Lay of the Land

The 1862 Dakota War, A Play with Choruses

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Cover photo: Wowinape, Taoyateduta's son, in 1864.
Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society."

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And what the dead had no speech for when living,
They can tell you, being dead:
The communication
Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.

—T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding"

Introduction

On August 18, 1862, at seven o'clock in the morning, Mdewakanton Sioux warriors filed quietly onto the Lower Sioux Agency in Minnesota and launched an unexpected attack, first on the government-licensed merchants who sold them supplies, including food, and then on the support facilities of the Agency—the doctor's quarters, the ferry over the Minnesota River, the barns housing horses and livestock. In a flash of powder, dozens of white and mixed-blood men, women, and children were killed. Later that day and in ensuing days, warriors swept through the surrounding communities and deep into central Minnesota, killing farmers and their families and besieging towns. The toll on white Minnesotans reached hundreds and among the Mdewakantons dozens dead. Tensions had been high before the attacks, fueled by aggressive settlement-and-removal initiatives, realized via treaties and extra-legal settlements around the Minnesota River valley, from St. Paul in the east to the Red River valley at the border of the Dakota Territory and north into central Minnesota. Although the Mdewakanton Sioux had agreed to sales of their land in exchange for annuities from the U.S. government, by 1862 the annuities were being transferred to the agency merchants without Indian control and were occasionally late, leaving the Sioux with no money to buy food. Settlers were regularly violating agreed treaty arrangements, and the corruption involving government money meant for support of the tribes was being enforced by Federal troops keen on keeping the peace.

How had this situation developed? It had not been always thus, but had evolved over a generation. The men and women involved in the short-lived Sioux Uprising of 1862 had witnessed this evolution, following it to its bitter outcomes. From the frontier exploits of men like Jack Frazer and Taoyateduta, known to history as Little Crow, the claws of prejudice and violence ripped apart a delicate tissue of equity and respect.

Characters

Jack Frazer—a fur trader and scout
Big Thunder
U.S. Indian Bureau representative
Kintzing Pritchette—inspector for Indian Bureau
Union Pacific Railroad representative
Eutace Lange—an immigrant settler
Gustav Mogeland—an immigrant settler
Capt. Bernard Bee—U.S. Army, Fort Ripley
Capt. John Marsh—U.S. Army, Fort Ripley
Wabasha
Red Owl
Taoyateduta (Little Crow)—leader of the August 1862 insurrection
Lt. Timothy Sheehan—U.S. Army, Fort Ripley
George Spencer—worker at the Lower Sioux Agency
Pvt. Sven Norbeck—U.S. Army, Fort Ripley
Mdewakanton soldier's lodge warrior
Wakinyantawa
Unnamed enlisted man at Fort Ripley
Shakopee (Little Six)
Two New Ulm residents
Paul Mazakutamani—a leader of the Mdewakanton opposing the war
An unnamed Mdewakanton old woman
Henry Sibley—fur trader, politician, commander of the Minnesota volunteers
Three unnamed white captives
Two unnamed "friendlies"—Mdewakanton of the peace party
Unnamed dead warrior of Taoyateduta's band
Unnamed soldier in Sibley's force pursuing Taoyateduta
Antoine Campbell—mixed-blood cousin of Taoyateduta

Two unnamed "hostiles"—members of the Mdewakanton band supporting the war
Samuel Brown—a mixed-blood scout and volunteer with Sibley's army
Thomas Wilkinson—missionary
A.J. Van Vorhes—editor of the *Stillwater Messenger*
Frederick Brandt—resident of New Ulm
Jane Grey Swisshelm—editor of the *St. Cloud Democrat*
Abraham Lincoln
Col. Stephen Miller—officer in charge of the executions in Mankato
Unnamed correspondent reporter for the *New York Times*
Unnamed correspondent reporter for the *St. Paul Daily Press*
Alexander Grant Dallas—governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, Fort Garry region, Canada
A military aide to Alexander Grant Dallas
Wowinape—Taoyateduta's son
Nathan Lamson—the man who killed Taoyateduta

Choruses
Lower Sioux Agency traders
Indian agents
Missionaries
Mdewakanton women
Mdewakanton chiefs
Farmer Indians
Traditionalist Indians
Taoyateduta's warriors

Verse lines indicate fictional narrative; prose lines indicate text taken verbatim from historical records.

PART

1

Jack Frazer:
How was it back then? I'll tell you:
No fences. Every breath of wind that
Hit my face with rain or ice or sweetest
Smell of grass, sweetest on earth, hit
Your face, too. Every man who wanted
To kill me, wanted to kill you, too.
Every woman and drop of whiskey
That invited me in, invited you, too,
Without exception. Every fur-bearing critter
Was on the earth for us to take, and that
Included you and me. And every wild ride
On a borrowed horse or us hiding like lynxes
At the bend of a path to take French prey
Or Ojibway prey or English prey, every knot
Of panting blood and braided scalp was yours—
Or mine. I've kept my scalp by dodging or by providence,
The two the same, really. The only corners, the companies'
Houses, square and true as logs allowed, gave
Plenty of room for shadows, but nowhere to hide,
Which taught the treachery of sudden turns, the isolation
Of sorting out, not gathering in, always elbows
And crooked eyes, never of wide arms
Of kin and hoop house and drum. No fence
Only life and death, smoke and god.
Then, over the eastern horizon, driven by the sun
They came on wheels of money. Our western winds
Have been no match for a rising sun. The people
Resisted, were slain and herded, 'reserved' and starved.
Their oxen and slaves were better treated. The chiefs
Watched and thought. What would keep some land,
Keep some of the hunting way, the kinship, and medicine
Paths, the people's lineage, the ancestors' spirits
At ease? For us, the way was to accommodate.
For us, the chiefs—father, son, and grandson—
First Cetanwakamani, then Big Thunder,
And then Little Crow (Tayoyetoduta),
Decided thus: we would make peace, accept.

Big Thunder:
My father made peace with the government agents and traders,
Cetanwakanmani his name, awakener
Of peace. Why not let people live and hunt?
We surely all can live. Yet others hated it;
They feared overtaking, drowning, bad dealing.
They wanted the fight, but Cetanwakanmani,
My father, saw what happened in the east, the people's
Defeats, a march of centuries, so many dying,
The children, women, elders without respect.
Accommodation alone allowed hope
For keeping our hard-won lands. The hopeless wars
Were warriors' dreams. We could fight, yes, forever,
But right are those who watch and wait, then pounce
Like animals on prey when need and opportunity arise.
Superior fighters are those who strike to kill
By choice, like single hawks that terrify whole fields
Of mice. Superior enemies don't need to choose
Deserving from undeserving but massacre the weaker
Ones, like illnesses that flood the people, men and women
Old and young. We are the superior fighters,
But they the superior enemy. Accommodation,
Then, I say, must awake the sleeping minds
Of warriors, dealings over lands and waters replace
The whoops and reading of bones before war. The spirits
Await. Can we adapt like wolves to the hardest
Winter we have ever known? Are they our enemies?
Of course. Only a fool would think otherwise.
But on his last day, only a fool would hear
Only the taunts of his enemies, no children or grandchildren
Speaking in his heart. We must live our lives.

Frazer:
And now? I suppose I should rejoice, applaud,
For the spectacle, white people, far as the horizon,
My own half-kin, I guess, somewhere among them.
Like my Dakota children, though, I'm now a half-breed,
Not of them who are here, nor of them who arrive.
Once I owned every horizon, today

A stable boy, holding the reins of his majesty
The land-agent, the milliner, the ploughboy, the Bible-thumper,
Every man an earl in the sudden towns.
Every sunrise I was sober enough to see, I saw.
Now I see none, to dull the pain each day,
I saw the play well after the curtain had risen and left
Well before the latest act was added. I scouted
For Sibley, for Ramsey, for anyone who'd pay my price,
To feed my Indian in-laws. Odd, ain't it?
The old way of hospitality and gifts that hunters used
Laps now like a stream against an immoveable shore,
As stronger grows a drought and wider the rocky banks.
People's hearts shriveled as their courage dried up.
Did I live to help bring this forth? 'Ppears so.

[Enter choruses, one by one, beginning with Traders]

So, what have we here? The new horsemen of the apocalypse,
Who need a hand to mount nonetheless. *Traders*
With contracts to sell the needed goods to the tribes,
Food and guns and clothes and whiskey,
You know, the needed, and take their mighty profits.
The spirits will cut my lips away since these men,
Some anyways, have been my best companions in drinking
And crazing; some are good men; some are vermin
Who take a woman or two, swear kinship
To her and her breed – brothers, sisters, cousins,
Many as the leaves on a great tree – then robs them,
Denies them when the money's gone, the government money,
That tribes have exchanged for their acres in the millions,
In treaties no man of good will would even believe.
Extend them credit, these traders do, in advance
Before the yearly government payment comes. Credit.
A word never heard before. At first, the tribe thought it was
A gift such as they would give to kin in need.
Then came the reckoning: the payment comes, but no money
For them to buy tomorrow's food. They're millionaires
Without a penny. All promises. With game depleted by settlers
And their own past hunting sold to traders,
Their children now were hungry, horses lean or meat.

They paid yesterday with tomorrow, the way
Of the whiteman, of starvation, trespass, regret, and lie.
So much for kin, for open hands, for superiority
Of money and promises. There is a medicine stronger than honesty:
Men once true will turn for money. Economy,
Praised in the halls of Congress, steals slowly
The lives of the people and our common peace. Beside them there,
Government agents hunch shoulder to shoulder, the protectors
Of traders and settlers, of the sellers of land not theirs,
The takers of fees, the makers of treaties wherein
They are called the protectors of the red men. They're just bureaucrats.
They're agents of politicians, of Mr. Ramsey and Mr. Sibley,
Of Flandrau and Brown, the land sellers, of railroaders
And steamboaters and whiskey-sellers and on Sundays of missionaries.
Upright men, I'm sure. Yes, I've scouted for them,
helped them out of stirrups, often heard them
Scorn, as white men do, the savage ways,
fearlessly call me a half-breed, an almost-them, acceptable.
Some like Sibley I can almost handle as men.
He hunts, can ride bareback and likes those big stories,
But bureaucrats, no: "quick, just sign on the line"
Sort of men as they hand you their pens.
Over there, now behind the others, *the missionaries.*
They once were honest, came with fur traders,
Now still tireless in spreading their words, but bought,
Like me, holding stirrups, preparing the way
Of the horde, converting souls in white men's clothes –
And, oh, how important must be clothes in their Great Beyond! –
Changing hunters to farmers, the healthy to the sick, water
Into whiskey then back to water. Some true men among them, yes,
But reduced to praying first to the Great White Father
And only then to the Creator, watching Providence with mercy
While teaching the living Jesus out of Red Men.

Traders' chorus
Ever does the businessman wait for the moment to be right.
So we wait on goods in transit, on funds promised,
On the tribes to pay for all their credit, who never
Understand that money advanced must come from someone.

That someone's us. Yes, the money looks like food
Or clothes, tobacco or salt, ammunition or guns,
But money it is. Our money. We look to the east
For goods at prices set in the east; we sell—
If sales it can be called—at prices set by government
Officials—you guessed it, in the east, away from tribes
Who have sold their land for pennies per acre, their brains
Locked on furs and hunting and war and whiskey.
Don't get us wrong. We're kin. We're brothers in law,
Or cousins, uncles, fathers, related to everyone,
To every branch, every band, we've tied
Our knots over and over beneath the belts
Of women and families, to secure our places here.
It's worked, but then the furs and hides ran out
And cash arose, a dark enemy, to kill
Our peace. No more credit for family but business.
All came to depend on the treaty monies each year.
The only things our kin could use to pay for goods.
They cannot eat the land, nor pelts of muskrat,
Nor live on what they take in war against old foes,
A few horses here, an old rifle there, more mouths
To feed in prisoners. For us it's been as harsh: we wait
For payment coming once a year. Yearly!
We store in barns, meantime, what's needed to draw out
When need arises. Of barns our kin have none.
The scarcity of game—elk or deer or bear—
The fights over ricing lakes and hunting grounds
Now filling with whites, their fences, fields, and stock,
Has meant starvation, created not by weather
But men, abundant humanity, and their demon cash.
Still, that's what we live on. Either they starve or we do.
Our real kin now is the Indian agent, the giver
Of licenses and annuity cash, and the government department
From which we suckle.

