

Libbie and Autie

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. STEBBINS' YOUNG MEN'S ACADEMY - MORNING

SUPER: "MONROE, MICHIGAN - 1849"

A humble two-story wooden school building. A sign over the front door identifies it as the "Stebbins' Young Men's Academy."

INT. CLASSROOM

Lean, tow-headed, GEORGE "AUTIE" CUSTER (10) sits at his desk in the modestly furnished geography class. He holds his textbook upright, seemingly listening in strict attention. Also in class are ONE DOZEN OTHER BOYS.

Old SCHOOLMASTER STEBBINS (60s), an overweight, balding, frumpy man, shuffles in his cloth slippers through the aisles between the desks while lecturing on the geography of the United States.

SCHOOLMASTER STEBBINS

Now the territories west of the  
Mississippi River mostly have not been  
settled by Americans.

Walking toward the front of the classroom, he passes by Autie and pats him on the shoulder.

SCHOOLMASTER STEBBINS

Good, Custer. Paying attention means  
success.

Autie smiles. After Stebbins passes, Autie flips his textbook pages to the end, revealing an illustrated military novel about dragoons.

SCHOOLMASTER STEBBINS (O.S.)

Much of this land belonged to Mexico,  
and it is now populated by many Indian  
tribes...

EXT. THE BACON HOME - AFTERNOON

Surrounded by stately elm trees, this two-story home is a gracious structure on a corner lot. It has white siding, bottle-green shutters, and a tall chimney protruding from the center of the roof.

A porch extends halfway around the house, and a well-kept lawn containing a four-seated swing extends to the white picket fence that skirts the sidewalk.

INT. THE BACON HOME - PARLOR - AFTERNOON

Slightly-plump, pretty, chestnut-brown-haired LIBBIE BACON (7) stands before her attractive mother ELEANOR BACON (35). The resemblance between the two is conspicuous.

Libbie's father, JUDGE DANIEL BACON (51), is short, slightly portly, and balding in the front.

The parlor is finely furnished. In a comfortable chair, Daniel is engrossed in a newspaper.

ELEANOR

Elizabeth! You know you were not supposed to leave the yard after returning from school. For that there will be no more play today. You go to bed right now and have a think!

Libbie frowns like a sorrowful puppy and scampers upstairs to her room.

LIBBIE'S BEDROOM

Comfortably furnished and with a small writing table. Libbie lies on her bed and begins practicing cat's cradle with string.

PARLOR

The clock moves ahead two hours.

Eleanor enters, looks at it, and exits to check on Libbie.

LIBBIE'S BEDROOM

As Eleanor is about to enter, Libbie hears her, hides the string, and pretends to be napping. Eleanor kneels by her bed, bows her head, and begins praying softly but audibly.

ELEANOR

Dear Father in Heaven, I've lost three of my four children.

Libbie slightly opens one eye.

ELEANOR

Thou hast taken my Sophie, my Edward,  
and my little Harriet. Please help  
this, my surviving child, see the error  
of her ways and always be a good girl.

Libbie tries to control a grimace of self-consciousness.

ELEANOR

Help her understand how much we love  
her and wish only the best for her.  
Amen.

Eleanor lifts her head and lovingly looks at her daughter.  
Touched by her mother's sincere prayer, Libbie's eyes begin  
to moisten and she raises her head.

LIBBIE

Oh, Mother, I'm sorry I worried you! I  
promise I will never disobey you again!  
You can count on it!

ELEANOR

Thank you, Libbie. You may leave your  
room now.

Libbie springs out of bed and kisses her mother on the cheek.  
She dashes out of the room as Eleanor looks amused.

EXT. THE BACON HOME

Libbie bounds out the front door and gallops to the fence  
gate. She mounts it and begins swinging back and forth.

Autie carrying his school books approaches on the sidewalk.

Libbie sees him and breaks into a big, dimpled smile, her  
eyes tracking him. He passes in front of her, paying scant  
attention.

LIBBIE

Hello, you Custer boy!

He says nothing but looks at her nonchalantly while  
continuing to walk.

Surprised at her own impertinence, Libbie blushes and hurries  
into the house.

Autie hears her quick retreat and turns to look back at her,  
smiling in amusement.

EXT. MONROE CEMETERY - DAY

SUPER: "FIVE YEARS LATER"

Libbie and Daniel Bacon stand weeping near an open grave as a coffin is lowered into the ground by FOUR GRAVE DIGGERS.

LIBBIE (V.O.)

August 27, 1854. My poor neglected diary, two weeks ago my Mother was laid in the cold, cold ground, and as I stood by that open grave, God only knows what anguish filled my heart. I hope the Lord will spare me to my father, for I am his only comfort left. And what will become of me?

EXT. MONROE - YOUNG LADIES' SEMINARY AND COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE-DAY

An imposing three-story educational facility centered on an entire city block. On the small portico at the main entrance is the sign, "Young Ladies' Seminary and Collegiate Institute."

INT. THE INSTITUTE - PARLOR - DAY

While Daniel (59) observes, Libbie (15) sits next to him and sketches on a drawing pad. She has lost all her plumpness and is a strikingly pretty girl. SCHOOL GIRLS amble through the parlor on their way to and from classes.

The tall, Lincolnesque REVEREND BOYD (late 50s) strolls over to them.

REVEREND BOYD

Hello, Judge Bacon. Hello, Libbie.  
How are you two?

DANIEL

We're fine, thank you, Reverend Boyd.  
And very pleased with your excellent Seminary, I might add.

REVEREND BOYD

Thank you, Judge. I try to provide for our young ladies a solid preparation for life. You never know what fate will throw at us.

He looks over Libbie's shoulder at her drawing.

## INSERT - THE SKETCH

An artfully rendered drawing of a house on the shore of a bay.

REVEREND BOYD

Well done, Libbie. Well done. Good day, folks.

DANIEL

Good day, Reverend.

The Reverend strides away.

DANIEL

You know, Libbie, it isn't unreasonable that I should remarry. It's been several years, and you need a mother. You don't want people calling you "Poor Motherless Libbie" do you?

Libbie pauses drawing and begins to fidget in her chair.

LIBBIE

No, Father. I'm weary of people calling me that. "Poor Motherless Libbie". Humbug! People give me too much sympathy, and I've taken advantage of it.

She becomes overly agitated.

LIBBIE

How I want school to end! God help me for I know I do wrong every day! I need to take better care of you! Will my future be one of respect or of shame?

DANIEL

I see that drama was your last class. I'm confident you will have a splendid future, Libbie. Ahem, on the subject of my remarrying?

LIBBIE

Oh, yes. I know that earlier in my mind I objected to it, but I have undergone a great change and feel it would add to your happiness, so I advise you to find a suitable woman.

DANIEL

Um, thank you, Libbie. Soon I hope to introduce you to a suitable woman. A friend of mine in Tecumseh wants to introduce me to the widow of a minister of the Congregational Church.

Libbie focuses on this unexpected news.

DANIEL

She is highly recommended; intelligent, sensible, well off, and a very good housekeeper.

LIBBIE

A good housekeeper! Very encouraging. She might be satisfactory. I will judge her fairly. Must go now, Father. Goodbye.

She quickly gathers her supplies, springs out of her chair, hugs and kisses him, and then rushes to go upstairs.

DANIEL

Goodbye, Libbie.

EXT. THE BACON HOME - DAY

SUPER: "JUNE 1859"

INT. THE BACON HOME - PARLOR

Libbie, Daniel, and his new wife RHODA (49) sit in the parlor, and the two women laugh gayly like two schoolgirls rather than step-mother and daughter. Rhoda is a slim, intelligent, attractive lady.

LIBBIE

Oh, Father, Mother is so delightful! I love her dearly. I approve!

RHODA

And I love your daughter! You did a splendid job raising her without her poor mother. My late husband Reverend Pitts and I should have been blessed with such a charming girl.

DANIEL

Do you think you can give this charming girl some direction in life? She's terribly concerned about her future.

RHODA

What doubt could such a lovely young lady have about that? Are there no acceptable gentlemen in Monroe?

LIBBIE

Oh, Father, don't worry her so soon! Mother and I shall laugh and grow fat together.  
And who cares about gentlemen, acceptable or not? Mind you, the only fine one in Monroe is my father!

Daniel chuckles. Rhoda manages a concerned smile.

EXT. MONROE - THE DAVID NOBLE FAMILY HOME - AFTERNOON

The Noble home is larger than average. Snow is on the ground.

SUPER: "NEW YEARS DAY - 1861"

INT. THE DAVID NOBLE FAMILY HOME

FIFTY GUESTS are at the house. LIBBIE (18) and her friend, the Noble's pretty blond daughter LAURA NOBLE (18), act as hostesses. Among the guests standing and conversing are the well-dressed young men in their early 20s JOE DANSARD, JOHN BULKLEY, and CONWAY NOBLE, Laura's brother.

JOE DANSARD

(to John Bulkley)

John, what do you think of South Carolina's vote of secession?

JOHN BULKLEY

I believe the Federal Government will oppose it, but I don't know how.

CONWAY NOBLE

They should do something soon. I expect other southern states will follow.

JOE DANSARD

Maybe a compromise can be worked out, Conway. I don't want war, but I heard that South Carolina is setting up an independent government.

DAVID NOBLE (45) joins the group.

DAVID NOBLE

It's going to be war for sure, boys.  
Damn treasonous southerners! We've  
borne enough insults from them. I hear  
they're itching for a fight, and they  
think we don't have the stomach for it.

CONWAY NOBLE

If they can't compromise, Father,  
perhaps it will be a quick war. Maybe  
only a few weeks.

Libbie and Laura approach, each carrying a tray of  
refreshments.

LAURA NOBLE

What's this, dear brother? Who is  
having a quick war?

CONWAY NOBLE

The entire nation, unless there's a  
compromise.

DAVID NOBLE

It won't be quick. I can promise you  
that.

LIBBIE

If women were allowed to vote, there  
might not be a war.  
Isn't that right, Laura?

DAVID NOBLE

Poppycock! Southern women are just as  
treasonous as their men!

LIBBIE

If you men get us into a war, I hope it  
doesn't affect Michigan. What would we  
ladies do if you all didn't return from  
war?

DAVID NOBLE

Only southern ladies, if you want to  
dignify them with the term, need worry  
about their men at war. Mark my words!

EXT. MONROE - MAIN STREET - DAY

A busy, mid-19th-Century main street of a moderate-sized  
town.

SUPER: "APRIL 1861"

Libbie ambles down the sidewalk while window-shopping.  
EXCITED PEOPLE gather in the streets.

An EXCITED MAN shouts to anyone within earshot.

EXCITED MAN

It's war! Fort Sumter has surrendered  
to the Confederates!

THREE YOUNG MEN rush by Libbie, who now pays attention to the  
people.

YOUNG MAN

(to the other two)

The Fourth Michigan Volunteer Infantry  
is calling for 90-day volunteers!  
Let's sign up!

She looks worried as she watches the young men quick-step  
away.

INT. THE BACON HOME - LIBBIE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Libbie in her nightgown sits in front of her open window  
sadly staring at the night sky.

A KNOCK on her door.

RHODA (O.S.)

Libbie, I just came to say "good  
night." How are you doing?

LIBBIE

Come in, Mother. I'm just (beat)  
thinking.

Rhoda enters the bedroom.

RHODA

About anything special?

LIBBIE

I was considering my, um, options.  
They don't look good now because of  
this war, not that I'm very concerned.

RHODA

I see.  
You know, Libbie, your father doesn't  
want you to become entangled with one  
of these soldiers. He believes you  
would come to regret it deeply.

LIBBIE

I know, and I won't forget. They're not my type anyhow. I think they're a bit arrogant.

Rhoda smiles. Suddenly, Libbie drops her head into her hands and begins to sob.

LIBBIE

Oh, Mother! Curse this war! What will I do? All the men will be killed, and I'll become an unwanted old maid! Father has you now, and I'll just be a burden!

Rhoda puts her hands on Libbie's shoulders.

RHODA

Now, Libbie, all the men will not be killed, and because you're such a lovely, talented young lady, you won't have any worries about finding a suitor.

LIBBIE

Do you believe so? Do you really?

RHODA

Yes, dear. Wait until you graduate from the Seminary. You'll see. And who knows? Maybe the war will be over by then.

LIBBIE

Oh, I hope so!

EXT. BEHIND THE YOUNG LADIES' SEMINARY AND COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE - MORNING

SUPER: "JUNE 25th, 1862"

Libbie (20) graduates from Seminary as the valedictorian.

She stands behind a podium on a stage, and behind her are the TRUSTEES, which include Daniel with Rhoda; Reverend Boyd and his wife SARAH; the TEACHERS; and MINISTERS. In the audience are some TOWNSPEOPLE and NEWSPAPERMEN.

She concludes her address.

LIBBIE

...and we hope this terrible war will end soon.

(MORE)

LIBBIE (cont'd)

I am indeed honored to be chosen valedictorian of the class of '62. We ladies of this class pledge our support to our troops.

The audience applauds.

LIBBIE

Today, June 25th, is a glorious day for the graduates of the Young Ladies' Seminary and Collegiate Institute. Onward for Michigan and victory!

The crowd applauds enthusiastically.

EXT. BEHIND THE INSTITUTE - LATE AFTERNOON

The Reverend and Sarah Boyd host a graduation party. A BANNER proclaims "Congratulations Graduates." Libbie and other GRADUATES are enjoying themselves.

Local hero Army Captain (Cpt.) Autie Custer (22) also is invited. He is dressed smartly in his blue cavalry uniform. His blond hair is not yet long, but he wears a small side beard, mustache, and tiny goatee.

Libbie stands alone, enjoying the crowd. Conway Noble strolls up to her.

CONWAY NOBLE

Hello, Libbie. Do you see Cpt. Custer over there?

Conway nods in the direction of Autie, who Libbie sees chatting to the vivacious blonde FAN FIFIELD (20).

Libbie's eyes widen at the sight of the striking officer, but she quickly suppresses the autonomic response.

LIBBIE

Yes. Captain Custer? He's so young!

CONWAY NOBLE

I will introduce him to you.

LIBBIE

No. No, thank you. I'm enjoying the party as I am. I must be alone to receive congratulations from the guests.

CONWAY NOBLE

You seem to be free at the moment. Come on, Libbie. He's a local hero!

LIBBIE

How nice.

CONWAY NOBLE

Quite dashing, too. He's caught the eye of many ladies here.

LIBBIE

I see that. Like a preened rooster in a hen house. And it didn't take him long to zero in on my valedictorian rival Fan Fifield. Or maybe it was the other way around. How she makes my skin crawl!

CONWAY NOBLE

You will regret not meeting him.

LIBBIE

Oh, alright, Conway! For goodness sake!

Conway hustles away to bring back Autie, and the two quickly return to Libbie.

CONWAY NOBLE

Libbie Bacon, may I present West Point graduate Cpt. George--better known as Autie--Custer.

Autie tips his hat, smiles, and speaks in a little-boy voice.

AUTIE

Hello, you Bacon girl!

Libbie's polite smile fades to confusion.

LIBBIE

I beg your pardon?

AUTIE

Miss Bacon --

LIBBIE

Libbie.

AUTIE

Libbie, perhaps you fail to recall our first meeting as I returned from school many years ago.

Briefly turning away, she blushes.

LIBBIE

Yes. I thought I had seen you  
somewhere. It's good to meet again,  
without your looks --  
(quick recovery)  
good books!  
(quick recovery)  
I mean school books!

He flashes her a confident smile.

CONWAY NOBLE

Excuse me for a moment, folks.

He signals a quick smile to Autie and fleetly steps away.  
Autie continues grinning at Libbie, who stares at the floor.  
Awkward silence.

LIBBIE

Yes, it's nice seeing you again, Custer  
b --  
Captain Custer. You have advanced  
quickly in rank, haven't you?

He places his hand gently on her arm.

AUTIE

I have been very fortunate, Libbie.  
I'll be pleased to see you again.

Autie turns and strides away to find another pretty girl.  
Hooked, Libbie watches him go. Some distance away, he turns  
and their eyes meet. She quickly looks away, then he fades  
into the crowd.

INT. MONROE - HOME OF MR. AND MRS. JOHNSON - EVENING

The Johnsons, a couple in their 30s, are having a party.  
Libbie is escorted by handsome JOHN RAUCH (22). They enter  
the door and are greeted by MR. AND MRS. JOHNSON. Also  
present are average-looking JACOB GREENE (22), Autie, Fan,  
and pretty NETTIE HUMPHREY (20). OTHER GUESTS mill about.

Libbie and Nettie are good friends. She is a lovely, tall,  
intelligent young lady, refined and dutiful.

Nettie sees the Johnsons greet Libbie and John as they enter.  
She rushes over to the couple.

