . . Oh, by the way, let me give you the list of wholesalers General Sheridan asked me to leave with you. (He hands Parks the list.) They are the companies who are responsible for our eating horse meat.

Parks

Yes, sir.

Ouster

Whatever you do with it won't make any difference.

Parks

No, sir.

Ouster

A year from now we'll still be eating horse meat. You will send this to Washington, and it will eventually get to some Congressman who'll do nothing about it because the wholesalers are friends of his, or get him votes, or bribe him, or promise to make him President.

Parks

Thank you, sir.

Ouster

It's a great game, Parks.

Parks

Yes, sir.

Ouster

Have you ever tried putting the cart before the horse, and saying

sir yes, sir no, sir no, sir yes? (Custer rises; so does Parks.) When General Sheridan comes in, have him fire off a cannon to let me know he's here.

(Sheridan enters. Custer stops, comes to attention, and salutes respectfully.)

Custer

I've just been having a fine little chat with your soul mate.

Sheridan

Parks, go find the officer of the day and tell him I want officers' call sounded at ten o'clock.

Parks

Yes, sir.

Sheridan

And then lose yourself until Ouster and I get through our business.

Parks

Yes, sir. (He goes.)

Custer

If that fellow was my secretary, I'd send him out looking for himself. (Sheridan sits at his desk; Custer sits at Parks'.) His weakness isn't contagious, is it? Do I look as if I'd inherit the earth?

Sheridan

Now what have you got against Parks?

Custer

Only that he'll inherit the West when those of us who find life worth living will have - (throws up his hands) one way or the other. But

I got along with him beautifully. We had the most moving discussion just now. I told him things dear to my heart. I told him I was moony about the wind's going up and down the world playing with the snow and the hawks and the rain while inspired Americans mumble about a manifest destiny which means nothing at all. Fighting Indians so a tribe of Parkes can move in - that's what it boils down to. I'd rather worship the wind. More sensible. Most of that I told him; and he agreed with me. Yes, sir, he said. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

Sheridan

You are still full of the old blarney, aren't you?

Custer

Blarney?

Sheridan

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

Custer

Oh, you did. (With an air of, "How interesting. Would you mind telling me what it's all about?")

Sheridan

I confess I've worried about how you'd taken being court-martialed. (Custer is silent.) And how you'd take Sherman and Sully and myself having to beg to get you back--months after you'd been acquitted. I tell you right now I didn't like it any better than you did - damn' trumped-up affair.

Custer

What do you mean, trumped-up?

Sheridan

That damn' fool trial of yours for shooting deserters.

Custer

Well, I do shoot deserters. The rest of my officers do, too, but I'm the worst. It helps pass the time away and gives us an appetite. Why, whenever we get a guard-house full, we turn them loose and shoot them down as they try to run. (Sheridan grunts.) Well, Bath heard that in a railroad station.

Sheridan

Ah, I thought so.

Custer

Thought what?

Sheridan

That it still stings. I thought it would. . . . When you got in last night ten days before any one thought it was possible, and woke me up, commanding officer or no commanding officer, I thought to myself, "Well, thank God, they haven't hurt him any." Then when you began on your wild idea about a campaign in winter, I thought, "Well, it's like old times." I felt like putting you in command of this Post right then.

Custer

Well, aren't you going to?

Sheridan

(After a pause): Have you got that list?

Custer

(Shrugs resignedly): I gave it to the grand mogul here. (He looks



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.

Custer

I hate those men. You understand? I hate them in a way that made me almost kill one of them once. . . . One fat member of the House of Representatives will never know how close he came.

Sheridan

Are you serious?

Custer

Why shouldn't I be? He was responsible for oh, say fifty deaths. We had a lot of death about that time from scurvy and cholera because of the food, and others would desert because they were half starved, and weren't getting paid; some of them would get lost and die. The Indians would get them, too, and tie them down on red hot scalps, or strip their skins while they were still alive. He sat there in his swivel chair, and I told him about the desertions; and when I got through, he said it was what they deserved for their lack of loyalty. He talked to me about loyalty - to me. Imagine being tried for the murder of a fish like that, and having to listen to his lawyers going over his virtues. . . . Then But I didn't. I walked out of his office saying nothing. . . . Then do you know what happened? I went dancing up and down the streets of Washington happy as a lark. What kind of an emotion is that? I went home to our hotel suite and rode Bath on my foot - (He makes the motions of riding a child on his foot, crossing one knee over the other, holding out his hands, and making his foot go up and down.) and looked out of the window and watched all the people who'd come to Washington for a slice of the cake and said, "You almost got me, but you didn't. My sense of duty nearly

overcame me, but it didn't. You won't sit around with your 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.