[Enter chorus of Indian agents and representatives of US government Indian bureau]

Government Agents chorus
For us, too, change. We once were agents of the War Department, our call
Brought out the troops to restore peace and quiet.
Even now we listen for the voices of powerful men
To the east, those warriors not to be toyed with, dispensers
Each day of counsel, mediators with traders and tribes.
They're civilians now, though, agents (like us) of some Bureau, politics
In every breath. We dispense the annuities promised
In treaties, which means we try to explain to hungry
Indians why it's late, when it's coming,
If it's coming, why the traders take all of it,
And where the mission is so they might eat.
Until they can be white men with red bodies,
Nothing will change, so we push to make hunters
Into farmers, savages into civilized men,
Who won't make war on other tribes or whites,
Who peacefully welcome the pilgrims to Plymouth Rock—
And give at last the land whose title they've sold,
Peaceably to move farther west, ever west,
To wider, less tillable lands. Yes, we know—
We hear our own talk as well as the squeaking wheels
Of a thousand thousand wagons moving west.
Political hacks without suits, now we're bag men
For rich developers, senators, newspaper editors,
Visionaries—the worst of the lot—and we're considered
Corrupt by whites and Indians alike. They need
Someone to blame, it's true, for all this,
And here we are. So, why not ask for premiums
When traders apply for licenses? Why scrimp
On houses when chiefs have idle hands
And need the cloth and guns and horses for their kin?
Why fear the courts of whites when by our words
Men by tens of thousands flow in to pay
The ransom to release this bound unclodded soil?
Each man will take his share.

U.S. Indian Bureau representative
We in the Indian Bureau take our duties
Seriously. There's an unclouded vision
We swear, our agents can repeat when needed,

Though their courageous predecessor wince from the earth,
At greed so manifest when a higher destiny presents.
Our policy for decades: containment of turmoil and threat,
That's needed to welcome families, businesses, churches,
Safe from savage menace, vast as sky
They take possession of a future pushing west,
Always to displace the savage past. The treaties
Were a start but mistakes were made, to allow the Sioux
In Minnesota their swathe from Fort Snelling to the Dakota Territory,
We know this will not stand, yet it is the law,
A deal daily abrogated by in-flow of settlers,
Their oxen, horses, houses, and kin, that soon
Will leave not a berry unclaimed. A wave unstoppable,
Inevitable as the will of God. Our burden, then: the peace
If possible; the land without fail.

A letter from Kintzing Pritchette, inspector for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, written this day, August 18, 1857 from the Bureau's northwestern offices, to the Secretary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Washington, D.C.

"Sir—It appears that on 14th of February, $15,000 was sent to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, St. Paul office, for Sioux of the Mississippi, none of which has been paid to the agents for distribution to the Sioux and maintenance of the Upper and Lower Agencies. Moreover, the Indians complain that other funds have not been paid, viz, $12,000 per annum by the Treaty of 5th August, 1851, besides arrears for several years, claiming to be about $30,000, not including the $12,000 payable under said treaties for education, a large balance remaining in government hands. I also take this opportunity to inform the Department that as of now not a single agent in the Territory is at his post. I have the honor to be with great respect your obedient servant, K. Pritchette."

[Exit agent and government choruses. Enter missionary chorus in two groups, Stephen Riggs being in one group. Jack Frazer listens from upstage on one side. On the other side upstage, a small chorus of Dakota chiefs.]

Missionary chorus
[Subchorus 1] We mission workers offer a loving approach, counseled
By the examples and teachings of Jesus, we hold out their inclusion
In an orderly society.

[Subchorus 2] Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?
Or who shall stand in his holy place?
He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart;
Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

[Subchorus 1] The will of a loving God
Is indistinguishable from an orderly society, requiring the conversion
Of the Red Man from a savage life of war and infidelity
To peace, accommodation to other god-fearing peoples,
Education in the suppositions and styles of European peoples,
And morally redeeming industry. In conversion from the wild,
Disorderly, warring societies lies their salvation.
In civilization is their hope. We offer hope.

[**Subchorus 2**] The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous,
And his ears are open unto their cry.
The face of the Lord is against them that do evil,
To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

[**Subchorus 1**] To this end, have we given medicine and schooling in both morals
And useful skills. Agriculture is their salvation.
From the many savage gods, to the compassionate one truth.
From the life of a hunter, which is communal, contentious, and diminishing
To cultivators of the earth, supporting families better
And with less labor by raising stock and bread and spinning and weaving clothes,
Than by hunting—or so has said Thomas Jefferson himself.

[**Subchorus 2**] For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be:
Yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.
But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves
In the abundance of peace. The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again;
But the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth.
For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth;
And they that be cursed of him shall be cut off.

[**Subchorus 1, a voice**] Should they be completely integrated? How else to ensure

Their survival and our survival both?
For what do we wait? For their savage blood to be diluted
by conversion as they breed and thrive as is their manner?
Already the red sea could overwhelm our women
And children, our homes and wagons if God will not part
This sea of red. He awaits only our will.

[**Subchorus 2, a voice**] No, they should be "translated" in order to get along,
Maintaining their culture as much as doesn't conflict
Conversion is for God to do in remaking their culture
As He transforms their souls. The souls come first.
They will come around eventually and then we will all be one.

[**Subchorus 1, a voice**] Oh hell, only Episcopalians, Catholics, and Unitarians care about that.
Who cares whether they are assimilated or maintain their culture?
They must be moved out of the way.
They are yesterday; we are tomorrow.
God wants railroads, farms, shops, and churches here.
It's clear as a prairie morning. Why dawdle when the Lord
Is speaking in deeds, in destinies, in armies of the faithful?

[**subchorus 2, a voice**] What will prevent genocide if our white parishioners
Feel this way? Introduce civilization to these people.
Only that will prevent genocide.

Stephen Riggs: A reading from "An Outline of Plan for Civilizing the Dakotas," by G.F. Acton and me, Stephen Riggs, member of the Presbyterian mission to the Dakotas. "There are many evils resulting from the Indians' gregarious habits. Idleness is encouraged. A great deal too much time is spent in feasting, dancing, and gaming of all kinds. Besides, where there is a village of any considerable size their planting must necessarily be limited….We regard the community system among the Dakotas – property held in common and families interdependent – as one of the most serious obstacles in the way of their civilization…. In case of a treaty with them, arrangements should be entered into which will at present diminish its influence, and finally break it up entirely…. We would suggest that a few simple laws be given them, for the protection of life and property – for the prevention of crime and the encouraging of industry….For the present the execution of these laws would be necessarily

committed to agents, judges, or justices, receiving their appointment from and sanctioned by the United States government. The question of fact might, in all ordinary cases, we think, be safely submitted to the decision of a native or mixed jury. This would make them understand something of the benefits of a government of laws, and the importance of this cooperation in carrying the laws into execution.

Jack Frazer:
Sometimes, I can only shake my head.
Half-breed I may be, but white people's scruples
Seem to me like fish gone bad.
"We offer red men this opportunity," they say, then worry
How they can take it back without sounding
Like, well, an Indian giver—a white-man giver
That phrase should be. What a good deal,
You can't turn it down, red man, because our guns
Are behind it, and our missionaries deeply worry
How God might love you more. Only justify, just justify,
So anything is possible, so our minds can rest in peace.
So complicated it is, when human needs are so simple.

Stephen Riggs:
But wait, I haven't finished. Our "Outline of a Plan" goes on.
The bulk of it is about education and the treaty payments,
Which now go immediately into the pockets of traders,
Without the Dakotas seeing a cent. Besides boarding schools,
We want village schools for the reading and writing of the Dakota tongue,
For help in farming and house-building, in the mechanical arts
So the people can work and earn their livelihood apart
From the government and handouts. We want money
And family plots of land in the hands of the people,
Like any citizen, yes, any citizen, like any…of us, we others.
Look, I'll speak plain: the government provides and is needed.
The white settlers and salesmen and traders would steal
The Dakotas blind. Our duty as Christian colonizers
Is to protect God's child from seizure and plunder,
to lift and sanctify. When tribes are savage and lawless,
What respect will the conquerors afford them?
They send the army forward, making way
For land-seller, livestock-grazers, merchants

For settlers only, white settlers, wanting
Only their religion, their property,
Their oxen, horses, plows, and houses.
One-hundred-sixty acres large, a world unto itself.
I have seen the passage to the west of promises and treachery,
Sun up, sun down. The chiefs had me translate a letter
They dictated to Governor Ramsey about their plight,
Way back in September of 1849.
They requested me, Stephen Riggs, to translate
And send it. In addition, a copy was sent to the President
of the United States. The chiefs were Wamdiokiya,
Upigahdeya, and Inyangmani with sixty
Or seventy other. Let me read the letter:

[Chorus of Dakota chiefs:]
This country is not yet yours but you wish to do in it all your pleasure. We are not pleased with the idea of your coming and building a garrison here. And that you should remove us from the country that we occupy to another we do not desire and are unwilling that it should be so. When you ask us for our land if you make the traders negotiate for it, we will make no reply. When you wish to say anything to us if you come to our country, then we will talk together. . . "
Signed by all the Wapeton and Sisseton men
And braves — Shakopee, Big Eagle, Wabasha, Red Owl,
Little Crow, and the others present for the signing.

Jack Frazer:
After thirteen years who were we then?
The same few elders and thousands of new white faces
All jostling into imaginary plots on unbroken prairie.
Who oversees them? Not the Indian Bureau
Nor government agent nor missionary preaches nor you
Nor me, no, but the real estate fella,
The railroads selling off thier rights of way,
That ain't no right for nobody else's way,
Drawing folk filled with frustrated hopes
From salesmen sent from Europe and east coast cities.

A Union Pacific representative [leaning against a bar, smoking a cigar and palming a whiskey]:
Beer's on me, gentlemen. I'm on the verge,
I see the pinnacle of the peak just ahead —

More money, more sunshine flowing into the offices
Of Union Pacific, the halls of Congress, the grasslands
Of endless plains where sit the rulers of territories
And states, our people, our future, regardless of wars,
Separations, of hot hells or high waters.
The future is ours. Whose? You might well ask.
The makers of farms and homesteads, the immigrant nation
Moving west and those who sell them land.
To wit, me. And why not? There is so much there.
Everyone should have their slice. You can't imagine.
They're coming, still coming, in waves and tides, from Germany
Sweden, Norway, Ireland, all farmers, all eager
For new starts, who never could afford a stitch
of land in kingdoms. Good white stock, these,
no kikes or degos, hard workers who'll pay back the loans.
We'll turn vast empty land to dollars with crops
And stock for families willing to work, who take
The deal. The government took the land
By treaty for virtually nothing, ten cents an acre,
Then on it pays three cents per for annuity to the redskins
For 24 million acres, gents, then charges a buck
And a quarter an acre to settlers, easy terms, In 1841
The Preemption Act that overturned the bigwigs'
Land Laws, giving regular people
The chance to make a start, have a stake. To us
The railroads, free for laying track, plus excess
We can sell to settlers, plus the army
For protection. War or no war, Minnesota will be settled.
More treaty goods are coming, too. Poor bastards,
These tribes, are up against a wall, no help
At all, no lawyer or banker, no army with cannons,
They don't even speak our language, just missionaries
To plead for them, and Indian agents, clerks really,
Who'll take their share often as not. So, God and guns
Will do it. Kinda sad, ain't it, were it not for the land
And the money?

[Enter two settlers, Eustace Lange and Gustav Mogeland, one on either side of the stage.]

Eustace Lange:
My name is Eustace Lange from Alsace, west Prussia.
We have one-hundred-sixty acres south
Of Redwood Agency, growing now the corn
And sorghum, rye as well, and pigs, a luxury
I'm told. The pigs were hard to carry here
In wagons, short legs and all, half
We lost, but ate them there, Wisconsin it was,
Well, one was sick, too sick to eat, another
Escaped, frightened, ran away,
Was never found. The sow we saved, by grace
Of God. From money we'd saved from selling horses
In market plaza, bought our passage over
My wife and me, two boys. The pigs we bought
At railroad market in Indiana. The trip
In ship was bad for me, as I was ill
With every swell and wave—farmer, not sailor.
Was shit (between men who talk) on the sea when it wasn't
The other end, too. The wife and one of the boys
Was just as bad. The little one, though, must be
A sailor. He gave to the crew much laughs
And me with fright, with going up to deck
And asking questions of the men. But now, by God,
We're here. New home, farm that's ours, plow,
Two oxen, mule, pigs, and soon some chicks
For eggs and meat. So much to do, spring
Is going so fast by. No fear of armies, the French
Who want it all, the Prussians who prepare always
Each day and night in fear for war. But here,
Only enemy is our own damn laziness, weather, bugs—
All things well known to farmers—and maybe the red men.
They hungry seem. Sometimes low-spirited, then angry,
But ever willing to trade, play games, exchange
Hellos, not friends but struggling neighbors, moody,
Too rough and dark-skinned. No Christian man should sleep
But be ready, true. Yet now we all want good
For families. Our fences and our women we'll defend,
As they will their hunting, passage along rivers
This, a tight-lipped peace. 'Midst swells and waves,

A passage we take together now, hope so fragile
And so rare. Maybe for them, too. I don't know.