NETTIE

John, Libbie, there is a game of Blind Man's Bluff going on. Come join us!

JOHN RAUCH

Please excuse me for a moment. I need to talk to Jacob Greene.

LIBBIE

Okay.

Rauch strides away, and the two women mosey toward the game. Libbie sees Autie and Fan sitting together holding hands. Autie is dressed in his blue cavalry uniform.

She stops abruptly.

NETTIE

What's wrong, dear?

LIBBIE

Look at that Fan Fifield with Cpt. Custer! She's a natural flirt and predator of men!

NETTIE

She is pretty and talented. She takes top honors with her dramatic recitations.

LIBBIE

She reminds me of a Venus' flytrap about to ingest a bluebottle fly!

EXT. MONROE - MAIN STREET - DAY

As Libbie strolls down the street, she sees Autie escorting Fan. Libbie scowls with displeasure.

INT. THE BACON HOME - LIBBIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

A distraught Libbie sits at her writing table and writes in her diary.

LIBBIE (V.O.)

An old maid in britches with no mother and no children! What Monroe girl can compete with a professional huntress?

She stares thoughtfully at the wall and daydreams.

EXT. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - DAY (LIBBIE'S DAYDREAM)

Snow blankets the ground. Autie and Fan in wedding dress exit the church, passing through a tunnel of drawn swords by 12 OFFICERS, 6 on each side. A CROWD OF CITIZENS watches.

Across the street and down the block, poorly dressed spinster Libbie sadly stares at the spectacle.

END DAYDREAM

She lays her head in her arms on the diary and sobs.

INT. THE BACON HOME - PARLOR - AFTERNOON

Libbie sits idly thumbing through a book when Daniel enters.

DANIEL

Hello, Libbie. Mmmmm, something smells good!

LIBBIE

Hello, Father.

DANIEL

I've just come from the Humphreys. Cpt. Custer is there and we had a nice chat. He's a sharp soldier. I admire and respect him deeply. Too bad he's in the military, for he'd make a fine beau.

LIBBIE

I think he's tied up with that dreadful Fan Fifield. Mother is baking. See what she has in the kitchen.

DANIEL

Oh, splendid.

He disappears into the kitchen, and Libbie scurries to her bedroom.

EXT. MONROE - HUMPHREY BOARDING HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A modest, clean establishment identified by a sign indicating "Humphrey Boarding House."

Libbie hurries to the front door.

INT. HUMPHREY BOARDING HOUSE - PARLOR

As Libbie steps in, she sees Autie sitting in the parlor reading. Upon seeing her, he immediately rises.

AUTIE

Hello, Libbie! Nice to see you.

LIBBIE

Oh, hello, Autie. Have you seen Nettie Humphrey? How goes the war?

AUTIE

I expect to be returning to it soon. I'm very confident of victory. Nettie stepped out, I think.

LIBBIE

Oh, that's good. I mean victory. I was going to show this to Nettie, but maybe I should give it to you. I hope you will like it.

She withdraws from a pocket a small ambrotype of her and hands it to him. He looks at...

An ambrotype of Libbie wearing a bow in her curled hair.

AUTIE

Libbie, whatever happens, I will never give this up. It shall stay with me always.

Libbie smiles happily at the thought.

LIBBIE

My friend Annie Colton has invited me to Toledo, so I will be gone for awhile.

AUTIE

Then allow me to accompany you to the train station. I may return to the war when you're gone, so I would miss the opportunity to say goodbye.

A YOUNG WOMAN steps to the doorway of the parlor to another room, stops, and observes the couple with interest.

Libbie suddenly remembers Daniel's warning about soldiers but then quickly ignores it.

LIBBIE  
 Oh! Father doesn't  
 (beat)  
 um, very well. I will send word of our  
 departure.

For a beat Autie looks at her puzzled, then grins  
 confidently.

AUTIE  
 Thank you, Libbie. You are most kind.

EXT. MONROE TRAIN STATION - DAY

Daniel and Autie help Libbie and ANNIE COLTON, a plump lady a  
 few years older than Libbie, depart for Toledo.

Autie showers attention on both of them. Always smiling, he  
 stays within an arm's length of them, clearing a path as they  
 walk through the CROWD. He carefully places their bags in  
 order as if he were a bellboy fishing for a huge tip.

Daniel silently watches disapprovingly.

FADE TO:

EXT. THE BACON HOME - DAY

Daniel followed by Libbie carries her luggage into the house  
 after her return from Toledo.

INT. THE BACON HOME - LIBBIE'S BEDROOM

Daniel sets down her bags.

DANIEL  
 Libbie, I'm glad you had a wonderful  
 time with Annie, but about your  
 departure, why was Cpt. Custer there?

LIBBIE  
 He insisted on coming to say goodbye,  
 for he might have returned to the war  
 while I was away.

DANIEL  
 I didn't know you are such dear  
 friends. While you were away, I heard  
 rumors about you two.  
 (MORE)

DANIEL (cont'd)

I prefer that you avoid a romantic relationship with him. No good can come of it. A military life is not for you.

LIBBIE

Rumors about me and Cpt. Custer?

Her face begins to redden with irritation.

LIBBIE

I like him very much, and he's a pleasant escort. He has many fine traits.

DANIEL

I know he does. I feel it a privilege to be his acquaintance, but military life --

LIBBIE

You have never been a girl, Father, and you can't tell how hard a trial this is for me!

Libbie stalks to the window and glares outside.

LIBBIE

And Monroe people will please mind their own business and leave me alone. I wish the gossipers sunk in the sea! It would give me great pleasure to know that you place entire confidence in me, Father.

DANIEL

I do. I'm just concerned about your future. Rhoda and I both are.

She turns to face him.

LIBBIE

Oh, you're still like a father and mother to me! If you tease me about this I shall go into a convent for a year!

Twisting back to the window, Libbie beats to listen for a response, but the befuddled Daniel has none. Again she turns to face him.

LIBBIE

Please try not to worry.

DANIEL  
I'll try, Libbie. I will try.

EXT. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - DAY

SUPER: "APRIL 1863"

Libbie leaves Sunday School as the excited Fan Fifield catches up to her.

FAN  
Libbie! Oh, Libbie! Autie has left New York and is in Washington now. He has sent his love to me. We're writing often.

Libbie conceals an internal shudder.

LIBBIE  
Oh, when will you marry?

FAN  
Um, I don't know. We haven't talked about it definitely. But maybe you and Nettie could be my bridesmaids.

Libbie stiffens.

MONTAGE - DAY:

Scenes of UNION and CONFEDERATE CAVALRY skirmishes. Fearless Autie, a master tactician, is in the middle of each action. In each scene, he leads a rout of the Rebel forces.

- 1) SUPER: "ALDIE, VIRGINIA"
- 2) SUPER: "MIDDLEBURG"
- 3) SUPER: "UPPERVILLE"

EXT. MONROE - MAIN STREET - DAY

Fan sees Libbie ambling down the street and excitedly rushes to her.

FAN  
Libbie! Autie has been promoted to brigadier general because of his magnificent bravery! He's the hero of the North!

Libbie shows mild interest, smiling politely.

FAN

And that ambrotype he has of you;  
you look so careless-like, with that  
little bow on your head and the curl.

Libbie stiffens.

LIBBIE

Thank you.

INT. HUMPHREY BOARDING HOUSE - PARLOR - DAY

Both standing, an angry Libbie converses with Nettie.

LIBBIE

Yesterday that appalling Fan Fifield  
told me the news about Autie's  
promotion to brigadier general! And I  
learned he showed my ambrotype to her!

NETTIE

My goodness!

LIBBIE

He's probably been writing passionate  
love letters to her. I've decided he  
is nothing to me and never will be.  
Father was right: no good can come from  
a relationship with a man in the  
military!

Nettie is concerned that her dear friend is angry, but she  
tries to assume an air of neutrality.

NETTIE

Autie is only 23. He must be the  
youngest general in Army history.  
Monroe can be very proud.

Libbie nervously paces around the room, picking items off  
tables and shelves and replacing them as if to put them in  
better positions.

LIBBIE

His wife should be other than an  
unprincipled flirt! She is dead in  
love with him, especially with his new  
appointment! They deserve each other!

To Nettie's amusement, Libbie removes the flowers from a vase  
and checks to see if there is water in it.

LIBBIE

Bah! If I loved a man I should love him just as much at the foot of the ladder as at the top. I loved Custer for a time, but I never thought of marrying him.

NETTIE

I can't believe he's not in love with you. Fan's style and fine looks just captivated him is all.

LIBBIE

Can you imagine me being a bridesmaid at her wedding? And especially if she marries Custer!

INT. HUMPHREY BOARDING HOUSE - PARLOR

Libbie sits in the parlor reading a book. With the aid of a CANE, a uniformed BG Autie now wearing his famous long blond hair hobbles through the door as swiftly as he can. An addition to his uniform is the BRIGHT RED SCARF of the Michigan Cavalry Brigade.

Upon seeing Libbie, he drops the cane and sweeps the startled woman into his arms.

AUTIE

Libbie!

LIBBIE

Autie! Why, you have a cane!

AUTIE

Leg wound at Culpepper. Don't worry about it. Mrs. Bacon is visiting her relatives in Clinton. Are you and your father comfortable lodging here?

LIBBIE

Yes, Nettie is taking good care of us. How do you know Rhoda is gone?

Autie does not wish to reveal his intelligence gathering.

AUTIE

In two days the young men in town are going to honor me by throwing a masquerade ball here. We've got to get our costumes!

LIBBIE

Ball? Costumes? Aren't you here for your wedding?

AUTIE

Huh? Why Miss Bacon, I haven't even proposed yet.

LIBBIE

She must be chomping at the bit, then.

AUTIE

She? Are you and Nettie playing a joke on me?

TWO ELDERLY MEN enter the parlor from the interior of the boarding house and linger AD LIB chatting on the other side. Autie notices them.

AUTIE

Let's go for a walk outside.

LIBBIE

What do you want with me, General Custer?

AUTIE

Please, Libbie. Help fortify a soldier's morale.

Holding her arm and his cane, he half pulls her toward the door.

EXT. HUMPHREY BOARDING HOUSE

Autie with Libbie in arm exits the house and proceeds to amble down the street.

EXT. SIDEWALK IN FRONT OF HUMPHREY BOARDING HOUSE

AUTIE

Now, what are you and Nettie up to?

From the opposite direction, a LOVING COUPLE arm-in-arm and gazing into each other's eyes walks passed.

LIBBIE

We aren't up to anything. What are you up to asking me to a ball right before your proposal to another woman?

AUTIE

Whoa! Whom am I proposing to?

LIBBIE

Only the most beautiful, exciting thing in Monroe. She's quite thrilled, really, to be marrying a brigadier general.

ANOTHER COUPLE walks passed holding hands.

AUTIE

Okay, Libbie. You got me. What are you talking about?

LIBBIE

General, I am speaking of your impending marriage to that captivating Fan Fifield. I've been invited to be a bridesmaid.

Autie is stunned.

AUTIE

(whistles)

I'm glad the Rebels haven't outmaneuvered me like this.

LIBBIE

Pardon?

AUTIE

Fan and I are just friends. There is no impending marriage.

LIBBIE

No marriage. I really don't know which of you two is the bigger rascal! Were you two born to torment me? I'm so confused!

A THIRD COUPLE passes, arms locked. The gentleman steals a kiss on the cheek, and the woman giggles.

AUTIE

I'm sorry for any misunderstandings. Libbie, I can't wait any longer. I need to tell you now --

They pause, look into each other's eyes, his with love, hers with anticipation. He musters the courage to say it, but can't.

AUTIE

I love...

LIBBIE

Yes?

AUTIE

Your beautiful ambrotype. It put the coup de grâce on my heart. I've loved it since --

LIBBIE

Autie, I can't listen to this, because it is wrong to do so.

AUTIE

Wrong? But why?

LIBBIE

I should not entertain such feelings from you unless I can reciprocate, and that I can't do.

AUTIE

You can't? Can you give me hope?

LIBBIE

It would be wrong to build hope on an uncertain future. The nation is at war, and you are in the midst of it. How could I live with the fear that I might be left alone?

Autie thoughtfully looks at the ground.

AUTIE

It's your father, isn't it?

LIBBIE

Yes, to tell the truth, my father is of the opinion that to become involved with a soldier is unthinkable.

AUTIE

How can I change his mind? Win the war? I would sacrifice every earthly hope to gain your love.

LIBBIE

Would you sacrifice the Army? Apart from my father's wishes, I'm afraid of a man who may never return. Please forget me.

AUTIE

I can never forget you!

LIBBIE

I can never forget you, either. I wish to be your true friend throughout life.

EXT. HUMPHREY BOARDING HOUSE

The couple has rounded the block and returned to the boarding house.

AUTIE

About the ball, True Friend, will you be my guest?

LIBBIE

Now that I know I've been played for a fool by that shameful Fan Fifield, I reckon I can. Yes, I shall!

AUTIE

Excellent!

INT. HUMPHREY BOARDING HOUSE - PARLOR - EVENING

The parlor has been cleared to make room for the masquerade ball. There are a DOZEN GENTLEMEN and TWO DOZEN LADIES.

Autie is dressed as Louis XVI and Libbie as a gypsy with a tambourine. Fan is dressed as Queen Elizabeth I.

Holding his cane, Autie slowly leads Libbie around the dance floor. Fan regally glares at them while dancing with her PARTNER.

SAME - LATER

AUTIE

Libbie, let's go for a walk outside.

LIBBIE

Another walk? In these costumes? And Autie, you must be careful of that leg.

AUTIE

Please. We won't go far.

LIBBIE

Alright.

EXT. HUMPHREY BOARDING HOUSE

Autie with Libbie in arm exits the house and proceeds to amble down the street.

EXT. SIDEWALK IN FRONT OF HUMPHREY BOARDING HOUSE

AUTIE

Libbie, darling, I know I can't face this war any longer without you. I need you.

LIBBIE

Autie --

AUTIE

I chose my wife when a little girl audaciously called out to me as I passed her house.

He locks his arms around her.

AUTIE

Say yes! You know you love me! Think of what a general can offer you! Say yes!

Tearing up, she looks into his eyes.

LIBBIE

Autie, I am honored you asked me, but, my father...perhaps you could speak to him.

AUTIE

No, no. The time isn't right yet. Let's say nothing about this to anyone until your father consents.

LIBBIE

(laughs through tears)  
You charge rebel lines without hesitation, but you're afraid of my father!

AUTIE

I don't want to lose you, Libbie. This must be carefully planned, just like my battles.

EXT. MONROE TRAIN STATION - AFTERNOON

A CROWD sees Autie now minus cane off to return to the war. Crowded around him are Libbie, Daniel, and Nettie.

DANIEL

General, I expect an amazing future for you, and I will be disappointed if Monroe doesn't receive excellent reports of your activities.

Autie listens impatiently, while Libbie and Nettie AD LIB chat, not listening to the conversation at all.

DANIEL

You've come a long way in a very short time, which is a testament to your outstanding military skills.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR (O.S.)

All aboard!

AUTIE

Judge Bacon, I want to speak to you about an important matter, but I don't have time now. May I write to you?

DANIEL

Of course! Godspeed, General!

Autie, Libbie, and Nettie AD LIB farewells.

INT. HUMPHREY BOARDING HOUSE - PARLOR - EVENING

Daniel sits reading a newspaper. Libbie enters with determination.

LIBBIE

Father, we need to talk about Autie.

DANIEL

Say, did you hear the joke about the two corrupt Congressmen? Pardon my redundancy.

LIBBIE

Father, please. For the past six months I have tried to suppress the "fancy" for Autie, but it did no good. The fancy I know is more, it is love.

Daniel sets down his paper and listens intently. Libbie nervously paces around the other chairs as she speaks.

LIBBIE

I do love him and have all the time.  
He is dear, dear! I tried so hard to  
think it was an idle, passing desire,  
but I love him.

She picks up a vase of flowers, looks at them, and then stares out the window.

LIBBIE

I believe I shall marry him sometime.  
This afternoon when I parted from him  
was such a hard trial for us both. But  
if you say "no" I shall abide by your  
decision.

She turns and looks at him as if her life were on the line.

DANIEL

Young Custer is special after all. No  
man could be made a general at 23  
without influence unless there was  
something in him as a man and a  
soldier. He told me he wants to write  
to me, and I agreed.

LIBBIE

Oh, thank you, Father!

She sets down the vase and hugs him.

EXT. VIRGINIA - BULL RUN - UNION CAMP - DAY

A cavalry camp of tents staked in the green Virginia fields.  
CAVALRYMEN walk about their business.

INT. AUTIE'S TENT

Autie sits at a small foldable writing table and writes a letter to Daniel.

AUTIE (V.O.)

Dear Judge Bacon, I am presently camped  
at Bull Run, Virginia, where as a  
second lieutenant I heard my first shot  
in battle.