Custer

It works here the way it works everywhere. Indians at peace are under the Indian Department, Indians at war, under the War Department. Result? When we get the ones who kick up a row in a tight place, they declare peace and go under the Indian Department, get fed, get their ponies fed, get new rifles and blankets, - get all set to start a row again.

Sheridan

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

Custer

They don't even have to bother to think up their own murders. Their white agents even do that for them - Washington might forget to send out the supplies the agents get gifts for. We'll get this damned mess over with yet. Are you going to let me get busy with this outfit?

Sheridan

I'm not so sure about hurrying this morning. I just mentioned a winter campaign to a couple of your officers, and they acted as if I'd gone crazy. They seemed to think you had trouble enough trying to fight in the summer, let alone starting anything in the winter.

Custer

I've noticed they're all a little sleepy around here. No wonder they're getting men killed.

Sheridan

On top of that, in just the two weeks I've been here I can tell that the Indians have gone hog wild - whole damn' countryside.

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 "Garryowen".

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



and 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 manifest destinies. By the time I get through with this Seventh Cavalry, they won't have to get 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 command 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 Washington, 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

not one of them can touch you, see. You'll be up in the clouds so high, none of them can touch you. I'll be glad of it, and if they come around to me looking for sympathy, I'll laugh at them.

Custer

(To Parks who has appeared at the tent opening, then started to go): Imagine that, Parks. (Parks reappears.) He says I expect too much, and then says the Congressman will leave me alone. If I expected that much, I'd begin writing poems about our manifest destiny. What do I expect? Nothing. I only know what I'm going to do.

(The officers have gathered outside. They listen.)

Sheridan

All right, gentlemen. (They enter the tent.) Well, what I have to say won't take long. I've made no secret of the fact, since I got here a couple weeks ago, that my business here isn't exactly a military one. I'm doing an investigation that I guess every one here knows about. And I guess most of you won't be surprised when I tell you I called this meeting to turn the command of this post over to General Custer. I expect Parks and I will be here for a month yet, but I don't intend to be anything more than a visitor. I don't know anything about fighting these God-forsaken Indians; so I'm not going to stand in the way of the ones of you who do. Now you can listen to Custer.

Custer

(Rising): With the first snow, I'm taking the Seventh after the Cheyennes.

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, blaming editorials will be written on how we bungled our jobs and got 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.

ACT I, SCENE 2

Outside Sheridan's tent. December, 1868. To right of the flag pole a reviewing stand has been roped off. Sheridan and his staff are present, including Captain Pierce, adjutant, Captain Keckwiler, and Lieutenant Wallen. Also Peabody and Nugent, reporters from eastern papers, various soldiers and civilians, and a crippled man, Tom Smith, who is on crutches, having lost a leg.

Sheridan

It was a damn' fool chance as he outlined it to me. Then he piles into the end of an Indian settlement with eight villages in it - eight instead of one - and gave the Indians the worst beating they ever got in history. - In history. . . . This Battle of Washita'll make history of its own. Did you ever hear anything like it?

Peabody

General Sheridan, Nugent and I wonder if we could use your tent for a minute?

Sheridan

I guess so. What do you want?

Peabody

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

Sheridan

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

Peabody

Yes, sir.

Sheridan

All right. Go ahead.

(Peabody and Smith start toward the tent. Nugent hangs back for a minute.)

Nugent

General Sheridan, do you suppose Peabody and I could stand with you during the review?

Sheridan

Hell, yes. The more the merrier. That's Ouster's motto. But you'll have to put those pads up. I'm not going to have you scribbling while the troops go by. (Nugent hurries to the tent.) Have you got the gatling gun ready, Pierce?