Gustav Mogeland [reading]:
Dear brother Arne, I hope you, your wife and sons
Are well, escaped the grippe that held us all
So tightly in the weeks before we left. A thousand thanks
For hiding our leaving from the pastor and congregation.
Their fist comes down on all who seek to breathe
Without debt or bond, or want enough to farm,
The prices to live on, free of stupid sons
Of landlords, powerful, foolish, vicious, ignorant. . .
Well, you know. Here, I sometimes gaze abroad
And try to recall the pain of class and want.
The fields are not yet filled, the fences built,
Or livestock crowding the barn, yet broad horizons
Still serve to promise a real life. How I wish
To offer what you gave to us, so you can escape
As well. I long for counsel and help—a place
For you is ready. You'll join the other half
Of Småland here, for up and down our district
Swedes put in farms. Some here are pietist, others Popish
All mixed (one wonders why some left). For everyone,
The work is crushing, and all are trying to share
The tasks. The larger families prevail now
If everyone can work. We live in constant emergency,
Survivors after hard winters, now facing the floods
Of a promising spring. Rely as we do on Swedes,
We ask nonetheless the Germans, Irish, yes, even
Norwegians for help sometimes, advice. Some men
Are stingy in storms and stress, as Christians never should be.
No trees are growing for miles around. A place
Called Lone Tree presents a widely known landmark.
Such broad horizons frighten Annika. She speaks
Sometimes of feeling trapped by unending space.
I confess to being frightened by it myself sometimes.
It all feels so unused, so unfamiliar.
We have each other, so probably won't go mad.
Other settlers are thrown wide on this ocean of grass.
Well, so. You're no doubt reading that this nation is rent

In two by north and south. I'm glad our boys,
Too young to fight, avoid conscription. The south
Has laborers, slaves, to bring in harvests, tend
The stock, and serve the landed. Here, we might use
Such muscle to aid in clearing land and building
Our farms. It's true the red men are everywhere here.
They keep to themselves mostly, except occasionally
They must be controlled, put down by the army. They're beggars,
Really, no help to us. Their hunting past,
They try to farm or trade, but live from payments
Made by government for land once theirs. They're lazy
And confused, belligerent. Perhaps we must someday
Wage war on them. I keep the rifle near,
Yet worry little about them. A small price to pay
For all that we can gain here from sweat and prayer.
This place awaits our reunion, Arne. My best
To wife and children. Reply if you can. I will
Receive it eventually and be glad to hear from you.
Yours, your brother Gustav Mogeland.

Jack Frazer:
For long this land has laid in the way of the world,
The rest of the world, I mean – Frenchmen, British,
Spaniards even, besides the coyote, buffalo, and bear folk,
Who are less exotic than humans in my opinion
Because they belong here. They don't have to lay claims.
But laying claim is the order of the day. Indians
Have mostly fought white men like they were other Indians.
White men have fought Indians like they were laying claim.
Even Indians do it. Who's more an Indian?
The farmer who wants to provide food and a future for a family,
Or a traditionalist, who wear the old clothes, carries the medicine,
A hunter and warrior? The trads control the soldiers' lodges,
Advising – sometimes overruling – chiefs, protecting
The people, organizing, packing up, moving, giving out
Of food and annuity money. They want no farmers.
Making war and peace are theirs, they say,
For men, not farmers, and so they lay claim.
And so the farmers plead, do not exclude us.

[Enter two choruses, one of farmer Indians and the other of traditionalists (the soldier's lodge), the former dressed in white people's clothing and the latter in traditional clothing.]

Chorus of farmer Indians:
Do not exclude us, strike us down from the lodges.
Together only, we belong as one.
We've all been plagued by theft: the end of game
By overhunting, the theft of promised money
By businessmen and traders, the smug chiefs
And slick guys who're pretty sure we're stupid,
Just taking what they offer. The root of spite
Is *handing* down, then *talking* down to people
Who cannot feed themselves—the disrespect,
The people's lives worth nothing. And soon despite
Our strength as warriors, their numbers will boggle the mind,
Will overwhelm our hunters' takes, and leave us
Empty, spreading the disrespect to us,
Our hands extended, awaiting annuities for land
Long sold, the automatic losers. In unity
Lies our greatest safety, the only sure way
To save our past and deal like men who feed
Their families. How can we keep our self-respect,
Who're forced to play this rigged game?

Soldiers lodge:
Our brothers speak well. That is the people's question:
How will our children respect us once we've played
This rigged game as losers? Wake up.
You want to learn from whites? Learn this:

Were the game rigged against them, *they* would fight,
We think, though we would still be better men
By far. Our brothers want to give up the old ways.
True, the game has left because their friends
Have killed beyond the land's and water's power
To birth. We leave, move on when little remains;
The world is made again when it sleeps for us.
Your friends stay put, exhaust the waters and kill

The game nearby. Just keep them out of lands
They haven't yet fouled. Just make them fear our hands,
Our people's wrath, or else there'll be nothing left
For us but dirt—the game sold off, the waters theirs,
The dirt itself for sale with everything on it
Sold off. For what? For gold that's not delivered,
For debt—they paint it bright by calling it "credit"—
A slow-acting poison, a fatal medicine. Our brothers
Are too clever: they think by casting the bones
Just right, they'll rebuild the raccoon. We cannot expect
To survive playing the game by white rules.

Little Six (Wabasha):
My people listen as Wabasha speaks. When men
Deal unequally, peace benefits only
The stronger, forbearance means nothing from the weak. Pretending
Otherwise is traitorous or stupid. It's used to distract,
As someone stuffs money in someone else's pockets.
Big Thunder is wrong: peace at any price
Is not the way for us to live. Just look:

Already it's scattered when most we need to stand.
Some be forbearing and strategic when most they need to act;
Others act impetuously, bravely, without strategy or patience.
Farmer Indians: We need not be divided, even in this,
A rigged game.

Farmer Indian:
The rules *are* bent for us
In only one respect: if we adopt
Some ways of theirs, we can live peacefully amongst them.
They have said so. Yes, it means a way to grow
And use our food, to sell our goods for profit,
To earn our way to owning land again.
But if we refuse, what's left? They'll hunt us down
And trap us like rabbits in heavy snows. They'll curse
Our children's children with disease, starvation, war.
Forever war. How taking annuities can be
Traditional, we don't know, yet that is your way,
The way of starvation. The spirits' way is different.

A tree that's bent by great winds survives
And casts its seeds to build a forest. No use
In raging or mourning over life or game that's gone,
Pretending yesterday will be tomorrow.
Great warriors that we are, we're still not using
The other half of the people's strength — the power
To stand as once we did in this, our land.

Soldiers lodge chorus:
Where now is our common life? When you live on plots
With corners and fences, calling this yours
And that mine, what do you have in common?
Soon, like whites, you'll count each bean that leaks
From your plot into mine. Soon, like whites,
You'll call most everything yours, so the life of the people
Is not what matters but the power of the bean, the gold,
The paper, the number, the writing, and that alone.
They bury their dead in "plots." So you. Each corner
Excludes your kin — excludes the long view
And deep circle. You treat us like we're pretending
About these traditional ways, yet you believe
The starlight stories these white men tell us.
When have their smokey tales been anything but lies?
The god-talkers give us one story — though they hate
The other god-talkers — filled with hopeful *if-onlies* —
If only our hair were shorter and pantaloons long,
If only our speech were filled with Lord Jesus. The bigwigs
Give us sweet talk until it's time
To pay, then disdain us, sneer at us losers,
Rewrite the rules, and unblock the rivers of farmers
Until our lands are flooded with their folk and contracts useless.
The Great White Father's friends ride
Their horses over the little ponies — ours.
We're sick of talking about this farming.
If you farmers want to join us, fine, but you
Must show us your farming will be one with us as well,
Part of the blanket of our ways. Does this mean nothing?
You're pulling a single thread until the whole fabric
Unravels. Change your clothes, mount your horses,
Stand as one with us, the old ones and the spirits.

Jack Frazer:
How do you wear your Indian mask, over war paint
Or above a collar? Do you look to the past or the future?
Me, I looked to the present, if I hadn't I reckoned
I'd get up on one side of the horse and fall off the other.
I would always have been worrying about either past or future,
Just trying to hang on under a horse. Still, you got to wonder:
Does being the purest Indian mean you'll return
Their places to the people, or even a place?
White men lay claim in another way, to land,
It's true, but first to rights to own a place,
A thing, a person, the rocks you walk on, the blackness
That oozes from the earth, the air you breathe, the selling
Of whiskey, the killing of Indians and slaves, but above all
They lay claim to the preeminent right of laying claim.
For claims like that, you'd better have an army nearby.

[Enter Captain Bernard Bee, dressed in military uniform and reading from a dispatch. On the other side, a second soldier, Captain Marsh, also in uniform.]

Captain Bernard Bee [reading]:
"Fort Ridgely, Minnesota
April 9, 1857
To Colonel E. B. Alexander, from me, Capt. Bernard E. Bee, Commander of Company D, 10th Infantry

On the morning of the 10th of March I received an order to proceed with the effective force of my company to Spirit Lake on the southern border of Minnesota, where it was reported certain houses had been plundered and citizens killed, by a Band or Bands of Sioux Indians.

I now present the following as facts. Some six weeks or two months since, a band of some 12 or 13 warriors led by Inkpaduta were hunting in Iowa on the Inyan Yankey or Little Sioux River, when a dog belonging to one of the settlers attacked an Indian, who killed the dog. The owner punished the Indian. Other citizens, probably fearing the consequences, took the guns of the whole band of Indians, leaving them no means of providing their daily subsistence. These Indians bore no great love to the whites at best. They determined on revenge, returned to the place where their guns had been stored, found it unguarded, got possession of their arms, and swept through the valley of the Little Sioux up to Spirit Lake. On this lake were

several houses scattered at wide intervals through the grove. All of these they plundered, killing the inhabitants and probably bearing off with them some women.

The region's inhabitants collected in houses on the east bank of the river and sent to Fort Ridgely for assistance. But a man named Wood and his brother remained on the west bank and ridiculed their fear. When Inkpaduta's band came in from Spirit Lake, Wood traded with its members until a few days before the troops arrived and then told them they had better keep out of the way for soldiers were coming. This brought affairs to a crisis.

Meanwhile, the Indians were plundering the vacant houses, but found one house unfortunately occupied, its owner Josiah Stewart having left the house where the settlers had congregated and returned to his own homestead with his wife and three children. Here the Savages revelled in blood. When I visited the spot, the father lay dead on his threshold, the mother with one arm encircling her murdered infant lay outside the door, and by her side was stretched the lifeless body of a little girl of three summers, the eldest a boy of ten escaped. . .

I arrived Saturday evening being too late by two days.

A great check has been given to settlement and civilization by this massacre. Settlers and pioneers would be most unwise to risk their lives and those of their families in a region which from its facilities for hunting and fishing and (should the settlement extend) for plunder and violence may be termed the Indian's paradise.

I am very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
Bernard E. Bee"

Jack Frazer:
Even thus, some there were who saw what they saw,
Clear as a prairie morn. Captain John Marsh was one,
Army man, duty and clear eyesight.

Captain John Marsh:
We forget so fast, we whites. So many of us
Are new, so there is no memory. Settlers arrive
So fast. Here in Fort Ridgeley, where we're garrisoned,
Four-hundred men keep an eye on millions
Of acres, from St. Paul west to Lake Traverse,
All up and down the Minnesota River, all points
Both north and south. I'm from Michigan, my father's
Second son, John Marsh. If I weren't here, I'd await

Deployment to the red dust of the south or west
Or be at home, starting a law practice, as I'd planned.
I've already spent a round of duty fighting
The southern rebels, saw the Battle of Bull Run
And then came west. It's been, well, not what I was told. I was told
I would be keeping the peace by keeping down
The Indians, the Red Menace, the Savage Threat
To civilizing people, meaning settlers,
missionaries, railroads, merchants, everyone
And everything that settles the wild hearts
And ways of men. I've reveled in these open spaces,
In the command of men, in the spread of peaceable commerce.
But I did not expect to defend the harsh demands
Of the corrupt trader, agent, politician,
The alternately imperious and desperate interests
Of settlers who, having bought their land unseen,
Occupy it, with impunity, unlawfully
When they are violating treaties and understandings.
They become a law unto themselves,
Propelled by politics and money, without regard
For others' lives. Well, all right, what are they
To do? Wait until Congress gets around
To achieving clarity on the issue
Of reservations for these Indians? Settlers talk
About boundaries as though they start and end
With their personal claims. They and their land agents
Talk about title, property, money, ownership.
These Indians talk about starvation.