I had hoped for a personal interview  
with you to seek this permission and to  
ask for your daughter's hand.

(MORE)

AUTIE (V.O.) (cont'd)  
 Yours respectively, Brigadier General  
 George A. Custer.

EXT. VIRGINIA - UNION ENCAMPMENT - DAY

A couple of CAVALRYMEN slog through snow past a row of tents.

INT. AUTIE'S TENT

Autie is standing and hurriedly opens a letter from Daniel.

DANIEL (V.O.)  
 Dear General Custer, full, free, and  
 personal interviews with reliable and  
 respected individuals whom you know, as  
 well as the wishes of my daughter,  
 perfectly reconcile me to yield my  
 hearty spirit to the contemplated  
 occasion.

AUTIE  
 (shouts for joy)

EXT. MONROE - PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - LATE AFTERNOON

SUPER: "FEBRUARY 9TH, 1864"

Snow blankets the ground around this modest church.

INT. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Church is FILLED to overflowing. Daniel escorts Libbie down the east aisle, while Autie escorts Rhoda down the west aisle.

Each is preceded by a bridesmaid (Nettie and pretty ANNA DARRAH, 21) and a groomsman (now Cpt. Jacob Greene and Conway Noble).

Libbie wears a rich white silk dress with deep points and extensive trail, a bertha of point lace, and a veil floated back from a bunch of orange blossoms fixed above the brow.

Reverend Boyd assisted by REVEREND D. C. MATTOON (late 50s) performs a short, traditional ceremony.

EXT. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Autie and Libbie exit the church, passing through a tunnel of drawn swords by 12 OFFICERS, 6 on each side. A CROWD OF CITIZENS watches.

Unnoticed across the street and down the block, Fan Fifield icily stares at the spectacle.

EXT. THE BACON HOME - EVENING

Light emanates from all windows.

INT. THE BACON HOME - PARLOR

Autie and Libbie's reception. The CROWD dances merrily.

EXT. U. S. MILITARY ACADEMY AT WEST POINT - DAY

Snow covers the ground. Some CADETS march to class.

Arm-in-arm, Autie and Libbie walk toward a huge Academy building. She is awed by West Point's magnificence.

AUTIE

Darling, it's been a wonderful honeymoon, and here is where I get to show off you and my rank. Custer, last in his class, is now a general and has married the prettiest girl in Monroe, Michigan!

LIBBIE

Oh, Autie, I have never seen so lovely a place in the United States!

AUTIE

Custer the dumbbell! Custer the troublemaker! They didn't consider Custer the warrior! I'm extremely proud to have graduated from West Point, but my time here was not happy for me.

Autie solemnly looks down at the walkway, as Libbie sympathetically listens.

AUTIE

I received many demerits. I had to walk long, lonely beats and was kept in solitary confinement in the guard house.

LIBBIE

I'm sorry, Autie.

AUTIE

But if I fall in battle, promise me you'll have me buried here.

LIBBIE

Oh, there won't be any need for that, dearest. You, you've come too far, and you're so young.

AUTIE

Promise me, Libbie!

LIBBIE

Yes, I promise. I'll, I'll promise you anything, darling.

AUTIE

Thank you.  
We won't stay here long. I need to get to Stevensburg, Virginia, but first we need to go to Washington to find a residence for you.

LIBBIE

Washington? Wherever you go, I want to go with you.

AUTIE

That's too dangerous. You would be more comfortable in Washington.

LIBBIE

No! I have known only a sheltered home where I've been spared all anxieties and cares.

She grasps his arm with both hands.

LIBBIE

I want us to be together for the rest of our lives.

AUTIE

What if I ask you to promise to go to Washington?

LIBBIE  
No, Autie.

EXT. VIRGINIA - CAVALRY CAMP - AFTERNOON

Snow blankets a tent city. A few SOLDIERS march.

EXT. CUSTER FARMHOUSE LIVING QUARTERS - AFTERNOON

Autie with Libbie drives an ambulance (NOTE: a boxy wood-covered wagon) to a two-story farmhouse that will serve as their living quarters and his headquarters.

The staff lives in tents in the garden, and the Michigan Cavalry Brigade is some distance away.

As the ambulance nears the farmhouse, they see Autie's attractive black cook ELIZA BROWN (mid 30s). Eliza speaks in the slave dialect of that time.

ELIZA  
Hello, General!

AUTIE  
Hello, Eliza!

Autie leaps from the ambulance and helps Libbie to the ground.

AUTIE  
Eliza, this is my wife, Libbie.

ELIZA  
Miss Libbie, I am so happy you is here.  
I ain't seen a female in weeks!

AUTIE  
I acquired Eliza as my cook at  
Amosville in Rappahannock County.  
Instead of fleeing to the north, Eliza  
is committed to see the war to the end.  
She's courageous and not disturbed by  
shell fire.

LIBBIE  
Marvelous!

AUTIE  
She's an important member of the family  
and a blessing to us.

ELIZA  
Shucks now, General.

LIBBIE  
I'm happy to meet you, Eliza. Are you married?

ELIZA  
No, Miss Libbie.

Libbie sees in the distance a muscular former slave grooming a horse.

LIBBIE  
(nodding to the man)  
Now over there is a strapping fellow.  
Do you know him?

Eliza looks in the direction and then back to Libbie.

ELIZA  
Why, Miss Libbie, he needn't think to shine up to me. He's nothing but a black African.

EXT. CUSTER FARMHOUSE LIVING QUARTERS - DAY

The snow has mostly melted. Autie leads a pony wearing a flat English saddle to the house when the door bursts open and Libbie rushes out choking. SMOKE is visible behind her and LAUGHTER comes from the house.

LIBBIE  
You rascals!

AUTIE  
(laughing)  
Libbie, what's the matter, darling?

She breathes heavily, trying to clear the smoke from her lungs.

LIBBIE  
Those Monroe boys you appointed to your staff deliberately smoked me out of the house with their cigars!

AUTIE  
Look what I brought you. If you're going to follow the cavalry, you need to learn to ride a horse. Come, I have a group ready for an exercise ride.

LIBBIE  
I need to catch my breath first.

EXT. VIRGINIA - CAVALRY CAMP - DAY

A FORMATION OF OFFICERS AND ENLISTED MEN is saddled awaiting Autie and Libbie. Among them is handsome Cpt. GEORGE YATES (22), blond with a mustache. Autie leads Libbie's pony to the rear of the officers and helps her mount it side-saddle. He then mounts his horse at the head of the formation.

AUTIE  
Forward, ho!

The horses begin walking. Libbie's pony is slow, and she gamely tries to keep up with the officers and stay mounted. The flat saddle causes her to keep sliding toward the animal's rump.

LIBBIE  
(to the pony)  
Faster! Come on! Go faster!

George Yates turns around to tease her.

GEORGE YATES  
Stop that, now. That's the way the  
infantry rides.

The officers and enlisted men LAUGH.

INT. CUSTER FARMHOUSE LIVING QUARTERS - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Preparing to go on a raid, Autie sits at a table and finishes cleaning his revolver.

Upset and frightened, Libbie stands at the opposite side of the room and eyes him with concern. Looking up from his task, he sees her demeanor.

AUTIE  
Relax, Libbie, it's only a raid.

LIBBIE  
I can't! I have this sensation of  
bewilderment and terror, and I can't  
escape it. Oh, what will your men  
think of me?

AUTIE  
Please try not to worry. It's only a  
raid, I tell you.  
(MORE)

AUTIE (cont'd)  
 Why don't you go to Washington? It's  
 more comfortable there.

LIBBIE  
 The Rebels don't shoot at you because  
 it's only a raid?

She plops her head into her hands and visibly trembles.

LIBBIE  
 I don't know what to do! Oh, God, make  
 me strong! Autie, please come back to  
 me!

He arises, quickly steps to her, and hugs her.

AUTIE  
 I will, darling. I always will. But I  
 must do this. This is my life now, and  
 we can't change it.

Autie returns to the table and holsters his revolver. He  
 steps toward the door and embraces her once more.

AUTIE  
 Goodbye, my dearest.

LIBBIE  
 Goodbye, my darling.

Autie departs out the front door, and Libbie sits at the  
 table, puts her head down, and begins to weep.

Eliza enters through the back door and pauses when she sees  
 Libbie crying. She then advances to her and puts her arms  
 around her.

ELIZA  
 Now, now, Miss Libbie. Don't you fret!  
 The General's blessed by a lucky star.  
 He don't know fear. He's just not  
 destined to fall by a Rebel bullet.

LIBBIE  
 I'm trying not to worry, but I can't  
 stop myself. I wanted us to be  
 together, but I may never see him  
 again! What shall I do, Eliza?

ELIZA  
 You should go to Washington, Miss  
 Libbie. There's nothing else you can  
 do. Nothing.

(MORE)

ELIZA (cont'd)

As much as I love having you here, this ain't no place for you. Please go.

LIBBIE

Maybe you're right, Eliza. I'm a fine example of a general's wife! The cavalry will despise me!

She returns to weeping again.

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

A picture-postcard view of the city in the summertime.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - LIBBIE'S ROOM - DAY

Libbie looks out the window at the Washington scenery and pens a letter to Autie.

LIBBIE (V.O.)

Darling Autie, Washington is crowded with strangers, and as the summer advances, they increase. All seem to be working to get something from the government.

There are gamblers, thieves, and lawless people from all over the country. I hope that after the war Washington will become a better place.

Libbie looks at a sketch lying next to the letter of Autie, herself, and a little son. She works on it a little bit, then returns to the letter.

LIBBIE (cont'd, V.O.)

I'm preparing a surprise for you from deep within my heart. Can't wait for you to see it.

I hope that now you consider me to be a good woman and worthy to be a general's wife. I pray that someday I will be a good mother, too.

EXT. VIRGINIA - UNION ENCAMPMENT - DAY

CAVALRYMEN walk about in the mud.

## INT. COMMANDING OFFICER'S TENT

Autie reports to his new commander, Major General (MG) PHILLIP SHERIDAN (33), a short, brusque man with a walrus mustache. A map of the area rests on an easel.

AUTIE  
(saluting)  
Sir, Gen. Custer reporting.

MG SHERIDAN  
(returning salute)  
Welcome back, General. Let me show you something.

Sheridan steps to the map on the easel and looks at it while he continues.

MG SHERIDAN  
I want to transform the cavalry into a prime fighting unit. The cavalry should be used to fight cavalry, not waste its time on picket or escort duty or carrying messages.

AUTIE  
I agree, sir.

MG SHERIDAN  
The superiority of the Rebel cavalry is because of its deployment as a body. From now on we're going after them. We're going to attack them at any point.

AUTIE  
Yes, sir.

Satisfied with his strategy, Sheridan turns to face Autie.

MG SHERIDAN  
Custer, you are an outstanding leader. I believe you're entitled to command a division, but the truth is, Grant is moving in and bringing his friends with him.

AUTIE  
Thank you, sir. I've always believed it's better to shout, "Come on, boys" than "Go in, boys." I will be honored to continue leading my Wolverines.

EXT. VIRGINIA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

SUPER: "YELLOW TAVERN, VIRGINIA - MAY 9TH, 1864"

The CONFEDERATES face off against Autie's MICHIGAN CAVALRY BRIGADE.

Brandishing his sword, Autie is in front of the mounted brigade ready to charge the Rebel lines. At each command, he raises his sword.

AUTIE  
Forward, ho!

Autie and the brigade advance at a walk.

AUTIE  
Trot, ho!

They accelerate to a trot.

AUTIE  
Gallop, ho!

They accelerate to a gallop.

AUTIE  
Charge! Come on, you Wolverines!

Autie points his sword ahead and the BUGLER SOUNDS the charge.

EXT. THE CONFEDERATE LINES

Gen. J. E. B. STUART (31), stout with heavy beard and mustache, rides up to the firing line to observe the action.

INTERCUT AS NEEDED - CONFEDERATE LINES AND MICHIGAN CAVALRY

The Rebels FIRE at the charging cavalry, led by Autie. During the charge many cavalrymen are shot from their horses.

Autie sees puffs of smoke emanate from the Rebel lines as they shoot at him and his cavalry.

END INTERCUT

MICHIGAN CAVALRY

Private (Pvt.) JOHN A. HUFF's (20) horse is shot from under him.

INTERCUT AS NEEDED - CONFEDERATE LINES AND PVT. HUFF

While the Rebels are SHOOTING, they don't see that Huff crawls forward to a fence.

END INTERCUT

Pvt. Huff spots Stuart sitting on his horse only 30 feet away. He aims his revolver and FIRES, hitting Stuart in the side. Stuart's shocked AIDES carry him away.

INT. AUTIE'S TENT - DAY

Autie sits at his little table at the front of his tent and writes to Libbie. The ambrotype of her lies on the table.

AUTIE (V.O.)

My little darling, I could devote this letter to telling you about the shooting of Gen. Stuart by one of my men, but let me just say that your boy general did not suffer a scratch. I have a deep conviction that my destiny is governed by the Almighty, a belief that dispels all of my fears in battle.

Autie picks up the ambrotype and gazes at it for a few beats.

AUTIE (V.O.)

I never loved my Gypsy as I do now. My love almost makes me wish I was out of the Army so that nothing could separate me from my more-than- life dear girl.

Through the opening of the tent, he watches a FORMATION OF CAVALRY pass about 50 yards away.

AUTIE (V.O.)

If I seek glory in battle, it is only to leave you a name which will be a source of pride to you in the after life. If I fall, your name will be the last word I utter and your memory the last I cherish, and my final wish will be for my little one.

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE - DAY

An omnibus with a captured Confederate flag hanging from each window drives Autie and Libbie up Pennsylvania Avenue to the roar of the CHEERING SPECTATORS.

INT. SECRETARY OF WAR'S OFFICE - DAY

SUPER: "SECRETARY OF WAR EDWIN STANTON'S OFFICE - OCTOBER 24TH, 1864"

EDWIN STANTON (49), a portly with a large beard, speaks to a small AUDIENCE. Beside him are Autie and MEMBERS OF AUTIE'S STAFF including Cpt. George Yates and now Major Jacob Greene.

Libbie and other WIVES, SOLDIERS, and SENIOR OFFICERS are in the audience. These officers appear more impassive than celebratory. There is a SOLDIER STANDING NEXT TO LIBBIE.

EDWIN STANTON

Gentlemen, to show you how good  
generals and good men work together, I  
have appointed your commander, Custer,  
Brevet Major General.

Stanton turns to Autie and shakes his hand.

EDWIN STANTON

General, a gallant officer always makes  
gallant soldiers.

The crowd cheers and applauds. The senior officers in the audience merely clap politely.

SOLDIER STANDING NEXT TO LIBBIE

(loudly)

The Michigan Brigade wouldn't be worth  
a cent if it wasn't for him!

Everyone laughs and Autie bows his head in embarrassment.

Afterward, the crowd begins to disperse, and Autie and Libbie have a moment alone.

LIBBIE

My intuition tells me some of these  
officers are jealous.

AUTIE

Naw, they're all good professionals.

LIBBIE

Autie, I must say, you are too  
accepting of people who someday might  
become your enemies.

AUTIE

I try to live by two creeds: don't cry  
over spilt milk and don't hold a  
grudge.

She looks at him with a mixture of admiration and amazement.

EXT. WEST VIRGINIA - TRAIN STATION - DAY

A sign identifies the station as "Martinsburg." On the platform, Autie waits for Libbie. Carrying a handbag, she steps off the train and they embrace and then stroll away.

LIBBIE

Darling, while attending a church service I prayed that I might be given a child, and Autie, if God gives me children I shall say to them: "Emulate your Father! I can give you no higher earthly example."

She beams at him.

LIBBIE

But then I can say to them: "Emulate him in his Christian as well as his moral character," can I not?

Autie ignores the inquiry and reacts a bit uneasily.

LIBBIE

Oh, Autie, I can hardly wait for this wretched war to end! I want to raise a little boy and girl in a time of peace.

She fishes the sketch of Autie, herself, and their son out of her handbag and hands it to him.

LIBBIE

Here is my surprise. Do you like it? That's us and our son. I'm so glad I studied art at the Seminary. Maybe I can continue to study art while we raise our family.

Autie nods his approval of the sketch and hands it back to her. Still uncomfortable, he changes the subject.

AUTIE

I have some good news. My brother Tom is now a second lieutenant and soon will be joining my staff.

LIBBIE

That's great! We'll be a little family!

AUTIE

The Third Cavalry Division camp is about 40 miles from here. We'll leave tomorrow morning.

EXT. THIRD CAVALRY DIVISION CAMP - DAY

Autie and Libbie, in an ambulance driven by him, arrive at camp, a tent city in the lush West Virginia countryside. CAVALRYMEN walk about.

