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?

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


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)
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)
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 out-maneuvered 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)
Yours respectively, Brigadier General George A. Custer.

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

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

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 train, 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)
Why don't you go to Washington? It's more comfortable there.

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

She plops her head into her hands and visibly trembles.

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.

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.

Goodbye, my dearest.

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.

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.

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?

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

(MORE)
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 cavalrmen 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.
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 that 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)
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 SENTRYs mistake them for Indians and each SHOOTS 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 ANNA DARRAH
Yes, sir! 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 (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?

McCaskey 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. 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 tuberoses 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.
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,
will ing 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 holds a piece of paper, preparing to read from it.

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
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)
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.
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.

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.

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)
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.