Pierce

Yes, sir.

Sheridan

Let 'em have it the minute they're in sight. (To the others of his staff) We've got a gatling gun for the salute. I wish I had a ten pounder. (Inside the tent):

Peabody

Thomas Smith?

Smith

No; Tom Smith.

Peabody

How do you know for sure that it's your wife General Ouster found?

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

"Garryowen'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-martialled 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.)

MaeKenzie

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.

Sheridan

There's Custer! What the devil was it he told me to remember?

Oh. . . . (He chews hard on his cigar as "The Girl I Left Behind Me" is heard distinctly above the rumble of the march. Cries. Salute gun. Tom Smith watching. Sheridan breaks out suddenly): Fifty years from now - (He breaks off as the others turn to him.) Pierce, Go out there and get Custer. He can watch the tail-end of it from here if you hurry.

Pierce

Yes, sir. (He salutes.)

Sheridan

Thank God, I'm not hidebound. . . . If I went to pull a man out of a parade, I pull him out - regulations or no regulations. . . . What's he stopping for?

Wells

The column's taken up a trot. I guess he wanted to see them when they broke into it. Here he comes running.

Sheridan

Send a man out to get his horse. The rest of you keep in position here, and don't break 'till the review's over. Custer'll stand here. (He indicates a spot on his left.) Now when we come to attention, you civilians come to attention - that means silence - too. And when we salute the colors, you take off your hats. . . . (Noise of the troops; far off shouts of command. Custer enters just as the command,

"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 "Garryowen"; 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 "Garryowen".)

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 cooes 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

(Ecstatically): 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 extraordinary 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 understood 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 get drunk on the whiskey and had races over the prairie with hundred-yard belts 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--not 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 buzzes 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.) Now 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 tribes 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.

Custer

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

Satansta

Yellowhair is a great chief. Wherever he is, his power could make a treaty hold.

Custer

The White Father may not agree to it.

Satansta

Yellowhair could give it to me for the White Father; why not for himself? A treaty with the White Father is nothing. A treaty with Yellowhair might be something.

Custer

I will do what I can.

Satansta

Yellowhair will sign the treaty himself?

Custer

Yes.

Satansta

My people will come to the reservation by two o'clock tomorrow.

Custer

You're sure they'll come?

Satansta

They will come.

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 laugh.

(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 Setanta'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 sword, 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 grab, 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, say-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 to-morrow. (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 Bentons 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 greening 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 Great?

Custer

(Shrugs): Oh, just because it happens to be his great White  
 Fatherhood. - 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 shuts 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.

Tom

They give you any reason why?

Custer

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

Tom

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

(Grinning): You bet.

Tom

(Looks at him quickly): You bet what? (Little Bear looks at him uncomprehendingly; 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.

Custer

Oh - that was something else. I haven't heard from it yet.

(Interpreter and Little Bear talk.)

Tom

I knew he was after something.

Interpreter

Little Bear says the government promised him plenty of food for staying on his reservation. He says if he'd gone off the reservation, he could have had plenty of buffalo.

Custer

Yes; yes; I know.

(Interpreter talks again with Little Bear.)

Interpreter

He says the government promised to send a big steamboat up the river here filled with food just for his village. This steamboat hasn't come. He says some of his village watch the river every day. He says you promised him food, too, and he waits in the telegraph office all the time.

Custer

Tell him the minute I know, I'll tell him. Tell him there's no sense in watching the river. It's covered with ice. That's the trouble. The steamboat didn't get started before the ice.

(The interpreter and Little Bear talk.)



Custer

I've got the food here. Tell him that was an Indian Department steambot. 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.

Custer

Tell him I'm sure to hear within a day or two. Tell him it's just a formality - that I explained to the government about the steam-boat, and it will be all right. (More talk. Little Bear looks dubious.)  
 Tell him I'm sure it will be all right.  
 (More talk.)

Interpreter

(Laughing): He's afraid because no food came over the telegraph. He thinks you got the telegram already, and he's not going to get anything.

Custer

(After thinking it over): Tell him if I don't hear soon, I'll give him the food anyhow.

Tom

Then the fat will be in the fire.