EXT. AUTIE'S TENT

The ambulance proceeds to two large tents joined together at the ends that compose Autie's quarters.

AUTIE

Here's home for awhile, until you return to Washington.

INT. AUTIE'S TENT - DAY

Near the entrance, Autie sits at his table reviewing paperwork, and Libbie sits behind him against the side of the tent reading a book.

TOM CUSTER (19), lean, tall, broad shouldered, enters to report for duty. He is wearing his sabre and is strictly formal.

TOM

(saluting)

Sir, Lt. Thomas Custer reporting for duty!

Autie rises and responds equally as formally.

AUTIE

(returning salute)

Welcome to the Third Cavalry Division, Lieutenant. I am assigning you to be one of my aides.

TOM

I will be honored to fulfill this duty, sir.

AUTIE

I have no more orders, Lieutenant, for the present.

Tom flings off his cap and unbuckles his sabre.

TOM

Autie, you overblown martinet! It's great to see you again!

AUTIE

Tom, you half-baked tin soldier! I've waited a long time for this!

As Libbie tries to contain her laughter, the two brothers engage in a vigorous scuffle, and then Tom halts, looking at Libbie.

TOM

Who's this old lady sitting here?

A PICKET OFFICER arrives and stands in the tent opening.

PICKET OFFICER

Sir! All pickets have been placed.

The two brothers return to their previous formal demeanor.

AUTIE

Thank you. Dismissed.

The officer departs and Libbie LAUGHS out loud.

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

A picture-postcard view of the city in autumn.

INT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - BOARDING HOUSE - LIBBIE'S ROOM - DAY

Libbie sews a personal guidon with help from her cousin, comely and slender REBECCA RICHMOND (late 20s).

The guidon is 3 x 6.5 feet, swallow-tailed, and made from a double layer of silk. It has a red bar over a blue bar, and the outer edge is bound with a heavy silk cord. She stitches white crossed sabres in the center of the field on each side.

LIBBIE

Thanks so much for helping me, Rebecca.

REBECCA

My pleasure, Libbie.

LIBBIE

Autie shared with me a letter he received from the Third Division's chaplain. The chaplain prayed that he would be safely kept by the Power that has so strangely shielded him in the past.

REBECCA

Very good! I do hope Autie is kept safe. I worry that he is always in the front of his men. And he wears that red scarf that makes him such an easy...

Her voice trails off.

LIBBIE

He charges the rebel lines as if he has a promise from God that he won't be shot.

Libbie shakes her head at the floor in disapproval.

LIBBIE

I wrote to him telling him not to expose himself so much in battle. "Just do your duty and don't rush out so daringly." I told him we must die together. Better the humblest life together than the loftiest divided.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - LIBBIE'S ROOM - MORNING

CANNONS FIRE o.s. Libbie jolts awake. She quickly rises, opens her window, and sees PEOPLE shouting.

VOICES IN THE CROWD

The war's over!  
Lee's surrendered!  
Hallelujah!

LIBBIE'S ROOM - LATER THAT DAY

Libbie hears a KNOCK at her door and opens it. SENATOR CHANDLER'S MESSENGER (20) greets her.

SENATOR CHANDLER'S MESSENGER

Hello, Mrs. Custer. I'm from Senator Chandler's office.

LIBBIE

How do you do?

SENATOR CHANDLER'S MESSENGER

I'm here to extend to you an invitation to join the Committee on the Conduct of the War and their wives to go to Richmond aboard the president's gunboat, the *Baltimore*.

LIBBIE

Why, thank you. I would be delighted to go.

SENATOR CHANDLER'S MESSENGER

You may be pleased to know that your heroic husband's gallantry has earned that your accommodation will be the former Confederate White House.

LIBBIE

My goodness!

EXT - RICHMOND, VIRGINIA - MORNING

A mist covers smoldering ruins. Quiet. Mostly abandoned.

EXT. THE CONFEDERATE WHITE HOUSE - MORNING

A picture-postcard view of this stately mansion that housed Jefferson Davis.

INT. BEDROOM

Libbie is asleep in Mrs. Jefferson Davis' bed.

Carrying a small writing table, Autie quietly opens the door and tiptoes to her bed. He looks very tired, his face thin, drawn, and sun-reddened.

AUTIE

Darling.

Libbie awakens.

LIBBIE

Autie! Oh, Autie!

He sets down the table and pulls her tightly into his arms.

AUTIE

A girl from Monroe in Mrs. Jefferson Davis' bed! My, my.  
Look what I have here, Libbie. Gen. Sheridan bought it for us. Read the accompanying note addressed to you.

He hands her the note, which she reads aloud.

LIBBIE

(reading the note)

"My Dear Madam, I respectfully present to you the small writing table on which the conditions for the surrender of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia were written by Lt. Gen. Grant, and permit me to say, Madam, that there is scarcely an individual in our service who has contributed more to bring about this desirable result than your very gallant husband.  
Very Respectfully, Phil H. Sheridan,  
Major General."  
Autie, my general, my hero, my husband!

They embrace again.

EXT. THE BACON HOME - DAY

SUPER: "MAY 1866"

INT. JUDGE DANIEL BACON'S BEDROOM

Daniel (68) lies in his bed, dehydrated, eyes sunken with dark rings. His breathing is labored. On either side of the bed are Rhoda (56) and a distraught Libbie (27). Libbie holds his hand.

DANIEL

Libbie, is there any good news about Autie seeking employment in Washington and New York?

LIBBIE

Nothing definite yet, Father. We are still being careful with our expenditures now that he's returned to his rank of captain.

Daniel wheezes. Rhoda hands him a glass of water from the end table.

RHODA

Here, dear. You must drink plenty of water.

Daniel takes a sip of water and gives the glass back to Rhoda.

DANIEL

Libbie, I want you to know that I am very happy with your marriage. You married entirely to your satisfaction and to mine.

Daniel pauses to catch his breath.

DANIEL

Ignore yourself and accept Autie's military career. Put no obstacles in the way to the fulfillment of his destiny. Autie was born a soldier, and it is better even if you sorrow your life long that he die as he would wish, a soldier.

LIBBIE

Yes, dear Father.

LIBBIE'S BEDROOM - WEEKS LATER - EVENING

Libbie and Autie are lying in bed together with her head on his chest and his arm around her.

LIBBIE

Darling, you've been unusually attentive since Father's death. You're so indulgent and far more devoted than when we first were married!

AUTIE

(grunts an acknowledgement)

LIBBIE

Mother Rhoda has informed me that she would like to live with her nephew near Tecumseh. May God bless her.

AUTIE

(grunts an acknowledgement)

LIBBIE

Do you expect to receive offers of employment soon?

AUTIE

Libbie.

(beat)

Libbie, Gen. Sheridan has written a letter to Secretary Stanton making application for my appointment as a lieutenant colonel in the reorganized Army.

She is thunderstruck.

LIBBIE

What? The military? What about our son and daughter? Our peaceful life?

AUTIE

I was treated very kindly and respectfully in New York and Washington. There was even talk about entering politics. But I've learned where my heart is.

She begins to sob.

LIBBIE

No! Autie, I don't want you to be a soldier in combat again, ever.

AUTIE

It's my destiny. That's why I couldn't find employment.

LIBBIE

My parents and all of my brothers and sisters are dead! Do you think I enjoy playing the survivor? I want a family again! Is that too much for a wife to ask?

AUTIE

Libbie, I'm sorry, but I would be willing, yes, glad, to see a battle every day of my life! It's my destiny!

LIBBIE

It's more thrilling than anything from Monroe.

Autie hugs his emotionally crushed wife tightly.

INT. SECRETARY OF WAR EDWIN STANTON'S OFFICE - DAY

Autie in civilian clothes enters and is greeted by Stanton.

EDWIN STANTON

Gen. Custer! How are you, sir?

AUTIE

I'm doing well, Mr. Secretary.

EDWIN STANTON

And how is Libbie? Is she as pretty as ever?

AUTIE

She's still improving.

EDWIN STANTON

Good, good. General, ah, Captain, I was pleased to receive Gen. Sheridan's letter. How would you like a commission as a lieutenant colonel in the Seventh Regiment of Cavalry out west? It's a new regiment authorized by the Army Act passed this year.

AUTIE

I would be honored, sir. But tell me, what will this regiment do?

EDWIN STANTON

It will ensure the Indians don't molest the settlers and railroads. We can't have them interfering with progress. I'll write the order now.

Stanton sits at his desk to write the order.

AUTIE

I'm sure they can't hold a candle to Lee, Jackson, and Stuart, but it might prove interesting. Mr. Secretary, I would like to request the transfer of my brother, 2nd Lt. Tom, to this unit.

EDWIN STANTON

Certainly, certainly! I will not only transfer him, but I will promote him to first lieutenant.

AUTIE

Thank you very much, sir.

EDWIN STANTON

Andrew Smith will be the commanding colonel of the Seventh. The regimental ranks have been fully recruited. There will be four West Pointers on the staff. That should make you happy.

AUTIE

Indeed, sir.

EDWIN STANTON

I'm sure the Seventh will be proud to have your leadership.

AUTIE

Thank you, sir. I shall not disappoint them.

EXT. KANSAS - ARMY ENCAMPMENT - DAY

SUPER: "FORT HAYS, KANSAS - MAY 18th, 1867"

The Fort is a huge tent city on the prairie with trees nearby. The prairie grass sways in the breeze. TWO SOLDIERS drinking out of mess cups sit gossiping by a fire. ANOTHER SOLDIER leads a horse by them.

Libbie, Anna Darrah, and Eliza arrive in a wagon driven by a SOLDIER. Autie greets them enthusiastically.

AUTIE

Ladies! Welcome to Fort Hays! It's great to see you!

The smiling women alight from the wagon, and Autie and Libbie embrace. The wagon with their bags continues toward the Seventh Cavalry camp.

AUTIE

How's my little Gypsy?

LIBBIE

Your little Gypsy is always good when she's with you!  
Autie, I've resolved to have no wants. I will not be a burden to you or the cavalry. I just want to be with you wherever you go.

AUTIE

Excellent! You are a remarkable little wife! After we receive supplies, I will be departing for the field. Gen.

(MORE)

AUTIE (cont'd)  
 Sherman wants us to clear the land of  
 hostile Indians between the Platte and  
 Arkansas Rivers.

Libbie looks crestfallen. Autie doesn't notice, but Eliza does.

EXT. FORT HAYS - BIG CREEK - EARLY MORNING

The Seventh Cavalry camp is at Big Creek, a hundred yards from Fort Hays. A SQUAD OF CAVALRYMEN marches in a drill.

The women and Autie reside in tents on a pleasant place near a stream two hundred yards from the rear of the camp.

Autie's huge tent consists of a front section that serves as a sitting room and a rear separate bedroom section. The opening of the front section is supported by cut tree trunks. Anna and Eliza stay nearby in the kitchen tent.

Reveille SOUNDS at 5 a.m. The 350 SEVENTH CAVALRY TROOPERS leave their tents to groom their horses and then have breakfast.

INT. AUTIE'S TENT

Autie is dressed, but Libbie is still sleeping. He squats by her bed.

AUTIE  
 Libbie.

She awakens and opens her eyes, barely.

AUTIE  
 Darling, I'm not going with them this morning. I don't like the location of these tents. They're too close to the water. I'm going to move you to higher ground.

LIBBIE  
 Okay, dear.

EXT. BIG CREEK - LATER

The companies of the Seventh Cavalry prepare to move out. The BUGLER PLAYS "To Horse." With this the men lead their horses into line to await the next command from lean Maj. WICKLIFFE COOPER (early 30s).

WICKLIFFE COOPER  
Prepare to mount!

Each man places his left foot in the stirrup.

WICKLIFFE COOPER  
Mount!

Each man seats himself in the saddle.

The bugler PLAYS "Advance," and the troops move out in columns of four followed by 20 WAGONS.

EXT. AUTIE'S TENT - DUSK

Surrounded by a small trench, Autie's tents are now on higher ground. As Anna and Eliza watch from afar, Autie embraces Libbie and moves out to follow the trail of the troopers.

ANNA DARRAH  
I hope Autie's men don't think ill of us and of him for remaining to tend to us women.

ELIZA  
No matter whether it's right or wrong, Miss Libbie's sure to side with the General.

EXT. BIG CREEK - NEXT DAY - ALMOST DUSK

Libbie and Anna are strolling around camp when they come upon Lieutenant THOMAS WEIR (29). Weir is a round-faced handsome officer with a mustache.

LIBBIE  
Lieutenant, we would like to walk outside the perimeter and take in the delicious smells of the prairie flora. Will you accompany us?

Weir smiles at the two attractive women.

THOMAS WEIR  
I would be honored, ladies.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CAMP - DUSK

The three are aimlessly walking about.

LIBBIE

This is magnificent! Thanks again for coming with us, Lieutenant. You've been very kind.

THOMAS WEIR

Mrs. Custer, I sensed you could use some cheering up, and while I'm always delighted to be with beautiful women, I must confess that I have a hidden agenda.

LIBBIE

Oh, what is that?

THOMAS WEIR

I must shoot you, preferably through the head, if we are attacked by Indians.

The women are stunned.

LIBBIE

What? In the name of God, why?

THOMAS WEIR

The General's orders. The entire command has them. He feels it's better you die quickly than by the depredations of the Indians. Speaking of which, we must return now. It's too dark to be out here.

The party nears the camp perimeter. TWO SENTRIES mistake them for Indians and each SHOTS in their direction.

THOMAS WEIR

Down! Get down flat!

All three fall flat on the ground.

THOMAS WEIR

I'm going to crawl up there and identify myself. Stay down.

LIBBIE

Yes, sir!

ANNA DARRAH

Yes, sir!

Weir crawls toward the sentries, leaving the women alone.

LIBBIE

I wanted not to be a burden to the cavalry, and now look what we've done!

EXT. AUTIE'S TENT - EVENING

Two nights later, THUNDER and LIGHTNING begin. The thunder sounds like volleys of artillery in a great battle, and the sky seems to be constantly illuminated by lightning. The WIND increases and the women's tents SHAKE violently. Anna has moved into Autie's tent.

INT. AUTIE'S TENT

Libbie and Anna huddle in the tent lighted by a lantern.

EXT. AUTIE'S TENT - LATER

The rain begins falling in sheets. The trench that surrounds the tent is unable to cope with it and overflows into the tent.

INT. AUTIE'S TENT

The lantern has been extinguished, and Libbie and Anna have fallen asleep for only a short time.

WARNING SOLDIER (O.S.)

Get up! Everybody run to high ground!  
The camp is flooding!

Libbie relights the lantern and the two women begin to hurriedly dress, standing on the flooded ground, where they AD LIB dismay at the condition of the tent.

EXT. AUTIE'S TENT

Libbie and Anna step outside, where they see by the lightning flashes that the nearby little creek is now a SEETHING TORRENT of water more than 35 feet deep and rising toward the tents.

Eliza hurries to the two women.

LIBBIE

Eliza! Thank goodness! We've got to  
get to higher ground now! Follow me!

Before they depart to the higher ground, the women hear the cries of soldiers caught in the torrent of water.

DROWNING SOLDIERS (O.S.)

Help! Help me!

EXT. BANK OF RAGING CREEK

Eliza runs to the sounds of the cries along the bank of the swollen creek.

ELIZA  
 (shouting back to the two  
 women)  
 Oh, Miss Libbie! What shall we do?  
 What shall we do?

Libbie and Anna run to Eliza and helplessly watch WRITHING FIGURES flail their arms in the torrent that engulfs them. Libbie turns and runs back to the tent.

WRITHING FIGURES  
 (Screaming)

EXT. AUTIE'S TENT

Arriving at the tent, she tries to untie a wet piece of rope from it. Eliza appears.

ELIZA  
 Miss Libbie, there's a chance for us with one man! He's caught in the branches of a tree, but I've seen his face and he's alive! He's most all of him under water, and the current is switching him about so he can't hold out much longer!

While Libbie still struggles with the rope, Eliza's eyes dart wildly in different directions, looking for something to help them.

ELIZA  
 Miss Libbie, there's my clothes line we could take, but I can't do it, I can't do it, Miss Libbie, you wouldn't have me do it, would you? For where will we get another?

For a beat, Libbie looks at her bewildered, then rushes away. Eliza follows her.

EXT. BANK OF RAGING CREEK

The two women return to Anna with the clothes line, and Eliza takes it from Libbie. After tying a loop in one end, she makes two attempts to throw the loop to within the shirtless DROWNING MAN's reach (the one caught in the tree branches).

On the third try, he grasps it and the three women pull and tug him to solid footing.

EXT. AUTIE'S TENT

The four stagger to it, and Libbie rushes in and quickly returns with a blanket and one of Autie's blue shirts. After putting on the shirt, the man looks at Eliza, embarrassed that a former slave helped save his life. He leaves without a word, while a surprised Libbie stands holding the blanket.