A settler [interrupting]:
What are treaties to us? We have land
To plow, families to feed, stock to raise.
We must keep starvation away ourselves.
Government is there to protect us and get the Indians
out of the way.

Marsh:
Right. Here we are, in the midst.
This latest—dozens killed down at Spirit Lake—
So far away, such vicious weather—dozens.

But who remembers Henry Lott? three years ago,
Henry Lott and his sons, who took revenge
For Indians damaging his stock by killing a dozen
Wahpekute Sioux, mostly women and children and old people,
Indian lives in payment for a cow, and he considered
That just. Even by the laws of the frontier, it is lawful but unjust.
We investigated, I'm told, but nothing was ever done.
Nothing. But *they* remembered.
Then, last fall we were ordered to confiscate
The Indians' guns, before hunting season began,
Before a man could feed himself. So, any wonder
They harbor and protect the outlaws who murdered those settlers
Down at Spirit Lake, settlers who had harbored the Lotts?
Between you and me, look east.
Treaty deals are only as good as the will
Of the government to follow through. The Indians know it
But lack counsel to compel honest dealing.
As the blood settles into the earth, layer
Upon layer, they call us for permanent garrisons all along
The territory—west, south, north.
Yes, it will be needed. We are on the cusp
Of more blood upon blood upon blood again.
Everyone knows it, can feel it. Renegotiate?
The treaties keep a semblance of peace a little longer,
Until the representatives of moneyed interests
Want more land, fewer Indians. Every treaty
Has been obsolete the moment it's been signed.
Soon, the bandages will fall off the atrophied flesh
Of these lies. People, any people, can
And do work around corruption, injustice,
Theft, laws unequally administered—
that's called civilization—
but where there is starvation, people will act.
Meantime, we have our orders to carry out,
And do it we shall, die though we might.

[Enter Wabasha and Red Owl, together.]

Jack Frazer:
Blood for blood, they say, but memory is blood, too,

The sharp corners of the waning moon that stick
In the people's spine, the cold light disdain
That justified massacre for a cow's death—human flesh for cow flesh.
With the new moon came new leaders who knew the old ways—
Raiding, capturing, killing—knew they would not work now.
Only together—not tribes but armies—could hope
Shake loose the poisonous moon. The man called Little Crow—
Dakota call him Taoyateduta—had negotiated treaties
As had his grandfather and father. Just accommodate
To preserve a place for the people. Go along to get along.
We can work this out. But sometimes a man's vision
Can shift, so he does not see what he always sees,
Doesn't hear what he always hears, nor do
What he always does. Here are two
Who knew him better—Wabasha and Red Owl—
Who hunted with him, warred, took scalps, scouted,
And carried the medicine bags. Let them tell it.

Wabasha:
All the time, you people want to know
About Taoyateduta. So, okay, I knew
His family, he knew mine. I went to Washington
With him in 1858, the year
Of waking up. He was spokesman for us,
The Mdewankanton band. His grandfather was chief
Among us, Cetanwakanmani, who went
To Washington to try and settle a boundary between us
And Ojibway bands. The white agent here then
Was keen for lines on maps to keep us apart.
I think it just made us want revenge for wrongs
Intently, like smoke that settles in low places
To sting the mind and poison the breath. His son,
Wakinyantahka, you knew as Big Thunder,
He struck a deal in Washington: money for land,
Annuity they called it, once a year, paid
In cash and barrels of food—salt pork and flour.
The cash was grabbed by traders, who gave us credit.
Times were good, but debt was mounting. We owed
Each year much more. The traders knew the government
Would pay from our annuity, meanwhile extending

Us credit. They got money. We got debt.
We owed not as you would owe your family
Or friends for help when needed, but as bankers take
Your promise and take for payment whatever you have,
As strangers or enemies would. The old ways ended.
I think he knew his mistake. He drank to a stupor
And passed the medicine bag to a son unworthy—
Until Taoyateduta returned and killed that bad brother,
He was a worthier man and warrior, unafraid and schooled
In his family's ways of dealing. In 1854,
He went to Washington, like grandfather and father before.

Red Owl:
He told us later he'd heard so much about it,
The earlier journeys, father's, grandfather's: the railroads
Steamboats, cities, soldiers, rank on rank,
Line by line, the houses, buildings of stone,
The lights that lit the night like baby stars,
The organs, orchestras, actors, preachers, painters,
Foods and hospitals, hotels and grand arenas
With a thousand horses, cannon and sailing ships
That brought a world of slaves and goods and riches
Unimagined by Dakota people. We, called
"the people" amongst ourselves, are so few and invisible
Compared to the peoples *they* mix with, the earth they take,
The blood they spill. All that he saw as well.
His fathers had not dreamed it. He wanted our land
To remain as ours, unflooded, unseized, respected.
That is the land that lies north of the river from Kaposia to Traverse
To allow our hunting life, the traditional ways.

Wabasha:
He met the president, who wants to be the father
Of all, great and white: Pierce, with high Indian agent
Manypenny. Pierce agreed. The land
Would be ours. He ordered it. Taoyateduta
Returned to talk us into leaving wherever
We lived and live instead to the north of the river.
The north of the river. He us told of our smallness, their strength,
The wisdom of dealing now before we disappeared,

As a fish is caught and crushed by a bear. We heard.
We thought the President's order was forever. He thought so too.
Still, harsh it was to think us weak
And tiny. We were The People, the bravest and best
On earth, who fought each moment to save our eyes
From sleep, from stone our hands and legs, from knives
Our scalps and hearts, from death our medicine's heartbeat.
We agreed and moved. It appeared the only way.
Everything changed to the north of the river. For us,
That way remained the only way home.

Red Owl:
The People felt crowded. Two agencies, Yellow Medicine
And Redwood, west and east in the river's course,
Yet far from our ancestral land, the great river,
The St. Croix, the eastern Minnesota. The people adapted.
The payments came. The food was plentiful. The worries
Appeared to sleep. Perhaps we might convince
The government to pay old promises, set things right.
We agreed for twenty-four chiefs and our soldiers to journey
To Washington again from there. Times were good.
We had to review the treaties and set things right.
What might be possible? Prosperity? Security? Respect?
Times were good in 1858 so we paid our own way there.
We had hope, the deadliest of liquors, a spirit lying
In wait with pain and illness, fear and regret.

Wabasha:
Once there, we met. Taoyatedua began, praising them.
He wanted, he said, "to walk their streets," to see
Just how they lived, so we might learn. Some flattery
Before he listed their failures to pay our money,
Violations of treaties already agreed, leaving us
Short of funds to pay the trader-debts
And feed the people for the coming winter. The land
Itself was being shorted, as well,
The Germans especially pushing their beefy way
Past the treaty boundaries, spreading their farms
Through Dakota lands assured by the government
To us forever, reserved by Executive Order,

By the Great White Father's most sacred word.

Red Owl:
But here the government's chief negotiator pressed on
About the boundaries, and then began the unraveling.

[Enter Taoyateduta and the government negotiator performing a dumb show as Wabasha and Red Owl narrate:]

Red Owl:
The white chief went on about the boundaries of the 1854 treaty,
The one Taoyatedua had negotiated back then. He asked,
Did Taoyateduta remember the treaty's boundaries?
"Of course," he replied. Then the white chief brought out the treaty
And had it read in Dakota. All this time,
Taoyateduta was believing the line was south
Of the Minnesota River, but no, it was far to the north,
Our land did not straddle the river but rode as women
Ride a horse, one side alone. He hung
His head and silence gripped us all.
He had not moved us far enough north.
He felt our eyes upon him and cleared his throat.

Taoyateduta:
I do not know how to read or write, and supposing the men sent by our Great Father to treat with us were honest, I signed the treaty.

Wabasha:
The white chief pressed on now.
He wanted all our land northeast of the river,
Half our reserve, in exchange for making permanent
The rest as ours. We knew then things had changed,
They had no intention of doing right, of correcting
Any wrongs of the past, but were introducing fresh wrongs.
We had hoped the government might respect our rights and claims
More than traders or settlers did, but they did not.
The masks came off. Days later, we met again.

Red Owl:
The white chief spoke of farms for Indians, of plots

Dividing our land by acres per family, of the Dakota
As though they were settlers. I hung my head, flexed my fists.
Taoyateduta interrupted, I noted, between clenched teeth.

Taoyateduta:
You talk well and use fine language and that's all. This is the way you all do. But we never receive half what is promised, or which we ought to get. I recollect you distinctly. You then promised us that we should have this same land forever; and yet now, you want to take half of it away. We ought when we meet to talk like men and not like children. It appears you are getting papers all around me, so that after a while I will have nothing left.

Wabasha:
The white chief replied that if we didn't agree to his treaty,
Minnesota would take *all* our land from us
And like the tribes who fought, we'd lose every grain of sand.

[The white negotiators withdraw upstage, turning their backs. The Dakota gather close in a circle of chairs, some sitting,other pacing or dancing.]

Red Owl:
The meeting adjourned. A few days to allow us to sightsee.
I didn't. They wanted us entertained, distracted, drunk.
Some of us sat indoors, shades drawn, smoking,
Silent, while others drank and danced. The daylight
Refused to reach us, the evenings to cool, the birds
To turn in flight, the waters to cleanse as always:

Wabasha:
In the darkness the voices of kin, the elders' shaking
Of heads, the ragged feathers of victories past,
The land the spirits love, in blood, unallotted.
The winds, ever rising in our ears, tore away our shelters.
We met again once more to finish the kill.

[Dumb show resumes.]

Taoyateduta:
You gave us a paper…and we had it explained, and from that it would seem that the Sioux Indians own nothing. When I saw the paper, it made

me ashamed. We had, we supposed, made a complete treaty, and we were promised a great many things, horses, cattle, flour, plows, and farming utensils, but it now appears that the wind blows it all off.

Wabasha:
And yet, Taoyateduta said, a new treaty
Would help pay debts to traders, like Myrick,
Campbell, Brown, the others. He named them all
And what we owed to each, plus money set aside
For the people and named an amount—not much, just a little—
But the white chief refused to agree since the Congress must decide.
Just like a settler's approach—get as much for nothing as possible
At our expense, the stingy man's allotment-mind.
We gave up all the land but ten miles wide
Along the river from middle to west, in allotments
Of eighty acres. But no annuity did he give
Nor agree to pay for old failures and illegal withholdings.

Red Owl:
Taoyateduta did not agree. He refused
At the last minute to sign. The white chief insulted him instead,
Repaid him for his strength with mockery. "In this regard,"
He said, "he acts like a child." It was a bitter drink.
So sign he must and sign he did at last.

[Negotiators exit with signed treaty. Dakota begin to exit, scattered here and there, Taoyateduta stage center, head hanging, fists clenched.]

Wabasha:
We held it tight against him, Taoyateduta.
Humiliation doesn't stop with enemies, you know.
Taoyateduta ran for tribal spokesman
But lost to Traveling Hail. The people held
Him liable: the treaties, traditions out of date,
Embarrassments, and failure to deal better with whites.
The farmer Indians thought him old and angry;
The soldier's lodge youngsters thought him a big give-away.
Withdrawal, quietness, humility—qualities he'd never had—
Became his life. He became more white, wore pants
And shirts and collars, left off the feathers and beads.

The spirits slept as well, though—the crops were failures.

Red Owl:
The people went to the traders for credit, but they refused.
Starvation stalked us. No one dared to help.
The government payments were late and small. The traders
Could not be paid. The debts grew like grassfires
In autumn. The traders refused to budge.

Wabasha:
We starved
Despite the food in warehouses at Agency stores.
Right there, enough to feed away starvation
But the traders would not release it. We met with them,
We chiefs and young men to deal somehow, but the traders
Insulted us, kin and half-breeds though some of them were.
Imagine.
Starved.

[Exit Taoyateduta, Wabasha, and Red Owl severally. Enter Lt. Sheehan in riding uniform.]

Lt. Timothy Sheehan:
Lieutenant Timothy Sheehan, U.S. Army.
My commander sent us up to the Upper Agency,
Called Yellow Medicine, to keep the peace, which proves
Impossible when men and families starve. The traders
Were holding much food in stores, refusing to distribute
Until the debts were paid. We guarded their warehouses
Until a crowd broke in, removed a hundred bags
Of flour before we stopped them by threatening to fire
A cannon shot. The pillaging stopped. I asked
For reinforcements. Captain Marsh, my superior,
Arrived, as Little Crow did as well, to negotiate—
The warriors, the traders, Little Crow, and us, the Army.