Custer

Do you want them all to join Sitting Bull?

(The interpreter and Little Bear talk some more. Little Bear seems suspicious, and it is evident that he has asked the interpreter what Tom said. The interpreter stalls him off for a moment; then, evidently, invents. Little Bear gets somewhat angry. The interpreter is silent.)

Custer

What's he talking about?

Interpreter

He wanted to know what Captain Custer said.

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. Out 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.)



Custer

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

the telegraph. Little Bear watches the telegrapher. Koenig watches

Little Bear; and the stuffed owl the operator's got on the wall watches

Koenig. Play "My Country 'tis of Thee" again, Tom.

Tom

(Rising): Gentlemen - I think I'll leave you. Do you know what I'm thinking about? I'm thinking about the squaw after a battle, and how they go bobbing over the fields cutting open the corpses' bellies or sticking a knife into some one's head through one of his eyes - leaving it there, sticking out - remember? I just see that over and over. (He goes off l. front.)

Custer

(Looking thoughtfully after Tom): Why all the sudden interest in

Little Bear?

Koenig

Everybody knows Belmap's been stealing from the Indians right and left, and they're wondering what they're going to do about it.

Custer

You mean you wonder what I've heard from Washington about giving him that food.

Koenig

Well - all right.

Custer

I haven't heard yet. . . . Koenig, is it true that the Bismark Tribune is sending everything it finds out about Belknap 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 squares 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 Horse Creeley where once there was nothing but the wind - wonderful.

Koenig

Well - I guess I'll go over and sit some more.

Quater

Wrap yourself up well.

Koenig

I will.

(Quater sees him out, looking up and down the street from the door before he comes back in.)

Quater

(Calling): Tom. (He looks at two of the letters wondering, comparing them; then he opens one and reads it. He is looking at it when Tom appears.)

Tom

Well? Don't tell me the wandering Jew got any mail.

Quater

Yes, here. (He hands Tom the unopened of the two letters. Tom looks at it.)

Tom

Well, it certainly looks exciting. That all?

Quater

Yes. I got one just like it. When I first saw them, I thought some kid had sent us both valentines.

Tom

What's all the mystery about?

Quater

Come to think of it, they are valentines. (He laughs.)

Tom

I suppose the obvious thing for me to do is to open this. -  
 with you standing there watching, ready to have some sort of a big  
 horse laugh! (He opens the letter. A smile comes over his face  
 which gradually spreads into a wide beam.) Well, if it isn't our  
 old murderer friend - the Sioux with that lovely name, Rain-in-the-  
 Face. (He turns to Custer.) You say you got one of these? Valentine,  
 huh? Is he going to eat your heart, too? You suppose he's going to eat  
 them both at once? (He laughs uproariously.) Mine'll give him colic.  
 (The door opens and Mrs. Custer appears, followed by John, with suit-  
 cases, etc.)

Custer

Well, welcome home, welcome home. (He goes to her and takes her  
 in his arms and kisses her.) Have a nice trip? (He kisses her to keep  
 her from answering.) See any one I know? (He kisses her again.) You  
 haven't changed a bit.

Mrs. Custer

George, the mail man's come and gone!

Tom

All kinds of mail has come and gone.

Mrs. Custer

(Still in Custer's arms. She throws back her head and looks at  
 him, laughing): Sending Tom was a grand joke. I'll always remember that.

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, sodden 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

(Resolutely): 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 2

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, Landorf, and Grant's secretary, Davis. Custer, Sheridan, Terry, and a doorman appear during the scene.

Grant

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

Landorf

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, Landorf. 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 so any officer who takes it into his head can air his personal ideas about a Secretary of War and get away with it.

Landorf

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

Belknap

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

Landorf

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

Belknap

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

Landorf

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 Guster's the only one who can do it?

Landorf

He looks like a good man to me.

Grant

Well, you're all wrong. You ought to read this stuff, Landorf. (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're settled with him?

Belknap

I suppose he means I'm out, and so that's all. What is 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 -

Lendorf

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, Lendorf - why don't you stick around and hear what I'm going to tell him?

Lendorf

(Rising): No, thank. 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 Lendorf? "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 locked 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 courtmartial 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 mad 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 court-martial, 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 Connor.