EXT. AUTIE'S TENT - MORNING

The rain has ceased and the water has begun to recede. The three exhausted women emerge from the tent and are shocked to see on the opposite bank the SWOLLEN CORPSE OF A SOLDIER caught in some bushes. One of his arms is raised in the air as if beckoning for help.

INT. AUTIE'S TENT - DAY

Libbie tidies up the tent after the storm's chaos.

VOICE (O.S.)

Hello. Hello in there. Mrs. Custer?

LIBBIE

Yes. Coming.

EXT. AUTIE'S TENT

Libbie steps out and sees sitting on his horse MG WINFIELD SCOTT HANCOCK (43), a slightly portly man with mustache and beard. He is all business.

MG HANCOCK

Hello, Mrs. Custer. I'm Gen. Hancock, Commander of the Department of the Missouri.

LIBBIE

Hello, General. Pleased to meet you.

MG HANCOCK

Probably not, Mrs. Custer. A military order has been issued requiring all women to return to Fort Riley.

LIBBIE

Oh, no! My husband just departed for the field! When will I see him again?

MG HANCOCK

I'm sorry, ma'am. Lt. Weir will tend to your removal and accompany you to the Fort. Good day.

He rides away leaving Libbie forlorn.

EXT. KANSAS - THE PLAINS - DAY

Autie's command has met up with a pack train to resupply them. An ORDERLY carrying mail rides up to Autie, who is on his horse.

ORDERLY

Mail for you, sir.

AUTIE

Thank you.

He quickly sorts through the few letters and spots one with no return information, only his name as addressee.

THE ENVELOPE

"General Custer"

RETURN TO SCENE

Curious, he opens it and reads.

THE LETTER

"You should return to Riley and look after your wife closer. She and Lt. Weir are becoming too attached."

RETURN TO SCENE

Autie's face is awash in anger.

EXT. KANSAS - FORT RILEY - EARLY MORNING

SUPER: "FORT RILEY, KANSAS - JULY, 1867"

The Fort consists of six magnesium limestone two-story barracks built around a parade ground of nearly 600 square feet. Situated on a high plateau at the union of the Republican and Smoky Hill rivers, it provides a beautiful view of an endless sea of prairie grasslands.

The plateau is barren of all trees. The cottonwoods lacing the rivers below provide the only evidence of green foliage.

TWO SQUADS OF SOLDIERS practice rifle drills.

Autie, wearing his sabre, finds a very happy and smiling Lt. Weir walking between two barracks. He stealthily approaches him from the rear and then throws him to the ground. He collars him and pulls him up to his knees, facing Autie.

Autie draws his revolver, cocks it, and rests the end of the barrel on the frightened lieutenant's nose.

AUTIE

You fancy my wife, college boy?

THOMAS WEIR

No, sir! I, I don't know what this is about!

AUTIE

I heard you are quite fond of her! And that I should blow your conniving head off!

THOMAS WEIR

No, sir! I've done nothing wrong, General! I swear it! I swear!

Autie uncocks and reholsters the revolver.

AUTIE

Very well. I will believe you, this time.  
I don't hold grudges, Lieutenant.  
Nothing more will be said of this.

THOMAS WEIR

Yes, sir! Thank you, sir!

INT. LIBBIE'S QUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

Libbie is in bed on the second floor with a contented smile on her face, then she frowns as she begins dreaming a bad dream.

EXT. THE PLAINS - DAY (LIBBIE'S DREAM)

She dreams Autie is with a small detachment of CAVALRYMEN. All of them are dead or wounded.

INDIAN WARRIORS surround them WHOOPING their war cries. Hatless Autie also is wounded, lying helplessly on the ground.

He looks up at an Indian BRAVE, whose face is contorted with cruelty. The brave grabs Autie by the hair and raises a bloody knife to scalp him alive. The knife is about to fall.

INT. LIBBIE'S QUARTERS (REAL TIME)

Libbie is awakened by the clanking of a sabre against wood and the quick, springing steps of feet climbing stairs. Shaken, she gets out of bed to approach the door when Autie bursts through it. She gasps and falls into his arms.

AUTIE

Darling, I'm taking you back to my command at Fort Wallace. Get packing!

He notices her disturbed countenance.

AUTIE

What's the matter?

LIBBIE

Nothing, nothing. Oh Autie, dear Autie! I had no idea when I would ever see you again! We need to start a family!

AUTIE

Now? Okay, my little anaconda, I know we have some catching up to do! I've sorely missed my "morning ride." I firmly believe I require one every morning before breakfast!

A big grin from Libbie as she regains her composure.

EXT. LIBBIE'S QUARTERS - LATER

Autie and a smiling, contented Libbie load an ambulance with Libbie's trunk. A FORT RILEY ORDERLY approaches with a telegram.

FORT RILEY ORDERLY

(saluting)

Telegram, sir.

AUTIE

(returns salute)

Thank you.

The orderly departs, and Autie reads the telegram and is stunned.

AUTIE  
 (to Libbie)  
 It's from Colonel Smith. I must report  
 to Fort Harker immediately.

Libbie's contentment vanishes abruptly.

LIBBIE  
 Is that farther from danger? And am I  
 coming, too?

AUTIE  
 Definitely you are coming.

EXT. KANSAS - FORT HARKER - DAY

Autie's detachment of 76 TROOPERS and an ambulance carrying Libbie sitting next to the TEAMSTER arrive at Fort Harker, a fort similar to Fort Riley but much smaller. A SMALL GROUP OF SOLDIERS eyes pretty Libbie.

Autie reports to Colonel (Col.) ANDREW SMITH (early 40s).

INT. COL. ANDREW SMITH'S OFFICE

AUTIE  
 (saluting)  
 Sir, Col. Custer reporting.

ANDREW SMITH  
 (returning salute)  
 Hello, Colonel. I regret that I must  
 place you under arrest by order of Gen.  
 Hancock.

AUTIE  
 What? What for?

ANDREW SMITH  
 For absenting yourself from your  
 command at Fort Wallace without  
 authority. Your court-martial will be  
 held at Fort Leavenworth.

AUTIE  
 I was on military business!

Smith ignores the comment, knowing he cannot intervene.

ANDREW SMITH

There have been instances of cholera in this area, so I am giving you permission to await the court-martial at Fort Riley. I'm sure Libbie will be pleased at that.

AUTIE

But...yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

EXT. FORT HARKER - MOMENTS LATER

Autie meets the waiting Libbie sitting in the ambulance.

LIBBIE

Do we have good quarters?

AUTIE

Darling, we are returning to Fort Riley.

LIBBIE

What? What kind of screwball Army is this?

AUTIE

We're going there to await my court-martial at Fort Leavenworth. I will be court-martialed for going to Riley to see you.

LIBBIE

Oh, dear! Autie, you risked your career to see me?

AUTIE

Yes, my little wife.

Deeply touched, she falls into his arms and they embrace as he gently lowers her to the ground.

EXT. KANSAS - ARMY FORT - DAY

SUPER: "FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS - OCTOBER 11TH, 1867"

A large fort on the bluffs of the Missouri River. It has sizeable wooden barracks. TWO SQUADS OF SOLDIERS smartly practice marching drills.

INT. COURT ROOM

Autie stands before OFFICERS OF HIS COURT-MARTIAL, including the PRESIDING COLONEL.

PRESIDING COLONEL  
(reading from a sheet of  
paper)

"Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer,  
this court finds you guilty of all  
charges.

Guilty of the charge of leaving your  
command at Fort Wallace without  
authorization from your commanding  
officer.

Guilty of conduct to the prejudice of  
good order and military discipline.

Guilty of using public vehicles for  
private business.

You are suspended from rank and pay for  
one year."

INT. OUTSIDE THE COURT ROOM CHAMBERS

Autie and Libbie talk.

LIBBIE

Darling, this is wonderful! We will  
have a whole year together away from  
danger. We'll return home to Monroe.  
We'll have our son! I hope we never  
have to live apart again!

Autie looks bitter.

AUTIE

Yes, indeed.

SUPER: "MONROE - SPRING 1868"

MONTAGE - DAY:

- 1) Autie and Libbie enjoying hunting.
- 2) The couple fishing.
- 3) The couple horseback riding.

EXT. MONROE COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The pair joyfully races horses side by side. Libbie rides side-saddle as usual. Autie reaches over and with one arm scoops her petite body off her mount and onto his.

The couple clings to one another as the two horses slow and plod along side by side.

LIBBIE

Autie, I'm so happy. I wish you could stay suspended for a very long time!

AUTIE

(laughs)

Remember that beside the suspension from duty I'm not getting paid.

LIBBIE

You could try New York and Washington again! Now you have more time. Maybe you could teach at West Point. We could find a nice house near the Academy and raise a family!

Autie sadly stares at the ground.

LIBBIE

I'm sorry, Autie. That wouldn't be real soldiering, would it? That wouldn't be fighting.

AUTIE

I love you, Libbie. You are my first, my present, and my last love. All other women have been but mere toys compared to you.

Libbie begins to tear up.

LIBBIE

I love you so much. I can't love as I do without my life blending with yours. A wife should be part of her husband, a life within a life.

Autie holds her even more tightly and kisses her passionately.

EXT. THE WESTERN PLAINS - DAY

A Union Pacific Railroad freight train approaches a barricade of railroad ties piled upon the track. It CRASHES through them but becomes DERAILED.

EXT. TRAIN WRECK

INDIANS emerge from the surrounding tall grass and drag the FIREMAN and ENGINEER from the engine, SHOOTING and SCALPING them.

The Indians loot the boxcars, finding tobacco, flour, hats, boots, shoes, saddles, ribbons, and bales of calico. They attach the ribbons and calico to their horses and gallop around so they trail behind them. They WHOOP in delight.

The Indians light the boxcars on fire and dance a scalp dance. During the dance they throw the bodies of the fireman and engineer into the flames.

INT. MONROE - PRIVATE RESIDENCE - DUSK

Autie and Libbie are having a quiet dinner with friends, a HUSBAND and WIFE.

AUTIE

This dinner is excellent!

LIBBIE

Yes, it is.

WIFE

Thank you very much.

They hear a KNOCK at the front door.

HUSBAND

Excuse me.

He answers the door and brings back a telegram.

HUSBAND

It's a telegram for you, Autie.

AUTIE

Thank you.

He quickly reads it to himself.

AUTIE

They want me back! They can't contain the Indians without me! You see, you can't fight them like the Confederates. Standard military tactics don't work. You can't use reconnaissance.

The husband and wife listen enthralled.

AUTIE

When you find Indians, the real task is to cut off any avenues of escape, and then you've got to attack immediately, or else they will scatter to the wind!

Libbie sits quietly as tears form in her eyes.

EXT. INDIAN TERRITORY - DAWN

The camp of Cheyenne Chief BLACK KETTLE, consisting of about 50 lodges, rests on the southern bank of the Washita River. The river is narrow, shallow, and slushy because of the bitter cold. Snow covers the ground. The Chief's lodge flies a white cloth from one pole.

EXT. SHALLOW HILLS TO THE NORTHWEST

The mounted Seventh Cavalry led by Autie overlooks the camp from nearby hills. Next to him is Cpt. L. M. HAMILTON (early 20s).

L. M. HAMILTON

Why is there a white cloth on one of the lodges? Is that a peace sign?

AUTIE

I don't know.

EXT. BLACK KETTLE'S CAMP

An OLD SQUAW exits her lodge, happens to look across the river, and sees the cavalry. She SCREAMS.

The Cheyenne DOUBLE WOLF (30s) rushes out of his lodge with revolver in hand. The old squaw looks at him and points to the troopers. Double Wolf FIRES his revolver into the air to alert the camp.

EXT. SHALLOW HILLS TO THE NORTHWEST

AUTIE

Charge!

The cavalry gallops down the shallow hill and quickly crosses the narrow river. The BUGLER cannot play because his instrument is frozen.

EXT. BLACK KETTLE'S CAMP

Autie's troopers storm into the camp. Chief Black Kettle (40s) and his SQUAW (30s) hurriedly mount his horse with her scrunching down behind him. They gallop into the river away from the cavalry, but a BULLET hits him in the back and he falls as his squaw tries to hold him up. After he falls, his squaw is SHOT in the back and falls.

The Indians are FIRING back now, and Cpt. Hamilton is SHOT from his horse during the combat.

INTERCUT AS NEEDED - CAVALRY AND INDIANS

The cavalry is SHOOTING many Indians. The latter valiantly return FIRE but are soon overwhelmed.

END INTERCUT

EXT. BLACK KETTLE'S CAMP - LATER

The Indians have been defeated. A SERGEANT rides up to Autie, who is surveying the situation.

SERGEANT

Sir, hostilities have ceased. We've licked 'em!

AUTIE

Slaughter all the animals and burn everything else.

EXT. FORT HAYS - BIG CREEK - DAY

SUPER: "FORT HAYS, KANSAS"

The Seventh Cavalry is once again camped at Big Creek. Autie addresses a FORMATION OF HIS OFFICERS AND SENIOR NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS.

AUTIE

Gentlemen, I returned to this command at the request of the Headquarters of the Department of the Missouri. I'm proud to report that our victory over the Cheyenne at the Washita was the most complete and successful of all Indian battles.

The formation mutters self-congratulations.

AUTIE

Now, I want you men to know that I intend to carry out my own views according to my best judgment, even if I know I will be opposed by the entire command.

The men look at him uneasily.

AUTIE

I am determined to do exactly what I believe to be my duty, regardless of friends or foes. I have no doubt that one complete victory over any hostile tribe will practically end the Indian war.

The men mutter approval.

AUTIE

I am not afraid of finding more hostiles than we can handle. My fear is that we won't find half enough. There are not enough Indians in the country to whip the Seventh Cavalry! I only ask for one decisive opportunity to fight them.

EXT. BIG CREEK - DAY

Tom Custer escorts Libbie to his tent.

TOM

Wait till you see these things, Old Lady. You've never seen anything like them!

LIBBIE

I'm sure, Tom.

## INT. TOM CUSTER'S TENT

The pair enters the tent, and Tom proudly shows his Indian trophies. There are scalplocks everywhere, even a warrior's jacket trimmed with them. Also displayed are buffalo-hide shields, bearclaw necklaces, warbonnets, and weapons.

TOM

Just look at these! Do you like these scalplocks? Look here. I even have a warrior's jacket trimmed with them. I've got shields, warbonnets, bearclaw necklaces.

LIBBIE

(politely interested)  
Very impressive, Tom.

TOM

Best of all, though, is my rattlesnake collection in these hardtack boxes! Let me show you these beauties!

LIBBIE

Um, no thank you.

TOM

Come on, get close to nature!

LIBBIE

I really don't --

TOM

Yes, you do! I've got some really good ones to show you this time. Captured them just for you.

Tom opens a hardtack box, carefully and skillfully removes a live rattlesnake, and holds it out to her.

Libbie shivers as he opens boxes and holds out snakes to her. Tom AD LIBS appreciation for each one. Then he opens his last box--it's empty!

TOM

Hey! I don't understand.

(beat)

Oh, wait. I get it! The big snake ate the smaller snake!

LIBBIE

Why don't you put all the snakes in one box? You know how animals crave companionship.

TOM

Yeah.

(beat)

Hey! If you think, Old Lady, that after all the trouble I've been to, to catch these snakes to show you, that I'm going to make it easy for them to eat each other up, you are mightily mistaken!

LIBBIE

How thoughtless of me.

EXT. BIG CREEK - SUNSET

Libbie is out for a stroll and sees Eliza sitting alone staring out into the prairie. She sits beside her.

LIBBIE

Hello, Eliza. How are you?

ELIZA

I sure am lonely, Miss Libbie. You always got the General, but I hain't got nobody, and there ain't no picnics nor church sociables nor no buryings out here.

Libbie puts her arm around her.

LIBBIE

I understand the loneliness out here, Eliza. I have a great admiration for women of the plains.

She looks out at the plains.

LIBBIE

I wonder if the men who pushed forward so bravely in search of a new home could have done so without the encouragement and support of their wives.

ELIZA

Is you happy here, Miss Libbie?

LIBBIE

I'm always happy being with the General.

ELIZA

You don't mind being way out here with the cavalry?

LIBBIE

Eliza, whatever the hardships and dangers military wives face being with their husbands, it is much harder to be left behind, a prey to all the horrors of imagining what may be happening to one we love.

Libbie stares at the horizon.

LIBBIE

You slowly eat your heart out with anxiety, and to endure such suspense is simply the hardest of all trials that come to the soldier's wife.

ELIZA

Is you so scared for the General like you was during the war?