[Enter John Marsh, Taoyateduta, and several white men. A dumb show, but for Nathan Myrick's insult, which is spoken aloud. Everyone but Sheehan and Marsh exits in anger and turmoil.]

The chief suggested a temporary solution to await
The annuity payments and payment of debts. He ended
By saying, quite truly I thought, "When men are hungry,
They help themselves." Then, Nathan Myrick, most prominent
Among the traders rose and, walking out, said,
"So far as I'm concerned, if they are hungry,
Let them eat grass." The translation ignited a storm.

John Marsh:
I arrived after negotiations broke down, with the traders at fault.
I ordered them to open their stores, give out the food,
And cease their provocations, promising to arrest them and open
Their stores myself should they cause further disturbance
Among the Indians. Peace cannot be had
When insurrection is provoked. It came to my ears
That they had told the warrior class the payments
Would never come, to rile them to violent measures
And force the Army to intervene. The agent
In charge of both agencies conveyed my order and promised
To give out food. The Indians were satisfied and left
To hunt in the west, assured their families could collect
The flour and pork until the men returned.
I returned to base, but later learned the agent
In charge, complacent that all was well, declined
To distribute the food he promised, so another assurance
Broken, another day was dawning on scarcity,
No limits in sight. The peace so carefully claimed
Could never last when conditions did not change.
What men's poor judgment sets alight, an army
Cannot extinguish nor return to a cooler state.
The debts that loomed above human life might claim
As payment human lives, theirs and ours.

[Dakota women working together cleaning roots and mending clothes and shelters. There is a long pause as the women set to the work, one or two lifting their heads now and then to watch what the others are doing. A woman notices someone looking at her.]

Woman 1:
There's no more over here than over there unless you want more.

Woman 2:
Oh, I know. My fingers aren't working very well. I wondered
If you were going faster.

Woman 1:
Of course I'm going faster.
I always go faster than you. I could outrun you to the boat landing.
Want to try?

Woman 2:
Ha. The soldiers would probably think
The Indians were acting up and shoot us both.

[Everyone laughs.]
Woman 1:
Even before we had children, I could outrun you.
Maybe if a snake was chasing you, though. Or that soldier
Marsh with his sabre. Ha. You'd run like a rabbit.

Woman 2:
Away from or toward him?

[Everyone laughs again.]

Woman 1:
I don't like to say this, but
You're better on a horse. I don't get how you can hold on,
Every which way. I lean over, grab the mane,
Still fall off.

Woman 3:
It's true. You look like a bear
Trying to ride a horse.

[She imitates her. Everyone laughs. Woman 1 flings a root at her.]

Woman 4 [an elder]:
No, no, no.
This is our food. We need to treat it with respect.
We'll probably never see buffalo or elk again.
Only roots—and sacks of stale flour that rot the teeth.

Woman 5:
Thank you, Cloud-on-the-Earth. I'd almost succeeded in forgetting.

Woman 2:
It's worse at the Yellow Medicine Agency, up river.
My man said some weren't even finding roots.
After all that action, the Army ordering the traders
To open their warehouse, well, then the Army leaves
And the Indian agent just forgets all about it.
He took a bunch of half-breed soldiers to St. Paul
To send them off to fight in the rebellion in the south.
I guess that was more important than giving my relatives
Some food to eat.

Woman 6:
The money the government owes us
For giving up our land would be a start to feed our babies.
We don't hunt on the land now – we hunt in the pockets of white men.

Woman 3:
Well, that would be just like Governor Ramsey and the Indian agents.
They take theirs from deep in the pot—no skimming off the top.
Nobody stops them.

Woman 4:
How do you know that?

Woman 3:
Oh, everybody knows that. The horses and prairie dogs know that.

Woman 4:
You don't need—

Woman 2:
My horse doesn't know. He doesn't know anything.
I wouldn't ask him.

Woman 1:
He probably knows shit.

[Everyone laughs.]

Woman 5:
She's right. No, I don't know about the horse, but I mean Ramsey.
Some white council or other accused him of stealing government money
Before it got to us, but they couldn't make it stick,
Probably because they all have sticky fingers.
That's how they get on—their noses under other people's tent flaps—
Mostly ours. We don't have lawyers. They write on a paper once
And then change their minds on its meaning a hundred times,
Always to their benefit.

Woman 1:
Pretty slick. How do we get some of that?

Woman 2:
We get a big army with many horses and big ugly guns
That shoot heavy metal balls that blow up. Then, we agree enough
With each other that we tell those army men where to go
That will let us take the most from Indians and put big wads of cash
In our own pockets.

Woman 5:
Our elder men are divided,
Even each in his own mind. Everything's all muddled up.
They're sort of like your horse in what they know.

[She shudders.]

Woman 6 [tentatively]:
Could we really win a war, an all-out war

Woman 2:
You mean like they fight?
They don't fight like we do. They feel exposed
When they're not exposed at all. We don't have much choice.
If we don't go out in the open, how will we gather firewood,
Bind grass, get water, take in the game, dry the meat?
We're in the open as a rule, where Ojibway or Sauk
Can kill or take us, our scalps on their poles or ourselves
Captive working in their camps.

Woman 1:
We could do it, though—
Make the white people be as exposed as we are,
Not trussed up behind walls and great guns, shielded
By money and fences and holy books. They have to be out there,
Plowing, planting, harvesting. They're exposed.

Woman 3:
Their army is stretched thin. The rebels are tough.
I wonder if we could join with them somehow.

Woman 2:
Another white army? Just what we need.

Woman 5:
So what about the white men's war? The men who have been east
Say it doesn't matter. They'd still crush us like bugs if they chose to.

Woman 2:
If they fought like we do, they'd whip the southerners in no time.
Besides, they don't love this land—they use it.
Sure, they love their families, and some of them love
The Lord Jesus, but they suffer on the land, and then they take it
And sell it to somebody else, so they can struggle
To build fences and cut trees and kill all the animals.

Woman 6:
If we can't win, what's the point to fighting?

[The women continue to work in silence.]

Woman 2:
That's Taoyateduta's view. He was finally humiliated back east.
It caught up with him, all those fancy deals in treaties
Hoping the white people wouldn't just kill us all.

Woman 6:
You shouldn't say that.

Woman 2:
Why not? Who are you going to tell?
You going to tell the agency that I'm a bad Indian?

Woman 6:
No.

Woman 2:
Better not.
Woman 1:
Settle down.
Biting each other's tails won't bring the food.
Yes, Taoyateduta is too slick for his own good
And maybe for ours, but the spirits have favored him.
I don't know why. It somehow feels like destiny.

Woman 2:
Is it destiny to take up the missionary way,
For men to cut their hair, to give up our guns
And hunting ways, to depend on money that never comes
And food in sacks that we have to steal or beg for?
There's too much choice in that way to be called destiny.

Woman 1:
Settle down, I say. Some of us here are living
The farmer ways, trying to change so we can live,
So our kids can live better. Maybe. I don't know.
We're just doing what we can.

[They work in silence.]

Woman 5:
The young guys have made a bundle of grass
To stuff in Nathan Myrick's dirty mouth.
Something's going to happen. It is destiny, whether we like it or not.
The Agency whites and some half-breeds don't think we'd dare,
But they're wrong. Anybody can feel it. Now the traders are saying
The annuity money will never come again, that the government
Can't afford it. So, we won't be able to pay them, so we won't get any food.

Woman 3:
How can you own food? Especially when babies go hungry.

Woman 2:
I don't get why we're so divided. One leg
Wears their trousers and the other wears our legging.
That's not good way for cleansing our land or our ways.

Woman 6:
There will be captives, then. Lots of them.
White women and children. They'd be our part.

Woman 3:
How can we support captives? We can't feed ourselves.
I would as soon they'd all be killed.

Woman 6:
But for bargaining—

Woman 5:
I want to save each one. Think what it would be like,
Away from kin and home-things. I was captive once.
Ojibways. I was lucky. I got away and hid,
And a war party just happened to come down the creek bed where I was,
And I chanced it and spoke Dakota, and they took me home.

Woman 1:
How old?

Woman 5:
I was six. I was gone for a winter and a spring.
I was lucky to fall in with kind people who protected me,
But whenever word came that Dakotas had killed an Ojibway,
I saw them looking at me and I felt bad.
Some of them could so easily have slit my throat—but they didn't.

Woman 3:
I'm sorry. I did not know. **[She stares at a root she's holding. The others return to work.]** I did not know.

[Enter Taoyateduta, listening quietly to the women at first. They gather the roots and bags and leave the stage.]

Taoyateduta:
Today, we were looking for small game,
rabbits, grouse, all that's left
between the plowed fields, beyond rows,
so much left still but so little we can use
without tripping over rows still unbroken,
invisible rows side by side
yet to be plowed, but not to be trod upon.
Yes, to all this did we agree.

[He looks towards where the women had departed.]

But even the horses knew what we had done.
All young fools, wise fools, breathe heavy,
Think small while they believe
They think big, drop trousers to wag
Their confidence, their right-now, right-here.
But I—I must think bigger, longer,
Plan, plot, wait, watch, anticipate
The moves of the stronger, slower men with iron belts.
My grandfathers heard the news from the hawks and horses,
but I have learned to be deaf, to hunt hands-tied.
So little time it's taken to be like rock
that others may draw their pictures upon me.
At the elbow of rivers a fort,
Leaning like a soldier, waiting to be called.

Sibley's fort sends young soldiers row on row
To fight other white rows of young men.
Some say it is a good time to raise trouble
While all the young are away being killed,
But I know the truth: they will be slow but sure
In gathering, like oncoming winter storms
That follow cold rain showers of autumn.
There will be old men enough to ride and shoot,
Fire the cannon, shield the women,
Row on row to return our fire, pursue
And kill and pursue again. Sibley himself
Will lead them, I see it, all together, those bitterest
In treachery and lies along with those truest
And most honest, all will rise as one
And chase us wherever the winds will blow.
This I see.

Oh fathers, I dreaded this moment,
grandfathers, greater ones than I,
the fruit of your women set to die,
young men first, I fear, but then
the old and weak, the wisest resigned,
few left to defend the people.
Where did we come by this?
We thought to trade but sold instead,
Inert metal for living earth,
dealt to avoid the threat we knew
had overwhelmed nations, pushed the peoples
from their spirit-loving homes
into land of yet other nations, who were themselves uprooted,
all shaken up, mixed like dried bones
thrown by children in games of dice.
We were horrified. We would deal
to stay on our home of homes.
How could we live else?
Elsewhere, we'd have no blood,
no lungs, no viscera, no eyes
either to fight or live long lives,
if only they would leave us here.
Ah, but leave us they will not.

They've let us live, yes, barely live,
on condition we would *become* them,
like paler shadows of their shadows,
whitened like winter breath exhaled,
like the long ice that hangs from their roofs.
Game they take and call theirs,
waters, hills, plains, forests
where once the people lived. They will say
to their young ones in days to come,
"The icicle people, thin as air,
savages who stole and killed innocents
and so deserved to die alone,
they once lived here, alien ones:
braves, women, elders, ancestors,
children, spirits, all, unworthy of our god,"
so will they say. Meantime now,
we play at farming without plow or seed
denied us by their merchants, braves
treated like buffalo-skin dolls, empty,
Flaccid.
Where once we trapped and tracked,
once gathered, now we ask to pick the berries
In someone else's field. Yes, we live,
But why?
The grandfathers hang
Their heads, the grandmothers weep,
Their children have turned to stone,
Dropping tears instead of scalps.
The ancient daughters trill for battle,
Like a thousand geese arising
From the river's shore, urging us on.
But the fathers know what this is:
Smoke of twisted grass aflame
Will mix with villages burnt,
Our flesh, our past victory scalps,
The burning sulfur of great guns,
Steel blade of sword and plow,
Soon will the villages be nothing but embers.
Our braves have entered the chute,

The beaters close behind them,
Into a low riverbed exposed to guns above.
We ride into exile, separation, hiding.
Oh my people, the very wind in the grasses
Cries to me farewell,
this land will we never see again.
I have no love of all the old ways,
But I live to hunt, to track,
To escape the enemy on a fast horse,
To slip past enemies
Like breeze-driven mists around grasses.
Still, to fight nevermore, surrender,
Even then would fate stalk us,
Each elder, woman, child, brave,
All the living people. Our fate
Has brought these demons to us.
What matters that we will pay
The debts of unruly children's deeds,
That our honor be less planned
Than our dishonor, that the fathers finally
Are being heard with the soil beneath us
Mostly unbroken by our lives?
However honor comes, it is right.
The cornered bear does not whimper.
So, then let our guns pulse
With our every breath and heartbeat,
To drive like hail the Dakota storm.
Let us fight each day forever,
To the twilight of the earth. Never will they
Forget the muscle and horses of our bands,
Ojibway, whites, killers of races,
Selling spirit for coin and for courage drink.