Grant

Who the devil is Connor?

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

a chance to grasp what he has said, he continues): I've been telling the doorman about the time Connor went through Bismark. He got his platoon off the train there, and had part of them go into town and exchange their guns for whiskey. Then he and the rest of the platoon went back and threatened to put all the bartenders in the penitentiary for possessing contraband unless they gave the guns back. He got them back.

Grant

(Seeing an opening): And what did you do?

Quater

(Noncommittally): Surely I had him outwitted!

Grant

(Pulling the chair the secretary sat in away from behind the desk, he sits down): Well, Quater, you've had a good time.

Quater

The country's dedicated to the pursuit of happiness.

Grant

(Unbending): I wouldn't be surprised if you'd had too good a time.

Quater

What do you want, my formula? I've never thought before, but it does follow from the Declaration of Independence that the President would be interested in obtaining formulas for the pursuit of happiness -- spread them with abandon through the land --

Grant

(Sharply): Are you trying to tell me what to do?

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 blaze 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? Male 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?



Ouster

I wish you ones who hate them so would ship them fewer guns.

(Quietly): How much does it take for the munition makers to bribe a Congress?

Grant

Say that again, will you? (He looks furtively toward the secretary's door.)

Quater

(Without suspicion): I think I was clear enough.

Grant

You ever hear of the constitution and the right of the people to bear arms? Still don't like the laws.

Quater

Evidently the Indians have been made citizens since this morning. So that's what the munitions makers use for an argument. What part of the constitution does President Grant's brother have a particular fondness for?

Grant

Are you saying that to my face?

Quater

Yes. What part of the constitution is it that allows him to sell supplies marked Indian Department up there in Fort Peck. Fort Peck isn't part of the United States yet; I don't suppose the constitution bothers him much.

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 Orvill 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

back." And, of course, as a punitive measure, we take a band of land for a railroad.

Crest

Awfully simple, wasn't it?

Ouster

Too simple. It didn't work. But this year it will work, won't it? There are plenty of excuses for punitive measures this year. The supply boats don't start on time, and get frozen in the river. Indians don't get food, get restless. Some of them even move off their reservations to where food is. Then they're all ordered back by the first of January, or there'll be a punitive expedition. Some of them don't even hear about it till the middle of February - and they get restless. And just about the time they're all restless, in come hundreds of tempting new rifles. And why was that official report of mine published? Why did all the flotsam have to know there was gold in the Sioux country - why, unless it was intended for them to swarm in there - get a few killed - then a punitive expedition and a band of land for a railroad? If you were doing it, I don't think you'd even know it. Sometimes I think you weren't even wise to Bellamy. He took in a hundred thousand a year right under your nose, and sometimes I think you didn't even know it.

Crest

(Jumping up): By God, Ouster, I'll kill you. I'll kill you for those guns.

Ouster

Grant, you're a fool.

Grant

I'm what? I'm what?

Ouster

You're a damn' fool. You're a God-damned fool. The whole thing is a God-damned two-cent smear. (He starts out the door.)

Grant

(Raging): You're through, Ouster. You're through. (The secretary appears in the doorway, tentatively, ready to congratulate Grant. Grant sees him, nods, and shouts): Ouster! (Ouster at the door turns. He sees the secretary. He looks at Grant.) Did you intentionally forget the customary thing when leaving a superior officer? (Ouster looks at secretary, realises what has happened, but turns and goes without saluting. Bolknay appears. Grant turns to him): We've got him now! by God, we've got him now. He's a small man, Bolknay. (Impressively.) Anybody who calls another man a damn fool is. Any kid knows that. That's just what he is, Bolknay -- a small man.

Bolknay

And now you can cut him right down to size. (To secretary): What did you get?

Davis

First, he made several charges against the administration. He asked how much it took to bribe a congress.

Grant

Oh, what a witness you'll make, Davis. I'm going to wrap you up in cotton batting till we have that trial. (To Belknap): He refused to salute me. You didn't see him refuse to salute me even after I put it up to him.

Belknap

When'd he do that?

Grant

Just at the end - Davis saw him.