Libbie drops her head, and Eliza puts her arm around her. The women stare at the vast emptiness of the plains. On the brink of sobbing, Libbie's eyes are tearful. Wind is INCREASING, becoming AUDIBLE, and the grass bends in it. Horizon seems a thousand miles away. The setting sun's glow paints a grand picture of desolation and loneliness.

EXT. AUTIE'S TENT - DAY

Tom and Libbie are relaxing in foldable chairs at the entrance to the tent.

LIBBIE

When Autie returns, I need to tell him we must let Eliza go to Fort Leavenworth. She's become terribly lonely. She needs to find a man.

TOM CUSTER

(chuckles)

Alright.

Holding new orders in his hand and unseen by the pair, Autie approaches the tent. He sees them relaxing, grins, and sneaks up on them.

Suddenly, he springs. He grabs Libbie by the waist, knocking the chair over, and swings her around in the air.

Then he sets her on the ground and begins to dance around her in a fashion similar to that of an Indian dancing around his bound victim, interspersed with howls of jubilation.

Tom and Libbie laugh.

AUTIE

We're going to the Dakota Territory!  
Now the Northern Pacific Railroad needs  
the Seventh Cavalry's protection from  
the Sioux!

Libbie's joyful expression turns to one of apprehension.

EXT. BANK OF THE CREEK - DAY

Libbie ambles solemnly along a bank. From a distance, Autie sees her and hurries to her.

AUTIE

Hello, darling. Anything wrong?

LIBBIE

No. It's amusing actually. When we were in Monroe, I thought I was so close to us settling down, perhaps at West Point, but now we're moving farther and farther away and deeper into danger.

AUTIE

That's what soldiers do.

LIBBIE

Once they've established their skill and bravery, they also teach other soldiers.

AUTIE

Libbie --

LIBBIE

I know. A battle every day of your life. But I just...I just will never forget that Cpt. Hamilton was riding close to you when he was killed at the Washita.

AUTIE

He didn't have a lucky star.

LIBBIE

He should have. He was the grandson of Alexander Hamilton.

AUTIE

Libbie --

He quickly realizes he has no good reply, so he just embraces her tightly.

EXT. DAKOTA TERRITORY - ARMY FORT - DAY

SUPER: "FORT ABRAHAM LINCOLN - 1873"

The end of fall is snowy. Lincoln is a large fort of principally wood-frame buildings on the west bank of the Missouri River. Tents are present for auxiliary personnel.

EXT. AUTIE'S QUARTERS

The quarters are a wood-frame two-story house with front porch. Autie and Libbie are in an ambulance driven by Tom.

As it approaches the quarters, the Seventh Cavalry REGIMENTAL BAND PLAYS "Home Sweet Home" followed by "Garry Owen." Many INHABITANTS OF THE GARRISON are there to greet them with cheers.

INT. AUTIE'S QUARTERS - STUDY - EVENING

The study is fully furnished with a large desk and Autie's wall-mounted mementos of stuffed animals, guns, Indian paraphernalia, and photographs. Above the desk are framed PHOTOGRAPHS of Autie (left) and Phil Sheridan (right).

Autie leans back in his chair at his desk and admires his hunting trophies and pictures on the walls. In a large chair on the other side of the desk, Libbie reads a book.

AUTIE

Ah, Libbie, I do so love life. I am so blessed! I have my darling Sunbeam. I have my horses and the finest cavalry regiment in the Army. I must be the happiest man on earth!

Libbie puts down her book and grins.

LIBBIE

I'm pleased I outranked the horses, and I'm so glad you're happy, darling.

(MORE)

LIBBIE (cont'd)

But are you worried about the Indian situation out here?

AUTIE

It isn't good. Running Antelope and other Sioux chiefs have reported how they are being cheated by dishonest Indian agents out of government food due their people, not to mention their lands.

Autie sits up now, becoming more interested in the conversation.

AUTIE

The success of the reservation system depends on the government keeping its promises. The Indians have a strong attachment to the land that whites neither feel nor respect.

LIBBIE

So what? They're only savages. The depredations they do are too horrible to think about.

AUTIE

You know, if I were an Indian, I would resist with the same determination.

Libbie arises from her chair and sinks into Autie's lap and his embrace.

LIBBIE

I hope you would be more honorable. Every day I think about your glory. Now if you make no mistakes, you're going on to more honors and greatness than you dreamed of a few years ago.

AUTIE

Yes, darling. I'm in charge of the Middle District of the Department of Dakota. I'm commandant of Fort Lincoln with companies of cavalry and infantry. Could New York or Washington offer this?

INT. AUTIE'S QUARTERS - DOUBLE PARLOR - EVENING

SUPER: "JULY 1875"

In the double parlor (32 feet long with a bay window) gathered in chairs near the Custers' rented piano are average-looking BOSTON CUSTER (26), the youngest Custer son; and boyish-looking HARRY ARMSTRONG REED (17), Autie's nephew.

Also in attendance are pretty blond MAGGIE CALHOUN (23), Autie's only sister; and athletically built Lt. WINFIELD EDGERLY (late 20s).

Next to him is slender LEONARD SWETT (mid 30s), a civilian; pretty NELLIE WADSWORTH (early 20s) of Monroe; now Cpt. Tom Custer (30), who is seated next to Libbie (33); and plain-looking EMMA WATSON (early 20s) of Monroe. The officers are dressed in their uniforms.

Emma's undistinguished-looking sister EMILY WATSON (early 20s) plays the piano while Autie (35) turns the music pages for her. Everyone is having a gay time.

Emily's song ends, and she takes a break while the others mingle.

LEONARD SWETT

(to Edgerly)

Lieutenant, how do you feel about the Seventh not seeing much action this year?

WINFIELD EDGERLY

That is how Army life in the West goes, Leonard. We expect nothing. The government creates policy and the Army obeys orders.

LEONARD SWETT

Maybe next year you'll finally resolve the Indian problem.

WINFIELD EDGERLY

With Washington involved, I don't foresee resolution soon. They make a treaty with the Indians, and either one of two things happens.

LEONARD SWETT

What's that?

WINFIELD EDGERLY

The settlers move into Indian lands regardless, and then the government changes its mind and wants the land back.

Swett chuckles.

WINFIELD EDGERLY

The other thing is that half the Indians don't agree to the treaty in the first place and continue attacking the whites wherever they find them. Maybe in '76 something conclusive will occur.

LIBBIE

(to Tom)

This is like being at home! Your sister Maggie and brother Boston, and Autie's nephew Harry are all here. The only one missing is your brother Nevin.

TOM

It's fun. Do you like the music, Old Lady?

LIBBIE

Yes, Tom. Almost as much as you enjoy surveying Emma Watson.

TOM

That's just a ruse. Now Nellie, she's a beauty, ain't she?

LIBBIE

Oh, Tom. I do wish you would pick one and settle down.

TOM

I'm trying. I'm trying awfully hard. Maybe next year will be my year.

EXT. FORT ABRAHAM LINCOLN - EARLY MORNING

SUPER: "MAY 17TH, 1876"

The Seventh Cavalry departs for another campaign against hostile Indians. BG ALFRED TERRY, a slim man with gentle eyes and a beard and mustache, commander of the Department of Dakota, leads the 925 MEN in his command.

It consists of 12 COMPANIES OF THE SEVENTH CAVALRY led by Autie, 3 COMPANIES OF THE SIXTH AND SEVENTEENTH INFANTRY, and a DETACHMENT OF MOSTLY ARIKARA SCOUTS.

Autie is dressed in fringed buckskin trousers and shirt. The trousers are tucked into a short pair of low-heeled boots. At his neck is the famous red necktie, and on his shorn blond hair is a light flat-topped sombrero.

BG Terry and his staff are in the lead, followed by the scouts. Next is the Seventh Cavalry led by Autie, Tom, and Libbie riding next to Autie.

Maggie Calhoun rides next to her husband, handsome JIM CALHOUN (30). He is a well-built man, erect of carriage, standing six feet one inch.

Following the Seventh is the band. Then comes the infantry and 150 SUPPLY WAGONS.

Libbie looks down upon the WIVES OF THE ARIKARA. They are crouched on the ground, too burdened with their troubles to hold up their heads. A few try to restrain THEIR CHILDREN who are attempting to follow their fathers.

The column passes "soap suds row," where the LAUNDRESSES cry and hold THEIR SMALL CHILDREN out at arm's length for one last look at the departing father.

Some of the children have tied handkerchiefs to sticks to mimic flags and beat tin pans for drums as they imitate the departing soldiers.

The band PLAYS "The Girl I Left Behind Me," and the OFFICERS' WIVES slowly disappear into their quarters to weep in private.

EXT. FORT ABRAHAM LINCOLN - MOMENTS LATER

The column winds its way out of the Fort through the fog and mist as the sun begins to penetrate. Libbie's face shows that her mind is far away. Autie looks back at his men.

AUTIE

Aren't they grand, darling?

LIBBIE

Yes, they're magnificent.

He notices her detached demeanor.

AUTIE

Don't worry. We won't be gone more than a few weeks. When the *Far West* travels up the Missouri to the mouth of the Yellowstone to resupply us, you might be able to accompany it.

LIBBIE

I'd really like that.

EXT. THE DAKOTA TERRITORY PLAINS - EVENING

A few miles from Fort Lincoln, the command has camped beside a small river.

INT. AUTIE'S TENT - EVENING

Autie and Libbie sit on small foldable chairs in their tent lighted by lanterns. Autie examines a map while Libbie watches him uneasily, the campaign still weighing on her mind.

AUTIE

Libbie, this is going to be a marvelous expedition. I'm confident we'll finally put an end to the hostile Indians and keep them peacefully in their own lands.

LIBBIE

I was under the impression these are their own lands.

AUTIE

(chuckles)

The real problem will be catching them rather than fighting them. By chance if they do choose to fight, the disciplined and well-trained Seventh Cavalry can overcome two or three times as many Indians as its size.

LIBBIE

I hope so, Autie.

Tears form in her eyes. Suddenly, she springs off her chair and grabs his shoulders.

LIBBIE

(softly so no one else hears)

Oh, Autie! I tried, but how can I be a good general's wife when you're in danger? What will I do without you? Please, please always come back to me!

He embraces her tightly.

AUTIE

I will, Libbie. I will. And you'll be a model wife.

LIBBIE

And what's wrong with me? Why can't I conceive? When you return we've got to change the "morning ride" into the Pony Express!

Autie barely smiles.

EXT. THE DAKOTA TERRITORY PLAINS - MORNING

Autie and Libbie embrace farewell. A short distance away, Maggie and Jim Calhoun do the same. Standing nearby, Tom smiles and watches. Next to him are Boston Custer and Harry Armstrong Reed.

AUTIE

Goodbye, my little wife. See you soon. I've still got your ambrotype, so I'll be fine.

LIBBIE

Farewell, dearest.

She walks over to Tom and gives him a hug.

LIBBIE

Farewell, Tom. Be careful, you scamp.

TOM

Goodbye, Old Lady. Don't worry about us.

She gives Boston and Harry each a quick hug and they AD LIB farewells.

She then sadly plods to the wagon where wait Maggie and the PAYMASTER, who will take the two women back to Fort Lincoln.

Autie watches them as he stands next to his personal orderly, JOHN BURKMAN, a grizzly old German immigrant.

AUTIE

(to John Burkman)

A soldier must serve two mistresses. While he's loyal to one, the other must suffer.

The paymaster's wagon with Libbie and Maggie drives away from the camp. Libbie's head is bent over as if she were crying.

MOMENTS LATER

Libbie turns around for one last look at the column. Her eyes are teary.

She sees the flags and pennons flying and the men waving.

Autie rides to the top of a promontory and turns around. He stands up on his stirrups and waves his hat at the women. Then the column moves forward again.

INT. AUTIE'S QUARTERS - DOUBLE PARLOR - DAY

Maggie sits with Libbie on a couch.

LIBBIE

Maggie, let me read to you this letter from Autie. "June 1st. Dearest Libbie, the column has moved into territory heretofore unvisited by white men.

The reports of many Indians waiting at the Little Missouri are the merest bosh. None has been here for six months, not even a small hunting party."

She slaps the letter onto the couch and grimaces in disgust.

MAGGIE

Darling, Autie hasn't written anything alarming.

LIBBIE

I know, but did you see that steamer at our landing last week?

MAGGIE

Yes.

LIBBIE

Its freight was Springfield rifles en route for the Indians up the river. The Seventh has only the carbines that grow foul after the first firing!

MAGGIE

I didn't see them. Don't you find it odd that the government is supplying the Indians with weapons at the same time its Army is out hunting them?

LIBBIE

Yes, Maggie, I do! Screwball government! Is it God's will that we be ruled by the stupidest citizens in the nation?

INT. AUTIE'S QUARTERS - STUDY - EVENING

At Autie's desk, Libbie pens a letter to him.

LIBBIE (V.O.)

June 21st. My dearest Autie, as I write, our separation has been five weeks, and during this time my fear has mounted. I cannot describe my feelings.

Libbie looks up at his photograph left of Sheridan's.

LIBBIE (cont'd, V.O.)

When you get back from this expedition, if we have no bad news, I shall then feel as if the worst of the summer was over. Your idolizing wife could not live without you. I shall go to bed and dream peacefully of my dear General.

EXT. AUTIE'S QUARTERS - DAY

Libbie ambles to their quarters when a MAIL MESSENGER approaches her.

MAIL MESSENGER

Mrs. Custer. Letter for you.

LIBBIE

Thank you.

She quickly opens and reads the letter from Autie.

AUTIE (V.O.)

June 22, 11 A.M. My Darling, I have but a few moments to write as we start at twelve. Do not be anxious about me. Remember what I told my officers years ago: There are not enough Indians in the country to whip the Seventh Cavalry!

She looks up from the letter and fights back tears, then looks down at the paper again.

AUTIE (cont'd, V.O.)  
 I hope to have a good report to send  
 you by the next mail. A success will  
 start us all toward Lincoln!

She looks skyward and closes her eyes as if in prayer.

EXT. FORT ABRAHAM LINCOLN - DAY

Libbie and Maggie are out for a stroll within the Fort perimeter. They see TWO INDIAN SCOUTS hurriedly being sent away with satchels by Cpt. WILLIAM MCCASKEY (early 30s) of the 20th Infantry.

LIBBIE  
 That captain is temporary commandant of  
 the Fort. Let's see what's up.

The women quick-step over to him.

LIBBIE  
 Cpt. McCaskey, what is the rush? Is  
 there any news?

CPT MCCASKEY  
 No sense in keeping it secret now, Mrs.  
 Custer. Gen. Crook has been defeated  
 on the Rosebud River.

The two women are taken aback.

CPT MCCASKEY  
 The scouts are riding to your husband  
 and Gen. Terry to warn them. This  
 could mean that with Crook out of the  
 way the Sioux are now free to join  
 Sitting Bull.

LIBBIE  
 Thank you, Captain.

Libbie and Maggie leave the captain.

LIBBIE  
 There are too many hostiles off their  
 reservations and joining Sitting Bull.  
 Maggie, the scouts can't cross the  
 country in time to deliver this  
 information.

EXT. FORT ABRAHAM LINCOLN - KATIE GIBSON'S PORCH - DUSK

SUPER: "JULY 5TH, 1876"

Sweltering hot. Some of the LADIES of the regiment are gathered on KATIE GIBSON's (mid 30s) porch. They sing as Katie accompanies on her GUITAR.

As they finish SINGING "Annie Laurie," they notice GROUPS OF SOLDIERS congregating and talking excitedly.

Suddenly, the Indian scout HORN TOAD (early 20s) runs to the porch.

HORN TOAD  
Custer killed! Whole command killed!

Katie's guitar slips from her grip and falls to the porch, while the other women look at the Indian in stunned silence.

CATHERINE BENTEEN (early 30s) rises from her chair.

CATHERINE BENTEEN  
How do you know, Horn Toad?

HORN TOAD  
Speckled Cock, Indian scout, just come.  
Rode pony many miles. Pony tired.  
Indian tired. Say Custer shoot himself  
at end. Say all dead!

KATIE GIBSON  
(to the ladies)  
Oh, that's too sweeping, though there  
may have been a brush. The Indians  
couldn't possibly have wiped out Terry  
and Custer.

INT. AUTIE'S QUARTERS - THE BEDROOM - BEFORE DAWN

In the upstairs bedroom, Libbie lies in her dressing gown on the bed and stares at the ceiling. She perspires from both the heat and anxiety.

EXT. AUTIE'S QUARTERS

Cpt. McCaskey, accompanied by the post surgeon J. V. D. MIDDLETON (40s) and Lt. C. L. GURLY (20s) of the Sixth Infantry, steps up to the back door and KNOCKS. Gurly carries a lantern.

The black maid MARIA ADAMS (late 20s) answers the door.

INT. AUTIE'S QUARTERS - THE BEDROOM

Libbie, still staring at the ceiling, hears the arrival, and her eyes open wide with fear.