[Enter four young men, miming the story.]

Now Brown Wing, Breaking Up,
Killing Ghost, Finds-Something-When-Crawling,
Here now, they've said what they did:
They found chicken eggs, away from houses,
Near the farm—some sly hen's secret.

Brown Wing started to scoop them—"No wait,"
Said Finds-Something-When-Crawling, "they're white eggs
For white people. There will be trouble for taking them."
A steady, worried one, young Crawling One,
Wanting to do things right, up proper.
Killing Ghost snorts, pokes young Crawling One
In the chest: "Afraid? You're afraid of them?
Over some eggs, like they'd be taking hens
Or girls or the white man's pants with dicks inside?
Take the eggs or you're a coward, Crawling One."
So, they ate them raw, the sting of the c-word like salt
In a wound, and went on to the farm.
A challenge for the farmer and his sons,
white boys and their fathers,
Winchesters their pride and ours,
a target on the whites' fence, theirs
yonder, so little to them, a fence,
to us a mountain stopping
our five days' ride river to river,
sweet or harsh by season,
full always, wide ever,
land of Mdewantan, Sisseton, Sioux,
land free of fences, eggs for the taking,
land never poisoned or imprisoned.
Our young men shot well,
they as well, good sport,
and then the others paused to load, we next to shoot,
when Breaking Up, low-voiced,
speared again with his finger the charge to Crawling One,
to prove he was not a coward, too afraid
to kill a white man, great potentate of hen's eggs,
not in paper on a fence but in blood.
To these young ones, children really, demons spoke
like cords quivering fast in gut and windpipe,
strung taut in a high wind,
easy as lifting an arm,
quick as a trigger, a flash,
then another, then three more,
hitting their targets sure,
and all was finished as all began.

Young men ever bring
terrible news, others' scalps or theirs,
ever at a flying gallop,
their hearts sharp as knives,
but vulnerable as belly of women.
They took the guns, horses, scalps,
brought them to show me. Children.
As though it had been a party of Ojibway.
So, now they ask what next,
And what they've killed, I must carry.
The whites' ways we know too well:
to kill the young, not capture, in return,
for they have little to teach but death.

Young Man 1:
What do we do? Do we wait for them?
They will come after us like at Spirit Lake.
What should I do? Should I run?

Young Man 2 [wearing feathers on his head, mocking]:
Oh great chief, hider in his house,
This white man's house, what should we do?
Do we wait for troops to seize the village?
Or meet them on the road with gifts and horses,
Hoping they will be happy and leave us?
It's worked so well in the past, hasn't it,
For plans cooked up by women and cowards?

[Taoyateduta rises abruptly and knocks the headdress from the young man's head.]

Taoyateduta:
Taoyateduta is not a coward, and he is not a fool! When did he run away from his enemies? When did he leave his braves behind him on the war-path and turn back to his *teepees*? When he ran away from your enemies, he walked behind on your trail with his face to the Ojibways and covered your backs as a she-bear covers her cubs! Is Taoyateduta without scalps? Look at his war-feathers! Behold the scalp-locks of your enemies hanging there on his lodge-poles! Do they call him a coward? Taoyateduta is not a coward, and he

is not a fool. Braves, you are like little children; you know not what you are doing.
You are full of the white man's rum. You are like dogs in the Hot Moon when they run mad and snap at their own shadows.

We are only little herds of buffaloes left scattered; the great herds that once covered the prairies are no more.

See!—the white men are like the locusts when they fly so thick that the whole sky is a snowstorm. You may kill one—two—ten; yes, as many as the leaves in the forest yonder, and their brothers will not miss them. Kill one—two—ten, and ten times ten will come to kill you. Count your fingers all day long and white men with guns in their hands will come faster than you can count.

Yes, they fight among themselves—away off. Do you hear the thunder of their big guns? No; it would take you two moons to run down to where they are fighting, and all the way your path would be among white soldiers as thick as tamaracks in the swamps of the Ojibways.

Yes; they fight among themselves, but if you strike at them they will all turn on you and devour you and your women and little children just as the locusts in their time fall on the trees and devour all the leaves in one day.

You are fools. You cannot see the face of your chief; your eyes are full of smoke. You cannot hear his voice; your ears are full of roaring waters. Braves, you are little children—you are fools. You will die like the rabbits when the hungry wolves hunt them in the Hard Moon.

[A long pause. The young men watch transfixed as Taoyateduta walks slowly away from them, then turns to face them, shaking his head thoughtfully.]

Taoyateduta is not a coward.
He will die with you.

[Exit together.]

PART

2

[George Spencer speaks from far to one side, seated. John Marsh enters center, holding a stirrup in one hand and a revolver in the other. His suspenders are hanging down, he has no coat, and his shirt is torn open. Sven Norbeck is behind Marsh, holding his cavalry hat at his waist with both hands.]

George Spencer:
They came in without warning. It was breakfast time.
My egg and sausage were just cooked. I was unaccountably
Not hungry, though. The rain storm
That night had left the world wet and humid,
The smells of sweet grass being strong. I heard
Something outside. It was quiet but present—a scuffing
Of feet outside the door—and felt something,
A presence, when you know someone is watching you.
I had gotten used to that a little over time.
The Indians would sometimes just watch us, without speaking
Or announcing themselves. But this was, I don't know, different.
It was like a whole group of people watching, I guess.
Then, there was someone speaking, a low voice speaking
To those right around him. And then—there was a shotgun blast.
It was meant for Jim Lynd, I learned later,
The clerk, who must have felt what I was feeling
And had been to the door of Nathan Myrick's' store,
Just right next door to us. I stood frozen in place,
Then more shots—Old Fritz the cook, I learned,
Then Myrick himself as he tried to get out a window
Upstairs at his place, a brand new building, you know.
Then, many more shots all at once around me:
My friends and rivals in the stores, at least half a dozen,
All dead by then. Now many shots from Dr. Humphrey's,
From the barns and the Prescotts', then down near the river at the ferry landing.
I was looking for a rifle, anything, a place to hide,
To make myself very small for the devil had broken from hell
And was dragging it behind him. Then Wakintantawa,
Part of Little Crow's group, came to find me.
I was beside myself, stiff with fear,
As the firing was all around me now. He protected me,
Rode with me away from the stores toward the river,

'Til I could cross away from the ferry landing,
My old horse nearly as frightened as I.
We were seeing Indians everywhere, painted and dressed
For war. I rode towards Fort Ripley. I remember nothing
About that ride. I reported to the officer on duty,
A Captain Marsh, who ran to collect a platoon.
They rode towards the Agency. It was mid-morning.
They left so hastily, and there were too few of them—
I tried to tell him—too few—but he was too intent
On stopping the devil and the denizens of hell. The sun
Had risen like curdled blood. Too few, too late.

Captain Marsh:
Trouble had been born at the Agency and had grown suddenly
To full vicious height. I had moved to defuse
The damn trader-created tension that week.
The annuity money was late—it *was* on its way—
But the traders were playing the fool thinking we would protect them
No matter how they behaved, and the Sioux were starving
Without the traders' food, which they had to buy on credit.
Traders had lied and said the annuity wasn't coming
So the Sioux would run up their credit to the absolute maximum.
Those who wouldn't, would just have to starve.
And now, the whites are streaming into the fort with their dead
And wounded, and their stories of atrocities, terrified all.
We are reduced in numbers with men at the front
And others sick. I can gather only 43,
And I know we might be in for it. The survivors can't say
How many Indians there are—some say only
A couple dozen, others have seen hundreds.
I suspect more of them will keep arriving.
I know them to fight like devils, and it wouldn't take many
To raise the sweat on our few men.
Now we see no Indian on the road to the ferry.
We find the ferry empty, on our side of the river,
Without the ferryman in sight. On the other side, I see
An Indian named White Dog. He shouts for me
To come over and talk to him. I will not.
But why was the boat here
On our side, as though waiting for us

Without the ferryman? Who has taken it here?
The whiff of burned powder drifting from above,
In a sulfurous haze I know this. The devil is here,
Invisible on this side. This is bad.

Corporal Norbeck:
I am Corporal Sven Norbeck, with Captain Marsh
At the Lower Agency with several dozen men.
Yes, I was worried. We had heard terrible stories
From the frightened people fleeing for their lives on the road.
Now we encountered a strange silence. We were about to load
Some men onto the ferry to cross to the Agency. An Indian
On the far shore was talking, inviting Marsh to parley,
But he would not leave us. He was nervous,
Kept looking into the brush along our side of the river,
Left and right, some of us about to board
The ferry and others on the shore. He drew his revolver.
It was so quiet: the river's flow, our horses' tack.
We cocked our rifles, the horses near the back startled—
Then the first shots and a man near me—Pennyman it was—
Fell into the water—then there was firing from the other shore
And more around me fell. Marsh was shouting,
Ordering us to enter the water if we could
To get us away from the Sioux closing in around us,
And ordering the ones on the shore to drop off the horses,
Kneeling back-to-back in a circle, ready
To fire. I could hear because I was close to him,
But most could not hear for the horses screaming,
war whoops swelling, water crashing wildly
With men and horses plunged in, guns firing
All around and the haste of every man to reach
For balls and powder and face the devils as they rushed
From hell. We returned fire as we could, and they dropped back
So that someone shouted, "There! Follow me!"
And we went, all who could, firing as we went
Fleeing up the road on horseback or dragging our limbs.
I turned and saw several men, Captain Marsh among them,
In the river, struggling. He went down, pulled into the current
As he struggled with one stirrup that wouldn't let go.
Did he see us few escaping? He was a good man.

Some of us made it back: twenty-five
Out of the forty-three who left with Marsh.
I think God retreats, all you preachers, when the devil shows up.

[Red Owl and Wabasha join the others onstage.]

Red Owl:
Can every blade of grass sing of victors,
Each passing bird cry out the warrior's joy?
No man ignores the words of earth and wind,
The testimony that blood provides the spirits:
War's begun, the houses burnt, the scalps
Awarded, the blue-clad soldiers no match for us,
Their young and women taken or killed, our young
And our women dancing, shouting, trilling and singing:
"They sank to the depths like logs, tangled like shore vines.
Horse and blue-clad rider thrown into the waters."
Taoyateduta's village drew our band
From everywhere, the farmers changed their clothes
From pants to leggings, changed their hoes to axes,
Joined our ranks and left the white man's houses.

Wabasha:
Winds cannot be outrun, the fires that blacken
Prairie grass and burn the life from bones left
Bare, some evil spirits' food, can never
Pause for our departure. In the way,
You're in the way, it sings as it burns the world.
This war for us: we're fire or grass, the farmers
Change their ways, their hopes, but know it's hopeless,
Expected to fight, to drop new ways, embrace
Again the old, be soldiers, hunt, and live in
Lodges, migrate when the buffalo move, and honor
Spirits, not the god of Jesus or the priests,
By which they've lived for years and learned to read
The holy books, to honor and love, to treat
All men, our enemies too, as family, protecting
Helpless folk as God's, the captives as our own.

Red Owl:
One army unit down. One agency burnt.
It has begun at last, returning respect.
We know what's next, rehearsing revenge forever
In mind and heart. The fort as good as burnt,
Its men are scattered to the south, deployed to wars
Much larger, whites against each other, but none
They'll find more passion-ridden, for keeps, than us.
And then the Germans. Noses pressed up high,
They ride their mules like clouds and they like princes
Of olden days look down on starving, struggling
Humans, harsh, unhelpful, arbitrary, bitter.
Yes, New Ulm they call the place, where we will
Seize respect as men and they will die.

[A young white settler, squatting on one side of the stage, and a Dakota warrior in war paint join the others onstage.]

Young white woman [aged about 18]:
Am I afraid? Am I alive? Awake?
Asleep? or dead? It hardly matters, does it?
My brother Tom was first to die. My father
Next, the blood exploded through his shirt,
He stood upright. He'd heard a sound he didn't
Know: my brother's scream in dying, the knife
Was tearing hair from skull. My father, working
Under the wagon to fix a broken axle,
Heard—what did he hear?—the whoops no doubt
When Tom went down. Oh, mother, where are you now?
They took me here alone, I recognized
The buggy they used—it was our neighbor Paul's.
Oh, mother, I need you now. Are you alive?
I wish I were dead with Pa and Tom.
But mother, your fate keeps me living, hoping.
I would otherwise fall on one of these knives I see
For skinning hides, if I could only reach it.
The savage women keep me cornered here,
A darkened corner, watched, awaiting death
If the men decide. I scream in the air I breathe,

I hate the moving skirts, the smell of their food,
My life if God has indeed forsaken us.