Belknap

I tried to push Davis in in time for that last damn fool; so he couldn't deny at the trial that Davis was where he could hear it.

Grant

Did you hear that weird tale he had to tell about a railroad? You'd think building a railroad was a crime the way he talked. He hasn't got an idea in his head about the expansion of this country,

Belknap. (With inspiration): Just a small man.

(The doorman appears.)

Doorman

General Sheridan and General Terry, sir?

Grant

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

(The doorman goes.)

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.)

Grant

(No secretary): Tell 'em I'm ready.

(Davis goes to door as before, walking slowly back to his office. Sheridan and Terry follow him in. They salute. Sheridan has a bottle under his arm, wrapped up.)

Sheridan

Hello, Grant. (He and Terry shake hands with Grant genially.)

Well, Terry and I have been guessing what you wanted to see us for. Terry had red-tape ideas, but I told him you had red tape every day of the week, and what you wanted to do was what we did the last time you and I were in here. Well, where are the glasses? (He unwraps the bottle.)

Grant

Terry was right.

Sheridan

Red tape? - Then we need it all the more. Where's that bell-hop of yours? (He goes toward the door.)

Grant

Sheridan, there's nothing doing.

Sheridan

(Stops. Then he opens the door): Get us three glasses.

Grant

By God, Sheridan, are you going to try that, too? You're all having a fine picnic, aren't you? You need what you're going to get,

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.



Sheridan

Jesus Christ! - Grant, if it's anything about this Bellamy business, you haven't got a thing on Custer. And if you dig up anything more about that, you'll come out worse than he does.

Grant

It hasn't got a thing to do about Bellamy. He called me a damn' fool. He's a small man, and we're well rid of him.

Sheridan

You're not rid of him yet.

Grant

Don't try to mix up in this thing, Sheridan.

Sheridan

How would it seem to you, Terry, to have Custer out of the army?

Terry

(To Grant): With all respect to you, sir, I'd think it was a

damn' shame.

Grant

It's a wonder you remember the respect.

Sheridan

I've seen the time, Grant, when you didn't give a damn whether they respected you or not. And you didn't have to worry about it coming.

Grant

I worry about it now. (Sheridan gets up, goes to desk, picks up corkerew, and begins to open bottle.) Never mind that, Sheridan.

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 damn' secretaries. Well - here's to Sitting Bull, Terry.

Grant

What's the idea of that?

Sheridan

Ouster 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 man 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): Rene! (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

Belknap, you're not going to run me any more. (To doorman):  
What do you want?

Belknap

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.)

Belknap

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): Belknap, look! (Belknap  
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, gentlemen - 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

Tuey?

Custer

Yes.

Gibbon

(Laughs): He can if any one can. You think I can risk it then?

Custer

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

Gibbon

Well - I'll let him try, anyhow. Here's one other thing. My scouts don't seem to know what to expect. They don't agree at all on the size of Sitting Bull's village. Do you mind if I talk to some of your scouts who were with Reno when he discovered that trail?

Custer

Help yourself. But I can tell you all they know. They found a trail early yesterday morning and followed it till late afternoon. It was only a day old, and without a doubt was leading to the place we plan to find the Indians. It was a big trail of about sixty lodges - 300 men - and they'll probably get to Sitting Bull before we do.

Gibbon

Reno didn't find any actual Indians?

Custer

No.

Gibbon

I wish we knew more than that.

Custer

You mean, how many other trails like the one Reno found are leading to Sitting Bull.

Gibbon

Yes - and where they are.

Custer

We'll find out - all in good time.

Terry

Is that all, Gibben?

Gibben

Yes, sir. (He rises.)

Custer

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

Gibben

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.

Gibben

(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 cursing and shaking his red-head in the peculiar brownish-yellow light that hangs over the place. Are you on?

Gibben

You're willing to bet twenty-five dollars you can tell just where a man will stand?



Custer

There are a half-dozen other places where he might stand, but I'll bet twenty-five dollars he'll be on that rise.

Gibbon

I'll take it.

Custer

To be paid in about four days when we meet - whether the Indians are shooting at us or not.

Gibbon

All right. (He rises.) It's worth twenty-five dollars just to make a damn' fool bet like that. (He salutes amiably and leaves.)