EXT. AUTIE'S QUARTERS

Cpt. McCaskey speaks somberly to Maria.

CPT MCCASKEY  
Please awaken Mrs. Custer and bring her  
to the parlor.

MARIA ADAMS  
Yes, sir.

INT. AUTIE'S QUARTERS - THE DOUBLE PARLOR

The three men file into the parlor and light candles.

LIBBIE (O.S.)  
(shouting from her  
bedroom)  
Captain, why are you here?

The men look at each other, but no one answers.

In a moment Libbie, followed by an alarmed Maggie, comes into the parlor, both in their dressing gowns. Maria stands behind them.

LIBBIE  
Captain, why are you here?

CPT MCCASKEY  
Ma'am, I have a message from Gen.  
Terry.

He holds a piece of paper in one hand.

CPT MCCASKEY  
(reading the paper)  
"Gen. Custer and five companies,  
totaling 261 officers and men, were  
killed on June 25th at the Little  
Bighorn River in a battle with Sioux  
Indians and their Northern Cheyenne  
allies."

Libbie and Maggie wail, and Maria gasps, but Libbie quickly composes herself.

LIBBIE  
 (despite the heat)  
 It's quite cold in here. Maria, will  
 you please fetch my wrap?

While the stunned Maria gets the wrap, the three men and two women stand silently except for Maggie's crying, all lost in their own thoughts.

In a moment Maria returns with the wrap, and Libbie places it on her shoulders.

CPT MCCASKEY  
 We'll be leaving now, Mrs. Custer.

The men depart out the front door with Libbie following them to the steps. As the men walk away from the house, Maggie rushes out to the porch and desperately calls to them.

MAGGIE  
 Is there no message for me?

McCiskey turns slowly to her.

CPT MCCASKEY  
 They all died fighting.

Maggie collapses sobbing on the porch, and Libbie tries to comfort her.

MAGGIE  
 No, God, no! I've lost three brothers,  
 my nephew, and my husband! I want to  
 die! Libbie, I want to die!

LIBBIE  
 I want to die, too, Maggie, but I have  
 a responsibility. I must be present  
 when the other wives are told. They  
 need consolation and an example in  
 their new widowhood. It is the least I  
 can do for them.

FADE TO:

EXT. MONROE TRAIN STATION - DAY

Libbie and Maggie arrive by train. Libbie leaves the car first and sees waiting her old principal Reverend Boyd (mid 70s). Her Stoicism finally breaks, and she cries in anguish and collapses in his arms.

After a moment she regains her composure as Boyd sadly looks into her face, then he escorts the two women to a carriage with DRIVER, which departs the station.

INT. MONROE METHODIST CHURCH - DAY

Memorial services. The church is filled to capacity. On the organ facing the AUDIENCE is a bas-relief portrait of Autie surrounded with an evergreen wreath. Underneath it are two crossed sabers. The entire church is draped in mourning.

Up front are Autie's parents, EMANUEL (70) and MARIA (69) CUSTER, Libbie, and Maggie. Emanuel is a healthy-looking fellow for his age and wears a beard. Maria is small and frail. A mournful Fan Fifield is visible behind them.

REVEREND E. CASLER (60s) reads a roll call of the dead. Sitting behind him is Reverend Mattoon.

REVEREND E. CASLER  
(reading)  
"Gen. George Armstrong Custer, aged  
36."

Libbie, Maggie, and Emanuel and Maria Custer begin sobbing loudly.

REVEREND E. CASLER  
(reading)  
"Cpt. Thomas Ward Custer, aged 31.  
Cpt. George W. Yates, aged 34.  
Lt. James Calhoun, aged 30."

Maggie cries even louder.

REVEREND E. CASLER  
(reading)  
"Boston Custer, aged 25.  
Harry Armstrong Reed, aged 18."  
These names we come to commemorate  
today no longer belong to private  
homes; they are the heritage of the  
nation.

Casler returns to his seat, and the Reverend Mattoon (mid 70s) rises and speaks.

REVEREND D. C. MATTOON  
Having their permissions, I read from a  
letter written to Mrs. Custer by her  
cousin Rebecca Richmond.

Libbie's face brightens at the mention of her beloved cousin.

REVEREND D. C. MATTOON

(reading the letter)

"Libbie, how much rather would you be the early widow of such a man than the life-long wife of many another! The mantle of your heroic husband has fallen upon your shoulders. Wear it, Libbie, for his sake, for your work is not yet done."

EXT. THE BACON HOME - DAY

Despondent Libbie sits on the four-seated lawn swing looking at nothing. A FEMALE FRIEND (30s) hastily approaches her with a copy of the September 2, 1876 issue of the *New York Herald* containing an interview with President Grant.

FEMALE FRIEND

Libbie! Read what President Grant is saying about Autie!

Libbie takes the paper from her, scans it briefly, and then reads aloud.

LIBBIE

"I regard Custer's massacre as a sacrifice of troops brought on by Custer himself, that was wholly unnecessary."  
This is outrageous!

FEMALE FRIEND

What are you going to do?

LIBBIE

I wanted to die before. Now I have a reason to live!

INT. THE BACON HOME - DAY

Libbie answers the front door. There stands FREDERICK WHITTAKER (mid 30s), British expatriate and opportunistic dime novelist.

FREDERICK WHITTAKER

Good afternoon, Libbie. It is indeed an honor and pleasure to meet you at last!

LIBBIE

Frederick Whittaker. A pleasure to meet you, also. Won't you walk in?

INT. THE BACON HOME - PARLOR

Frederick and Libbie take their seats.

FREDERICK WHITTAKER

Dear Libbie, you know from my September *Galaxy* article that I wholly believe your husband was a very brave man who happened to become overwhelmed by superior numbers through no fault of his own.

LIBBIE

Yes.

FREDERICK WHITTAKER

If there is any blame to be cast, it is with Gen. Terry for sending out separate columns without adequate means of communication.

Libbie looks at the floor, anguished at the thought of Army bungling that caused the death of her husband.

FREDERICK WHITTAKER

Your husband could not have known the Army had underestimated Indian strength, thanks to the incompetence of the Indian agencies in keeping account of them.

LIBBIE

Yes, Frederick, your article was very kind to my husband.

FREDERICK WHITTAKER

Libbie, I would like to write a book about the General. I envision a title something like *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*. I want to tell the full story of our nation's best soldier.

Her face brightens.

FREDERICK WHITTAKER

Will you help me? Will you provide me his personal correspondence and other documents you have?

LIBBIE

Yes, Frederick, I will. The truth must be told!

INT. THE BACON HOME - PARLOR - DAY

SUPER: "MONTHS LATER"

Libbie sits in the parlor with Emanuel Custer. Both are depressed.

LIBBIE

Father Custer, there's a storm of criticism over Frederick's book about Autie.

EMANUEL CUSTER

What are they saying?

LIBBIE

They're saying Frederick is highly biased, and that he relied on conflicting newspaper reports published at the time.

EMANUEL CUSTER

Oh.

LIBBIE

Frederick wants me to write my own memoir of life with Autie. He said it is through my memories that Autie's best traits will expand to the world.

EMANUEL CUSTER

Do it then.

LIBBIE

Maybe I will in the future, but Father, I have more pressing things to worry about now. You know there are debts to pay. There are liens against this house.

A frustrated and helpless Libbie looks at the floor.

LIBBIE

And I need to ensure that you and Mother Custer are provided for. But, Father, I have no employment.

EMANUEL CUSTER

I'm sorry, Libbie. I wish we and my son's debts weren't a burden to you.

She waves off the apology.

LIBBIE

I do have some good news, though. The Seventh Cavalry is sending me *Dandy*. Remember one of Autie's favorite horses? He was kept safe with the pack train during the battle. He should arrive any day now.

EMANUEL CUSTER

Oh, good! Good!

EXT. THE BACON HOME - DAY

Lt. JAMES BURNS (20s) of the 17th U. S. Infantry leads *Dandy* to the Custer home. He leaves the horse in the front yard and walks to the front door.

THE FRONT PORCH

Burns knocks on the door and Libbie opens it. They AD LIB greetings.

LIBBIE

(turns head back into the house)

Father! *Dandy* is here! Come see!

THE FRONT YARD

Libbie rushes out to pet the beautiful horse and Burns follows. Emanuel hobbles out to them as fast as he can. As he comes near to the animal, he begins to wail and then embraces its neck. He cries out to no one in particular.

EMANUEL CUSTER

Autie! Autie! My boys are all dead!  
They're all dead but Nevin! My boys...

Tears form in Libbie's eyes. Burns sorrowfully looks at the ground.

INT. THE BACON HOME - PARLOR - DAY

Libbie and Maggie sit and drink tea.

MAGGIE

How are things generally, Libbie?

LIBBIE

They're bad. Where shall I begin?  
Frederick's book about Autie is still  
drawing harsh comments, not only about  
his quality of research but about Autie  
himself!

MAGGIE

Oh, my!

LIBBIE

And I need employment! I can't take  
care of this place and Autie's parents  
on the little widow's pension we  
receive.

MAGGIE

I'm sure that is difficult.

LIBBIE

Frank Howe of the Pension Agency said  
that President Grant would have made me  
Post Mistress of Monroe, but I would  
sooner eat corn with the hogs than take  
anything from him!

MAGGIE

What will you do?

LIBBIE

My cousin Rebecca has advised me to  
move to New York. There's nothing I  
can do in a little town like Monroe.

She glares out the window with slight contempt.

LIBBIE

She says there is no limit to what a  
persevering woman can do in New York.  
I'm going to take up pen and pencil and  
do whatever it takes to be successful.  
If I can survive the prairies and  
Indians, I should survive New York!

MAGGIE

We'll miss you so much, Libbie.

LIBBIE

And I will miss you, too, but I must do  
this. I must.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - THE SOCIETY OF DECORATIVE ARTS - DAY

A modest building in the City. A sign identifies it as the "Society of Decorative Arts."

INT. THE SOCIETY OF DECORATIVE ARTS - OFFICE

Libbie, dressed like a widow, sits in front of a desk and interviews with matronly CANDACE WHEELER (50).

CANDACE WHEELER

And how are you, Mrs. Custer?

LIBBIE

I'm well, thank you, Mrs. Wheeler. I have heard that your organization needs a part-time secretary. I'm very earnest in my desire to do something for your enterprise.

CANDACE WHEELER

Very good. I founded the Society of Decorative Arts because I believe American women, well-trained in traditional crafts, can produce artistically beautiful and marketable work. In our current economic depression, many need the opportunity.

LIBBIE

Indeed we -- uh -- they do.

CANDACE WHEELER

We have a board of directors, some of whom you may have heard of, including Mrs. John Jacob Astor and Julia Bryant, the daughter of William Cullen Bryant, who is the poet and editor of the *New York Evening Post*.

Libbie smiles and nods in recognition.

CANDACE WHEELER

Given our ambitious goals, we need someone to work three days a week keeping abreast of correspondence.

LIBBIE

I do love art, Mrs. Wheeler, and I have had some training at the Boyd Seminary in Monroe, Michigan. I believe my background will serve the organization well.

CANDACE WHEELER

The salary is small, Mrs. Custer. I'm willing to give you a try, if you're willing to accept it.

LIBBIE

Oh, yes, Mrs. Wheeler. I must! I mean, I am!

INT. MONROE - OFFICE OF ATTORNEY JOHN RAUCH - DAY

SUPER: "SEPTEMBER 1877"

Libbie sits in front of his desk. A desk name plate reads "Attorney John Rauch." He is now 37 years old.

JOHN RAUCH

It is wonderful to see you again, Libbie, although I wish the circumstances were better. I'm afraid the claims against Autie's estate are serious.

LIBBIE

Yes, I know, but notwithstanding it's nice to see you again, John, and visit Monroe.

JOHN RAUCH

Thank you. Let's proceed, shall we? Libbie, your husband's debts stand at thirteen thousand, two hundred ninety-one dollars and ten cents. I have an assessment of all assets at two thousand, one hundred forty dollars.

She winces at the discrepancy.

JOHN RAUCH

I recommend that you sell your portion of the farm he owned jointly with his brother Nevin.

LIBBIE

Poor Nevin. The only one who remained at home to farm. It's been a hard life for him, too. You know, he tried to volunteer for the war but was rejected because of his chronic rheumatism.

JOHN RAUCH

Yes, yes. The worst matter is Mr. Justh's claim of eight thousand, five hundred dollars for your husband's silver-mine joint venture.

She gasps.

JOHN RAUCH

I shall propose that all claims be settled at ten cents on the dollar. If this all works out in court, I calculate that you will have remaining about fifteen hundred dollars before court costs and my fee are paid.

LIBBIE

How much do you estimate those will cost?

JOHN RAUCH

I expect they will take up most of the remainder.  
I'm sorry, Libbie. If Autie had been as successful in business as he was in the Army -- uh, I mean, during the war with the South...

His voice trailing off, he blushes at his gaffe, but Libbie manages a weak smile.

LIBBIE

Now I must arrange for Autie's funeral at West Point next month. The bodies of the officers were recovered from the battlefield this year.

She wearily looks out the window.

LIBBIE

Autie so much wanted to be buried at West Point, and now it's my duty to see to it.

JOHN RAUCH

I wish you every success, Libbie.

LIBBIE

Thank you. The Army planned to have the funeral during the summer, but there would be few persons there, and his burial would receive little notice.

JOHN RAUCH  
That would be sad.

LIBBIE  
It is more fitting to bury the heroic  
dead when the full corps of cadets and  
officers will be on hand, don't you  
think so?

JOHN RAUCH  
Yes, Libbie, that would be most  
fitting.

She rises from her chair, as does he.

LIBBIE  
Goodbye, John. Thank you for your  
help.

JOHN RAUCH  
Godspeed, Libbie.

INT. U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY AT WEST POINT CHAPEL - DAY

In the Academy chapel, Libbie sits tearfully with Emanuel  
Custer and Maggie as SIX CADETS carry the COFFIN outside to  
the waiting caisson. The coffin is draped with a U.S. flag  
and adorned with two stars made of tuberose against a  
shoulder strap of geraniums.

EXT. ACADEMY CHAPEL

Following the caisson is a riderless horse displaying a pair  
of spurred cavalry BOOTS with toes turned backward. The  
cortege makes its way to the cemetery, observed by MANY  
CADETS AND CIVILIANS.

EXT. CEMETERY - CUSTER GRAVE SITE

At the grave site, Dr. JOHN FORSYTH (50s), the Academy  
chaplain, sprinkles dust on the descending casket as it  
reaches bottom, lowered by the six cadets.

A SQUAD OF CADETS FIRES three rifle volleys, and the echoes  
REVERBERATE from side to side of the river and die mournfully  
away.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - THE GLENHAM HOTEL - DAY

A modest but very comfortable hotel in City.

SUPER: "NEW YORK CITY"

INT. THE GLENHAM HOTEL - LIBBIE'S RESIDENCE

Libbie sits at a table in her comfortably furnished residence and reads a letter from Frederick Whittaker.

FREDERICK WHITTAKER (V.O.)  
 Dearest Libbie, it is with great dismay that I inform you of the findings of the Reno court of inquiry held in Chicago regarding his conduct at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. After 26 days of testimony, mainly from the General's enemies, it concluded that "there was nothing in Maj. Reno's conduct which requires animadversion from this Court. No further proceedings are necessary."

Libbie sighs and sinks in her chair. Then she continues reading.

FREDERICK WHITTAKER (cont'd, V.O.)  
 Libbie, these findings are a Mockery of Justice and a whitewash! Reno and Benteen were responsible for the annihilation of the General's battalion!

She looks out the window and shakes her head in disbelief.

INT. THE GLENHAM HOTEL - LIBBIE'S RESIDENCE - DAY

SUPER: "MARCH 1879"

Libbie sits at the table and is shocked while reading *The New York Herald*.

LIBBIE  
 (reading out loud)  
 "A committee has been formed to erect a monument to Gen. Custer at West Point."  
 What? They didn't even consult me!  
 How did they choose the artist and model?

## EXT. U. S. MILITARY ACADEMY AT WEST POINT - DAY

In the center of a grassy area bordered by the mess hall and the officers' quarters, MG J. M. SCHOFIELD (50s), Superintendent of the Academy, stands before a CROWD of 3,000.

Behind him is an eight-foot-high STATUE of Autie with long hair and full dress uniform. In his right hand is a saber, and in his left, a cocked revolver flung against his chest.

Beneath his feet stands a marble pedestal, six feet high, with four panels. The front shows Autie on horseback. Buffalo heads adorn the sides.

On the back an inscription gives Autie's name, rank (including actual and brevet), and the facts of his death.

J. M. SCHOFIELD

As Superintendent of the United States Military Academy at West Point, I am proud to accept this statue and note its appropriateness for this honored institution.