Dakota warrior [20 years old or so]:
Their language sounds to me like rocks that strike
Each other in tumbling down a cliff, that dunking
Sound you hear from far away. I think
They have not fought yet. Captives are easy to take.
A man discharged a shotgun near me, missing
Me and Hard Eyes. He was dead then, with nothing
More to shoot. How powerful we felt, to kill
The dogs agreeing to starve us, to take our homeland.
The elders say we'll never win. They're wrong.
We will. Farmers' shotguns cannot match our courage.
Warriors will always win a war with farmers.

[A missionary, holding a Bible, and a war-painted soldier's lodge warrior, older than the young man who arrived earlier, fill in the gaps on the stage.]

Missionary:
If God has so ordained, I shall be dead.
But still we flee and live. The road was empty,
Horses running free above the mission,
The saddle on one blood-stained. My wife and I
Were warned, an Indian was directing us to leave,
In Dakota mixed with English. I was not inclined
To run, not knowing yet what dangers we fled
until I saw the blood that stained his buckskin
and the horse that was not his. His heart still had
some pity, the love of God soaked through even this,
the gospel teachings he'd heard took root. We live.
We made the fort and now prepare to flee
Yet farther, to St. Paul's bosom, to shelter with friends
'til the slaughter cease. I would return, to complete
My call, their hearts have shown they're children of God,
Savage children of God, whom He is teaching
Gentler ways even as the old ways die.
My wife may stay in St. Paul or return to Ohio.
Life in the frontier has never suited her: to wander

Forty years, she says, in this wilderland,
Plains and deserts, have no appeal. Apparently,
Moses I am not. But love of God
Will lead us both, I know, together wherever
He calls. My heart aches so for them and us.

Soldier's lodge warrior:
When people fear, they're all the same. If they
Can harm, they will. If they are harmed, they run
Or fight. We're all animals. Each man no better,
Higher, god-like, looking down on others.
Themselves maybe, they see themselves and want
In death to fight again, left whole to take
Revenge on those who killed them. So men
Make war with both feet here and both over there.
We too return, our hands and feet still ready
For war, an endless season. Why not stop it,
The festering anger in every heart, the children's,
Elders', women's, men's slow endless death,
Bleeding, numb paralysis of return and re-war,
The hiding openly like rabbits, cowering under trees,
Awaiting someone's charity and broken promise?
We should as well be setting ourselves aflame.
Enough. Our chiefs are finally coming along,
Abandoning cowardly farming, shedding clothing
Collared and buttoned, strange adaptations, unnatural
Skin, the peaked, starched apology of fools.
The captives flow like blood to the people's heart.
How many? Where will they live when we are looking
To gain our home again? Our women are asking,
Must we take in enemies, so many enemies?
Bring their food with them, bring our food, too.
I'd sooner kill them. They would not show us
This same compassion. They call us the savages,
The devil's brood, fit only for eating grass
Like oxen. Maybe now *their* mouths will shut
With fear and hunger, with tears of *their* children,
Not ours, when they have nowhere to live.

Red Owl:
There's nothing stopping our moving onto the fort,
Protectors, devils guarding devils, vanguard
Awaiting orders, enforcing cheating, stealing,
Clearing horizons of native people, forcing
Laws unknown to us, unrepresented,
Down our throats. It's right to strike at once,
Before they take another breath, and move on then
To towns where they root their snouts in ploughed soil
They have not bought. The Dutchmen puff and snort,
Important critters in their own bloated heads,
Dig their dens along the Cottonwood River. Ripley
Once burnt, that's where we'll go, as swift as fire
In woods long parched, not rest for horse or man,
To smoke out the hogs who bed beside the river.
Man's work, this, to tear the collared shirt
From warriors, to regain our birthright and the honor of the dead.

[The collection of characters onstage disperse to every side, all except Red Owl. Wakinyantawa enters, troubled, no war paint, wearing a shirt and leggings. As he speaks, the Enlisted Man, Lt. Sheehan, and Shakopee enter.]

Wakinyantawa:
Wakinyantawa refuses this war. He sees
The brave young men and foolish elders reach
Their arms for prizes long since past, returning
Satisfied with trinkets—the farmer's horse
Or buggy, sacks of flour, a shotgun, chickens—
And captives burdening villages, terrified women,
Children and elders unable to work—and he sees scalps
To make young men famous today. I see
In piles and corners these things, soon ignored,
While real things of value, the fruits of power
Meant for us—our land, our honor—blowing
Away like dust. These youngsters think they've won
Because settlers fall like flies in autumn.
Silly fools, who prove their worth as men
Indulging the momentary thirsts, ignoring what's coming

Soon when these weak settlers call their brothers
In uniform, who lead the carrion birds our way.
So, Taoyteduta has warned them "learn to make war
In the manner of whites," with discipline, order, tactics.
He might succeed with luck but to what end?
To win a battle or two and lose a war;
Revenge would be our enemy then. The slaughter
Of innocents would fall on all our heads. Our settler
Victories would rot to pain, regret, and hunger.
Tucanwicaste, like me, refuses and aids
The captives where he can. Yet now our lodges
Prepare for war on Fort Ripley. Perhaps the chiefs
Can keep the men in line. Oh spirits, you know
The force in each man's bones, how strong in war
We one by one can be. Together, ordered,
Steel would not suffice to kill braves.
Yet to what end? Short victories, long wars.

Enlisted Man at Fort Ripley:
I enlisted to fight the rebs, but here I am,
First bored, then sick, now fevered with fear and fight.
Everyone knew, the fort was on the list
Of targets—and we were low on men and supplies.
A fever had burnt away men and resolve. Now Marsh
Was dead. We'd heard reports of attacks
Lightning fast (Indians are expert at those)
On settlements in Milford Township around New Ulm
(about 50 killed) and farms up Beaver Creek
(another 150 killed) in two days time,
And the eighteen dead from Marsh's unit
Dispatched to Lower Agency. And then this fort without walls
Or ramparts, now to be erected hastily—
Forty able-bodied defenders plus forty
(under Lieutenant Sheehan) and one-hundred half-breeds
(the Renville Rangers), turned back from fighting the rebs.
If we doubted the half-breeds' loyalty before, we do
No more for they fight as men and comrades, taking
The same bullets, giving back as best
They can.

Lt. Sheehan:
The attackers came first in groups and surrounded us,
Some seventy-five or eighty per group. They feigned sorties—
Forward, then down in the grass and drawing back—
To get us to waste ammunition and crowd to one side
Of the fort. Then, we saw them gather in a large group—
Twice as many as us, and come on us
At one time. We nearly lost the flank nearest the river
But returned fire in a volley—just lucky timing
In reloading, actually—until our cannon fired
Onto the oncoming men. They were fighting,
One of our older men said, like white men.
So, the cannon worked well, killing some and scattering
The lot. Good timing, a blessing of God always,
Was on our side, and the cannon forced their withdrawal,
Except a few damn snipers. Know, though,
Better fire-power and they would have had us.
Now know it isn't over. We've built new walls—
It could help—and tended the wounded, buried
The dead—and now again we wait, sleepless.

Shakopee:
So we withdrew to Taoyeteduta's village,
Discouraged, frustrated. There, we might have ceased,
But our Wahpeton and Sisseton brothers from Upper Agency
Were there. They wanted to join us, four-hundred strong.
We planned again: slow attacks simultaneously
All around the fort, then a frontal attack
As the defenders would be busy all around—enough warriors
To mount not just one charge but as many as we needed.
The songs and drumming, the dancing and calling of ancestors
To fight beside us went on from morning to night.
It felt fine to be united, one brother
With many fathers, one cousin with another,
One stranger with another—all brothers yet.

Red Owl:
We surrounded them and started slow sorties—
Just firing as we advanced, then ducking down

Into the tall grass to reload and wait. We heard
Another group do the same, then another,
Then when we were ready, us again.
They shot back into empty tall grass
Until patches of grass appeared cut by harvest scythes.
We came closer bit by bit, then joined our groups
In rushing forth, firing but ready to duck
And regroup. They fired their cannon near us,
A group was rushing forward. The shot set fire
To the grass. The wind was blowing in the fort's direction.
We cut burning tufts and started blazes
All around until the world was burning toward them,
We charging and firing from behind the flame and smoke,
Smoke thicker than blood. We followed the flames.
But then the wind switched for just a moment, clearing
Smoke for a line of sight into our ranks.
They shot the cannon again into our belly—
Smoke circling and blinding everyone near.
They fired again and we were finished. Some ran,
Most waited, firing at random—one here, more there,
Another over there—the close powder and thrust now lost—
We all felt it. And one by one, we left.

[The stage clears. Taoyateduta enters center, in war paint, carrying a rifle. As he speaks, two New Ulm residents, Red Owl, and Wabasha enter, one by one, the whites from one side and the Indians from the other.]

Taoyateduta [addressing his warriors and allies]:
I hear some voices telling others our cause
Is hopeless. We have lost the fight for the fort.
Still it stands. We withdrew, not them. Our blood
Has stained the earth, our plans now drained of life.
These voices come from men who do not learn
Nor look, who ignore our courage, quick thinking, endurance,
Our warriors powerful in skill and spirit, our forbearers
Fighting and counseling with us. *Our strategies worked.*
Their guns were bigger, scattering chaos and shot.
Imagine our power with guns as large and warriors
Swift and strong as we, with brothers together,
Shoulder to shoulder, finally as one, the seed

Of forests of warriors, a nation formed once more,
Preferring forever brothers to white men's devisings.
We know their weakness, perhaps the greatest: the sureness
Their god is ready with armies of angels just there,
Behind those hills, to move ahead the end
Of time for them, just them, a final
Revelation that will justify their thefts.
Their stories make them seek for martyrdom as rain
Seeks a gully, so they fight the very stories
Of their god as any life-loving man might do.
This town they call New Ulm, the Dutchman's camp,
A farmer's town, is undefended, no cannon
To thunder, raining death and chaos amongst us. The lightning's
Ours. Just farmers armed with shotguns, with houses
Dropped in measured rows like white men's corn,
Their fears of capture greater than fear of death.
We will win: our plans, wide eyes,
Fast thinking, good legs, strong arms will wither theirs
Before their time. Our youth for their bloated age.

First New Ulm resident:
There's safety in numbers, we thought. We set up farm
In Beaver Creek area. Ninety acres English
Was many times more than Swabian farms we'd worked—
Not owned by us—for others. We came and started,
Our land, our pigs, our maize, our buildings, our well.
But Indians were angry, staring, not speaking. Their color
Frightened many of us, like devils they seem,
Or beggars, unwilling to put their hands to plow.
Then, someone told us the Indians legally owned
The land we farmed. How could this be? The englisher
Law allowed the savages to own good land,
Made ready by God for farms and churches, for people
Meant for God's new garden. Also, we'd paid
The railroad company and land agent for title.
But now I'm frightened. My brother dead, his farm
Next door to us burnt, child and wife
Are taken by savages, we know not where, maybe
They're dead, I do not know. We live, thank God.
How long, I do not know. My brother's blood,

I believe, has bought this land full title now,
As have the deaths of every family here.
When I heard the news, I looked around our place
And saw the empty distance, the empty world
We found, with no one now to save, no judge,
No law. No peace but bought with savage blood
Or ours. Was this what folk here call freedom?
Weiss ich nicht. But yet here we stop
And make a mighty fortress with walls of hearts.
We fight for plow and hearth and God's intended gifts,
And here we stand 'til they or we will die.
I do not know what will happen to us.
Here, refugees crowd the houses, so many driven
From Lower Agency, but no one a soldier is, few guns
Or ammunition for long fight. The will
To fight is strong, but the way to win is weak.

Red Owl:
The morning had worn on. We could see
The Dutchmen's town was filled with people. Many men
Were pulling wagons around the center buildings
And some of the houses at the edge, awaiting our visit.
Surrounding the place was quick. We heard the voices
Of fear that ordered haste in defense and gathering
Men, we thought for purposes of defense. But no,
They formed a line of armed men in the open
Before the town, where we most likely would approach.
Never a thought was given when houses went in
To how they might be defended, so disdainful they were
Of us, so sure we'd never act as men,
No thought that they were in a foreign and hostile
Land, inhabited and claimed by intelligent beings.
For me, it stoked the embers of anger. Their men
Came forth and stood in a line in military form,
A farmer's idea of how to fight a war.
We gathered, too, and giving war shouts rode
And ran against their line, which broke like children.
Retreating homeward, they drew us to the town.
Remembering how fire swept across the grass,
We lit first houses, then grass aflame, and burnt

Every house we came to, shouting and grappling
With them, street by street. Vicious work.
We crept and dodged the length of the place, knives
Being better than rifles, until we reached the center
Of town, where rifle fire stopped us dead.