Custer

(Closing his eyes again): Ferry, I can see that sergeant, and that place, and those guns - and I can put them all together. Pictures! It's an extraordinary process, you know it? (He taps his head.) You didn't see anything when it went on, did you?

Ferry

(After a temporary wonder, with prosaic conviction): That happens all the time.

Custer

Yes, that's just it. It happens all the time, but what do you think of when you think of a man? Strange photographic physiology? No - head, shoulders, trunk - man. All bound up in a small tightwad. That isn't it, Ferry. Even the pictures - streaming, streaming - (He waves

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

believe in that. You fight for duty and because it's manifest destiny. (He laughs.) And Grant's going to walk in on all my pictures, and pull the strings. (He laughs with spontaneous astonishment.)

Ferry

That's just what I wanted to talk to you about.

Custer

Oh.

Ferry

(He gets up and closes the door): Custer, it all looks good.

Custer

I'm very glad.

Ferry

Even at the worst estimate, they haven't more than six or seven hundred men. We've got nearly double that between you and Gibbon. It could be three times worse, and we'd still whip them. - You don't see the connection, do you?

Custer

What connection?

Ferry

Just this. Everything looks as if we were going to whip Sitting Bull. Sitting Bull's never been whipped before. Now, do you see the connection?

Custer

Not exactly.

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 sees 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?

Quater

(Training and rising) : They told me you were around. (He

shakes hands.) How in hell are you?

Johnson

(Holding up a bandaged left hand) : Gettin' doctor'd.

Quater

What's the matter?

Johnson

Injured.

Quater

Bad?

Johnson

No - it won't kill me for a week anyhow?

Quater

Will it then?

Johnson

Right. How are you, generally?

Quater

They're doing a lot of damn' 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 Ouster

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. Ouster 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

(Appearing 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 'till they all got out of Bismark 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 saying 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.

Keenig

A white picket?

Tom

Well, he's supposed to be white.

Custer

But red at heart, Tom?

Tom

Well, why not?

Custer

A 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

sealy him, they could only take off a little patch, and he wouldn't look so bad. And you said, "He was tryin' to sneak into the happy huntin' ground, Charlie. He was scared so bad, he needed religion, and his own religion didn't stick for some reason, so he took the Indians'. That's an important hair cut, Charlie," you said.

Custer

I had something to say about the statue of liberty, if I remember.

Johnson

Yup.

Custer

Well, on dark nights she still moves westward without much more than heads like Jim Dunn's in her outstretched arms.

Johnson

Yup. I always remembered that - I seen a lot of fellas since cuttin' their hair the same way, and I always think of that - and a lot others of 'em that would, only they don't have to live alone.

Tom

Do you two think you're talking deep stuff?

Custer

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

Tom

I'm asking you - do you think that gets you anywhere?

Custer

Hesn't budged me an inch. I've seen a piece of my soul come oft 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

Call'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 MacDougall, 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 individual "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

west end, and Bentzen will take everything to the south. We'll have to see if it's the same, of course - but it probably will be - no matter how much bigger it is. Latest indication is that they've got about two thousand men. (Piercealy): Is that too many?

Cooke

We did better than that at Washita.

Ouster

Thanks, Cooke. - I don't think it's too many either. I've thought it all out, and it's not too many. Not if we keep 'em excited - not if we keep hitting from here, there, and the other place. I've always told you to get what you could out of it, haven't I? Got what you could, see? All right. There's going to be plenty of opportunity.

Bentzen

We're not waiting for Terry and Gibson, sir?

Ouster

Terry and Gibson are two days away -

Reno

What time in the morning do we start, sir?

Ouster

We usually start when the bugle blows "Boots and Saddles", Reno. Have you gentlemen anything else you care to know? - All right. Dismissed. (The officers, except Tom, salute and leave. To Tom): Do they know about my court-martial?



Tom

They've heard rumors, I guess.

Custer

They set it. They set an 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 Cooke 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, Unepapa, 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 knoll 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 squatting 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

(Shouting): Hold it up down there.

Tom

Hold your fire.

Custer

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

Keough

Get down deep, men. (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.

Cooke

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, Cooke 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