The crowd APPLAUDS.

J. M. SCHOFIELD

Gen. Custer's monument will remind young soldiers that all they have on earth, save their honor, may at any time be required of them as a sacrifice for the security and welfare of their countrymen.

## INT. THE SOCIETY OF DECORATIVE ARTS - DAY

Libbie is at work at her desk. Candace Wheeler approaches her.

CANDACE WHEELER

Libbie, how are you feeling, dear? Are you regretting not going to West Point to see the unveiling of your husband's statue?

LIBBIE

No! I hate it! I was never consulted and didn't even know about it until the design was done.

CANDACE WHEELER

My goodness!

LIBBIE

It's an object of ridicule by many cavalrymen! They do not fight with a saber and a revolver at the same time. Autie looks like a desperado! And he wasn't dressed like that nor did he have long hair at the Little Big Horn.

CANDACE WHEELER

Oh dear!

LIBBIE

Some of my husband's most brilliant charges were made without a firearm about him! I cannot think of the statue other than a great insult to Autie's memory.

Libbie rests her elbows on the desk and plops her forehead into her hands.

LIBBIE

Candace, I'm still heartsick from the false accusations and allegations spoken during and following the Reno Court of Inquiry by the men who hate my husband. I could feel their hatred in the room when Autie was promoted to Brevet Major General. I could feel it!

CANDACE WHEELER

I'm so sorry.

LIBBIE

There are even the vilest lies about squaws bearing Autie's children! I wasn't able to, and despicable scoundrels are cruelly saying the Indians did it for me!

CANDACE WHEELER

Oh, Libbie!

LIBBIE

The bitter disappointment I feel is such a cross for me to bear, it seems to me that I can't endure it. I shall not see that statue in person until I can do something to have it removed. No statue should be erected unless I approve it!

CANDACE WHEELER

Good for you!

LIBBIE

And then I shall follow Mr. Whittaker's  
advice and write the truth about my  
husband!

She stares straight ahead while twirling a pen.

LIBBIE

Oh, if you knew how I think and think  
and plan at night in the still hours,  
ways to have the world see my husband  
as he should be known.

INT. THE GLENHAM HOTEL - LIBBIE'S RESIDENCE - DAY

Libbie sits at the table and angrily pens a letter.

LIBBIE (V.O.)

Dear Mr. Edwards, I write to you, the  
head of the Washington Monument  
Committee, to protest most vehemently  
the statue of my husband, General  
Custer.  
Let me be frank, my blood boils at the  
thought of that wretched thing standing  
by the General's grave.  
The way he is portrayed is incongruous  
and incorrect.

EXT. U. S. MILITARY ACADEMY AT WEST POINT - DAY

SUPER: "NOVEMBER 1884"

Workers remove the statue of Autie at his grave.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - BOOKSTORE WINDOW - DAY

SUPER: "MARCH 1885"

A poster announces the availability of Libbie's first book,  
*Boots and Saddles*, and copies are shown in the window.

INSERT - a copy of *Harper's Monthly* magazine.

HARPER'S MONTHLY REVIEWER (V.O.)

*Boots and Saddles* is worth reading if  
only for the way it makes one  
understand how a woman can love her  
husband.

INSERT - a copy of the *Albany Times* newspaper.

ALBANY TIMES REVIEWER (V.O.)  
 Of Mrs. Custer's sweet womanly nature  
 the book gives testimony in every page,  
 a loving wife and true companion,  
 willing to share all dangers with him  
 to whom her heart belonged.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - BOOKSTORE WINDOW - DAY

SUPER: "DECEMBER 1887"

A poster announces the availability of Libbie's second book,  
*Tenting on the Plains*, and copies are shown in the window.

INSERT - a copy of the *Chicago Dial* magazine.

CHICAGO DIAL REVIEWER (V.O.)  
 Not the least acceptable thing in this  
 book is the unconscious revelation of  
 Elizabeth Custer's own character as a  
 heroic woman and the perfection of a  
 wife.

INSERT - a copy of the British publication *The Spectator*  
 magazine.

THE SPECTATOR REVIEWER (V.O.)  
 The book is interesting from beginning  
 to end and is closed with a wish there  
 were more. The charm of the volume is  
 Mrs. Custer herself, who is ever both  
 sweetness and light.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - THE GRACE REFORMED CHURCH - DAY

SUPER: "SPRING 1892"

A modestly sized church.

INT. THE GRACE REFORMED CHURCH

Libbie (50) has become a popular lecturer and will give a  
 presentation before a large AUDIENCE.

At the podium, the male MASTER OF CEREMONIES (50s) introduces  
 her. Libbie sits in a chair behind him.

## MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to introduce to you noted author and lecturer Mrs. George Armstrong Custer.

Libbie smiles warmly at the audience.

## MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Libbie, as she likes to be called, was a model Army wife of a great commander. I present to you, Libbie Custer.

The audience applauds while Libbie steps to the podium.

## LIBBIE

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, before I begin speaking about military life on the frontier of our country, I would like to address the latest controversies about the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

Her face changes to a defiant expression.

## LIBBIE

You may have read that a few military officers have opined the disaster that occurred there had been because my husband disobeyed orders from Gen. Terry, who was the overall commander of the expedition.

Libbie holds a piece of paper, preparing to read from it.

## LIBBIE

Gen. Terry in his order of June 22nd, 1876, directed Gen. Custer to take his regiment and pursue the Indians up the Rosebud River.

INT. BG TERRY'S OFFICE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

BG Terry sits at his desk and writes an order.

## LIBBIE (V.O.)

The original, unaltered written order, a copy of which my husband had sent to me in a letter, states that it is quote "impossible to give you any definite instructions in regard to this movement, and

(beat)

(MORE)

LIBBIE (V.O.) (cont'd)  
impose upon you precise orders which  
 might hamper your action when nearly in  
 contact with the enemy."

INT. THE GRACE REFORMED CHURCH (REAL TIME)

LIBBIE  
 Unquote. Ladies and gentlemen, I have  
 concluded that the mistakes of this  
 battle are the following: First, it  
 was wrong to divide the expedition into  
 three columns. This was planned in  
 Washington.

EXT. WYOMING AND MONTANA TERRITORIES - THE PLAINS - DAY  
 (FLASHBACK)

MONTAGE:

1) BG Terry leads his command of cavalry and infantry.

LIBBIE (V.O., cont'd)  
 These three large columns of soldiers  
 were independent of each other and had  
 no means of communication.

2) BG JOHN GIBBON (49), a lean commander with a mustache and  
 beard, leads his command of cavalry and infantry.

3) BG GEORGE CROOK (47), slightly portly with a very large  
 mustache and beard, leads his command of cavalry and  
 infantry.

LIBBIE (V.O.)  
 In fact, one of them, led by Gen.  
 Crook, failed to reach its appointed  
 destination, being turned back by  
 Indians, and neglected to inform the  
 other two columns.  
 No one, moreover, had known the  
 hostiles would exceed 500 to 800  
 warriors.

EXT. LITTLE BIGHORN BATTLEFIELD - RENO HILL - DAY

Hatless Maj. MARCUS RENO (41) and Cpt. FREDERICK BENTEEN (41)  
 lie next to each other at the Reno-Benteen defense site  
 returning FIRE at the Indians. On either side of them are  
 TROOPERS also FIRING.

LIBBIE (V.O.)

Second, I want to tell you that other officers lay the blame for the deaths of Gen. Custer and the men of the companies who were with him on Maj. Reno and Cpt. Benteen for failing to come to their aid.

RENO HILL

A trooper, with two other troopers on either side of him, tries desperately to clear his jammed Model 1873 Springfield carbine.

LIBBIE (cont'd, V.O.)

Third, the Seventh Cavalry was equipped with antiquated rifles that often fouled after the first firing. The Indians had received modern rifles as gifts from the government.

INT. THE GRACE REFORMED CHURCH (REAL TIME)

LIBBIE

It is these factors collectively, rather than Gen. Custer's purported disobedience, that accounted for the disastrous events at the Little Bighorn.

MONTAGE:

Libbie speaking before:

- 1) a women's club.
- 2) a girls' school.
- 3) a missionary society.

EXT. MONROE - MAIN STREET - DAY

SUPER: "JUNE 4TH, 1910"

A sunny day. The town is filled with thousands of VISITORS, and bunting and flags are everywhere. HAWKERS sell souvenirs on the sidewalks.

## EXT. THE BACON HOME

An automobile brings portly President WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT (52) to a reviewing stand opposite the old Bacon-Custer home. Libbie sits beside him dressed in black and wearing a large hat and feather boa.

A PARADE begins featuring OLD VETERANS from the Michigan brigade, the Third Cavalry Division, and the Seventh Cavalry regiment.

## EXT. MONROE - LORANGER SQUARE

After the parade ends, the President and Libbie are driven by Taft's STAFF two blocks away to another grandstand in Loranger Square, where a statue of Autie is covered in two huge U.S. FLAGS connected by a yellow ribbon.

The Square and the two streets intersecting it are a solid mass of HUMANITY.

The STATE MILITIA and the MONROE GUARD form a khaki wall around the statue. To the left of the grandstand is the Presbyterian church Libbie was married in, and to the right is the Court House where her father had his office.

## EXT. LORANGER SQUARE - THE GRANDSTAND

Seated behind the podium are President Taft, Libbie, Master of Ceremonies OTTO KIRSCHNER (40s), sculptor EDWARD POTTER (52), and other DIGNITARIES.

Encased at the front of the speakers' stand is the GUIDON of the 7th Michigan Volunteer Infantry, a Monroe County Civil War unit. On top of the guidon is a WREATH made of sage brush from Last Stand Hill at the Little Bighorn battle site.

Otto Kirschner rises to the podium.

OTTO KIRSCHNER

Mr. President, Mrs. Custer,  
distinguished guests, ladies and  
gentlemen.

Welcome to this glorious event wherein  
we honor one of Michigan's favorite  
sons by the unveiling of his statue by  
his accomplished widow, Elizabeth  
Custer.

OLD VETERAN IN THE CROWD

We loved Gen. Custer, but we adore  
Libbie!

VOICES IN THE CROWD  
Hooray, Libbie!

OTTO KIRSCHNER  
All rise, please.

Everyone on the grandstand rises, and Libbie steps in front of President Taft and Kirschner, who hands her the yellow ribbon.

LIBBIE  
(to Taft)  
This is indeed a very anxious moment for me. It is quite an honor for me to supercede you for a short time, President Taft. I should much prefer that you should do it, Mr. President.

WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT  
We are all here to pay honor to you and yours.

LIBBIE  
(to Taft)  
Do I have to pull very hard? And the ribbon is yellow, the cavalry colors. I wanted it to be in the cavalry colors.

OTTO KIRSCHNER  
Just pull it steadily, dear.

Libbie gently pulls the ribbon, and the two flags fall away revealing the sparkling bronze statue of Autie astride his horse at Gettysburg as he spots Gen. Stuart's cavalry. On the base in large letters is written simply, "CUSTER."

A great CHEER erupts from the crowd, and a band BEGINS "The Star Spangled Banner." A 17-gun salute REVERBERATES in the distance.

Libbie looks into the crowd and sees many old veterans with their heads bowed and tears streaming down their faces.

INT. NEW YORK - BRONXVILLE - LIBBIE'S HOME - DAY

Libbie (79) sits in a comfortable chair and reads a letter from her cousin Rebecca Richmond.

REBECCA RICHMOND (V.O.)  
Dearest Libbie, I am as thrilled as you must be about the newest monument to Autie in Hardin, Montana.  
(MORE)

REBECCA RICHMOND (V.O.) (cont'd)  
 You certainly have accomplished your heart's desire and kept the memorial fires burning down to the third generation, and I congratulate your persistence and devotion. Bravo!

INT. NEW YORK CITY - LIBBIE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

SUPER: "JUNE 25TH, 1926"

The apartment is richly furnished and replete with mementos and photographs from the Civil War and the Old West. Prominently displayed on the wall is the Civil War PHOTOGRAPH of Autie that hung in the study at Fort Lincoln.

Male New York REPORTERS #1 and #2 (both late 20s) interview Libbie (84) in her apartment. She sits in a comfortable chair. The reporters sit on wooden chairs across from her.

REPORTER #1

Mrs. Custer, how do you feel on this 50th anniversary of the Battle of the Little Bighorn?

LIBBIE

You may call me "Libbie." The last 50 years have offered me nothing so precious as my memories. I've been blessed to have traveled to many places in the world. I've seen the Indian Wars and the Great War.

REPORTER #1

That is remarkable.

LIBBIE

I am proud that throughout the whole country schoolboys have made Gen. Custer a symbol of courage that has helped to mold the soul of an entire generation.

REPORTER #2

Libbie, was life on the plains terribly rough on cavalry wives?

LIBBIE

Yes, but we knew our husbands wouldn't notice, for it is one nice thing about men: If they get it into their heads they've married a pretty girl, they never see anything to the contrary.

REPORTER #1

What are your feelings about the plan to build a memorial for Maj. Reno on the Battlefield?

LIBBIE

I would not permit any memorial to be placed on that sacred battlefield to so great a coward as Maj. Reno!

EXT. THE LITTLE BIG HORN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

His face still partially splattered with brain matter and blood from the Indian scout Bloody Knife, the hatless, panicked Maj. Reno gallops toward the ridge beyond the river, wildly looking behind him from side to side.

LIBBIE (V.O.)

The Little Bighorn was his first battle, and he seemed not to try to hide his cowardice!

INT. LIBBIE'S APARTMENT (REAL TIME)

She looks down at the floor, embarrassed by her burst of emotion.

LIBBIE

I'm sorry. I can almost feel my husband's opposition to my meddling in military affairs, but on this I cannot refrain.

REPORTER #1

I understand.

LIBBIE

I long for a memorial to our heroes of the Little Bighorn, but not a monument of honor for the one coward of the regiment!

REPORTER #2

Libbie, what are your greatest disappointments?

LIBBIE

My husband's death and the absence of a son to bear his honored name. When I was a girl, I was "Poor Motherless Libbie." Now I can add the title "Poor Childless Libbie."

EXT. TOWN IN ORANGE COUNTY, NEW YORK - DUSK (FLASHBACK)

On a small street, West Point Cadet Autie (age 20) stands before a grinning young FEMALE PROSTITUTE.

LIBBIE (V.O.)

The theory is that boys will be boys at West Point, and the General paid the price, and I shouldn't blame myself. He never told me.

INT. LIBBIE'S APARTMENT (REAL TIME)

REPORTER #2

You never remarried.

LIBBIE

I would rather be the widow of George Armstrong Custer than the wife of any other man.

REPORTER #1

Libbie, do you want to comment about the treatment of the Indians?

She looks out the window thoughtfully.

LIBBIE

I have become more aware of the wrongs the Indians sustained. They were only defending their country as they thought. Over the years and through the help of many people, my views have broadened.

EXT. SOUTH DAKOTA, BLACK HILLS - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A small GROUP OF SIOUX BRAVES on horseback comes to a halt and admires a magnificent scene of nature.

LIBBIE (V.O.)

Five times the Sioux were promised land "as long as water runs and grass grows," but each time they were ordered to leave under the thin pretense of a Sioux violation that canceled a treaty.

INT. LIBBIE'S APARTMENT (REAL TIME)

REPORTER #1

Yes.

LIBBIE

The truth was, there was no place for them to go, no place the white man did not want.

REPORTER #2

Which brought about the bloody wars.

LIBBIE

General Nelson Miles once observed, "The art of war among the white people is called strategy or tactics; when practiced by the Indians it is called treachery."

She sadly looks at the reporter.

LIBBIE

For many years after the Battle of the Little Bighorn I could not have said this, but as time has passed I've become convinced the Indians were deeply wronged.

FADE TO:

INT. LIBBIE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Libbie, now alone, sits in her comfortable chair, staring at the Custer photograph.

She smiles. Then tears well in her eyes as she reminisces.

EXT. KANSAS - BIG CREEK NEAR FORT HAYS - AFTERNOON  
(FLASHBACK)

Libbie pictures herself at age 25 once again at Big Creek on a beautiful sunny afternoon. She is the sweet-faced, brown-haired girl-wife in a white dress and blue ribbons. She reclines in a hammock, and Autie (27) stands over her rocking it to and fro, dressed in his blue uniform with his blond hair sparkling in the sunlight.

AUTIE

Libbie, I'm the happiest man on Earth!  
With my dear little wife whom I adore  
and the Seventh Cavalry, the proudest  
command in the world, I would not  
change places with a king!

BIG CREEK NEAR FORT HAYS - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

The Seventh Cavalry is on mounted parade. Autie and Libbie ride joyfully side-by-side at the front, while the regimental band o.s. exuberantly PLAYS "Garry Owen."

FADE OUT.