Second New Ulm Resident, a teenager:
From inside town, the sounds were deafening, cries
And whoops and shouts, the firing of rifles
And pistols over and over. My job was keeping
The children and mothers in one place, the back room
Of the bank in my case. Later, I ripped up curtains
And sheets for bandages. We kept eyes open for Indians
Who came from every direction. The groans of the wounded,
White and Indian, were constant. The humid heat
Alone was groaning beneath the sun, heaving
With blood smell, shouts, alarms, and cries for help.
Above it all, the stench of burning houses,
First billowing smoke, grey or black, 'til eyes
Were smoked like fish—you wanted to tear them out—
And breath was burning, rasping like an iron poker
Scraped across a hearth. When embers alone
and coal-black skeletons of buildings were all that was left,
a smell like dirty sheep. My family was spread
throughout the town, and I, who father called
"the least among us" and pastor called "rattleheaded,"
Was given such jobs to keep me out of the way,
And yet I could shoot, could kill and skin an animal,
The chickens or rabbits, so I too found a rifle
When everyone was fighting, when sounds, smells, and sights
Were driving me mad, and shot an Indian man
Who ran around a corner, crouching. A wagon's length
Away he was, I did not think or ask,
But knew it was wrong—I took my skinning knife—
I did not think or feel or ask or pause,
But took his hair as though he was a rabbit
Or a pig. He twitched and opened his eyes but saw
Nothing, I could see. I left him there.
I had given no thought to the women and children, to bandages
That needed tearing. I was wrong to skin the man

And wrong to leave my post. I returned but hid
The hair, wrapped in a bandage, carried in my pocket.

[All exit except Wabasha. Paul Mazakutemani and Taoyateduta enter as he speaks.}

Wabasha:
After New Ulm, the breath disappeared. The fort
Still stood, the town was burnt, our people suffered—
So nothing had changed. That's wrong, of course. Exhausted,
My people waited while chiefs debated, the young
Have learned some limits, but are unbowed again.
Not wanting to be uncertain, they will be sure
They might have won if older men were not
So stupid. Taoyateduta's soldiers followed
And went northwest to capture Yellow Medicine Agency.
A few did not, the first few Sissetons
And Wahpetons, disappointed, went hunting
For buffalo instead. But Taoyateduta
Did not expect the Indians and half-breeds who defended
The white man's Agency. They warred against our camp,
They demanded restitution for goods that were taken
From half-breeds, and they wanted the captives, all white, released
To them. Taoyateduta's men and I were stunned,
Afraid of our own people for the first time ever.
These people hated this war and seemed to love
The white captives more than them. A council
Was called before the blood could spread, the medicine
Of war had cut blood from blood. Mazakutemani
Spoke for the peace party—called "friendlies" for their friendship with whites.
He confronted Taoyateduta.

Paul Mazakutemani:
Your presence here
Brings nothing but a bitter moon and starvation
in summer's hottest days, like a winter storm
Or a deadly plague you show your face among us,
Who live an honorable life, governed by laws
Of our own making, our people's protection offered
To weak and foreign peoples, to whom we give

Our help as though to our own kin. The season
Has hurt the white man farmer just like us,
So not their doing. But this you know, since you
Pretended to farm before you seized an easy war
To push your name into young men's mouths, those seeking
For elders who would not chide, who would refuse
The elder's duty, not just to speak the words
Of wisdom, but to act the wise hard ways.
Give us the captives you have taken. Right
The wrongs you've done to half-breeds. Deaths you cannot
Now make right—for that the spirits will call
You out—but act at last the man we all know
You have been in past days. Release them,
And pay for dishonorable thefts from brothers and kin.
Redeem yourself a little.

Taoyateduta:
Your words are smug.
This moment calls us deeper, asks for sacrifice.
Did we solicit this? Did we seek war?
Have we woven words and steel so tightly loomed,
The sense so hidden, the intent so raw that no one
Not evil in spirit themselves could believe, let alone
Prepare for, the dishonorable work of theft and murder,
Of lies and disrespect these whites have done.
My friend, how often, over and over, must we
Play their games, be their peaceful red fools?
Enough, the young men said, and they were right.
For how many years have my fathers and I dealt
With cheaters and liars, but hoping for better? The story,
Friend, is bad. No morning sun has risen
On equitable terms honorably carried through.
Do not be fooled by now and then the one
Or two that come to mind. They only draw
Our minds to hope and con ourselves again
To give away life-blood of land and ways
In hopes of peace, respect, old ties, and food.
The time has come. I do not care if gold
Is on its way; it's headed for the pockets of agency
Traders, you know as well as I. Yes, true,

The white man pays eventually but only other
Whites. Listen to younger voices, friend,
Whose eyes, unclouded by excuses, whose ears unjangled
By seductive words, can disenchant us, break
The spell of falseness in which we long have wandered.

Paul Mazakutemani:
If we have been enchanted, it's you who bear
Our gratitude, you who've worn the medal given
Favorites of the Great White Father, whose dealings
He likes. In war, once more, you've taken to selling
What's never been yours to sell, no council of elders,
No blessing of spirits, no medicine suited to grave
Endeavors like this, taking on enemies vast
In power, ready to crush whenever red men
Rise. And all for hearing your name intoned
By younger men as leader, powerful, bigwig.
Negotiating mutual interests means nothing now,
The careful work of entering pacts of peace
And isolating the crooks on either side
Has now gone up in flames, a brush fire soon
Enough put out when Sibley comes around.
For me, I do not care what happens now
To you but I cannot flee our people's fate,
As you can, nor your captives' suffering, whose freedom
Offers some good will at least to those
Who need not be our enemies and never have been.
You've traded the hatred of the few for the hatred of the many.
Taoyateduta, is that the sort of bargain
for which you want to be remembered?

Taoyateduta:
The honor
Of men is purchased, often in ways no farmer,
Stuck in villages amongst the women, can see.
Your honorable past you've traded for labor in fields.
This war found us, you surely can't fail to see.
The captives are hostages, first like pieces of silver
Tradable for peace, perhaps for land, but also
Hostages to a view that sees an empty land

Their money bought, "fee simple" they say, no troubling
People on it, no claims but theirs, no future
Left for savages who do not know enough
To talk or act as men but grunt assent,
Forever the pals of thieves with gold watches.
My brother, don't try to bully us to submit
To your hoarse threats, your breathless, dusty wheeze,
Your fears of enemies invisible, of a god not ours.
The captives must remain with us as fruits
Of war, their fate in hands not ours but theirs,
Of Sibley's army, Washington, St. Paul,
Of white men's god, until their honor dictates
That they bargain an honorable release and deal like men.

[Taoyateduta exits, leaving Wabasha and Paul Mazakutemani.]

Wabasha:
With that, they parted, with threats and promises of serious
Measures, kin on kin, should Taoyateduta
Harm more agency buildings, kill more whites,
Steal more from half-breeds, take more captives.
Big talk, you say. Perhaps, but captives were released,
Despite the pushing, shooting, and shouting. The war parties
Went north to seek more action—Taoyateduta
To Hutch and Grey Bird back towards the Dutchmen's. I heard
They easily found their fights—you know, what we seek
Seeks us. At Birch Coulee they found,
Undefended, the army—a party of grave diggers,
Sent to bury settlers killed before.
The white men died like mice drowned in a thunderstorm,
Surprised, surrounded, awash in red blood, red anger.
Grey Bird's men would not be frustrated again.
When Taoyateduta returned to his village, heavy
With loot, his hopes for alliance with other bands
Appeared to be about to come true, a group of Sisseton
And Wahpeton had come to council, but it was a trick
Of the spirits. The great chief Standing Buffalo
Spoke, but bitterly: the western Dakota would fight
No longer as allies with Taoyateduta, whose disaster
Hung like a twister over the plains, pending

Destruction to all who looked. What fool brought this on?
They wanted nothing more of Taoyateduta,
And left.

[Exit Wabasha. An old woman wanders onto the stage and progresses from one side to the other, nonlinearly, before exiting.]

An old Dakota woman, left in Taoyateduta's village:
Are you still here, little sparrow? Why not
Fly? The little group you go with, your kin,
Are following the food to our farms that lie so patiently,
Waiting for spirits to bless them at last, no withered
Beans, no half-eaten maize we've grown to feed
The bugs. We're just as jumpy as you, impatient
For things to grow, rewards to arrive, full kettles
Flavored a little with meat, but now only corn
If we can find it. Not food enough for warriors.
We can't be strong birds now but be like you, the nervous
Cousins of hawks and falcons while others prey
on you. Hu. You linger, I bet, because now we're kin.
I say hello then, sister, and ask for news
About other sparrow people who flit from here
To there and back to here, not following a herd
Migrating nor seasons that pull all creatures on earth
In ritual procession, a big medicine dance, deliberate,
Stately, honorable, beautiful. Ah, instead, we flee
And jump 'mongst the villages and chiefs. Hu. They want to raise
An army. The spirits have told me, though, "don't wait, go quick."
So we sparrow-people flee from village to village,
Chief to chief, until the blue-clad clouds,
The slowly moving thunderheads, break
Upon us, cowering like you beneath some bush,
Captives, flying in circles, never free. Hu.
Do you want, sparrow sister, to trade some food with me?

Paul Mazakutamani:
I saw men shackled in the great father's town, and others
Walking free to work and live, to raise
Their families, sing their songs, and eat their suppers
Peacefully. Why do men believe unceasing

War the better, peace with honor lesser,
Peace that leaves a man alone to run
His course as god intended weakest of all?
Avoid the shackles, I'm saying, and God is answering,
Do unto others as you would have them do.
If you seek justice, wear it as you might wear
A glove, though all you try makes your hand to tremble.
These people must be free, as mine must also
Live with kin and kind unshackled, safe.
A group of elders, me included, wrote
To Sibley, general now of Minnesota's army,
Come to punish whoever killed and burned
And looted white men's towns and farms; he's come
Enforcing peace, he says. We welcome that
And offer aid, whatever's needed, so peace
Returns and Taoyateduta's war will stop.
Sibley was grateful, saying he had come
To punish only guilty men but stopped
Before he made a clear alliance. He wanted,
As do we, release of captives, arrest
Of evil-doers, but promised nothing new.
If only he would wait until we gathered
Forces, chose a strategy, but time and fear
Will not cooperate. The whites demand
That Taoyateduta be captured now, the war
Be turned to victories. The more we fight,
The more their hatred grows, the more inflamed
Revenge will be. The captives' lives are key.

[Paul Mazakutemani exits. Sibley enters with a chair, sits, crosses his legs, lights a cigar. He wears the full dress uniform of an officer. A Matthew Brady photograph.]

Gen. Henry Sibley:
I've heard from Indians calling for peace and offering
Help. I've told them what they want to hear—
That blame belongs to a few among them, not all,
Some young men, leaders, misled followers—criminals.
That would be wrong, of course, but now I'll say
Whatever calms the Indians, whatever breaks

Their unity I'll foster. Truly, no white sees
A future state with whites and Indians co-existing,
No white, that is. They all must pay the price
Of reparations. They, however, don't need
To know that. Good will serves friends and foes.
I've been asked why Little Crow started this, a man
I've known for years. Newspapers, railroaders, preachers,
Idle inquirers, all think I should know
The mind behind an Indian war. It's true,
We hunted buffalo, deer, whatever was ready
When we were young. We two fought beneath our flag
As allies, he a steady comrade in arms,
His word his bond—of course, he followed the trail
In an Indian way, not ours, where mine and thine
Are never far apart, so one is pressed
For sureness. Will you die for this or that
Material thing, or let it go as common,
Used by whoever fancies a turn? He learned
Our preoccupations with wealth apart from family,
Dealing with us accordingly, adopting our ways
To fit his people, painfully it's true,
Like cogs on a miller's wheel, to help in grinding
Land and culture, game and open space
To a standard meal, a settler's grist and grit.
He's done his part, so why should he of anyone
Now retrace his path, my inquirers ask.
Well, damned if I know. He's strong, impetuous, arrogant,
All the older qualities we'd admire in *our* leaders.
Out hunting once, a group of whites and Indians,
Half-breeds mostly, sought out buffalo. We rode
Our horses, except for Little Crow, who trotted
Beside us on foot, keeping pace,
As though he rode. For days it was,
With never a plaint or lagging. I'll never forget it.
No white man will who saw it, glad to be
A companion, not an enemy, of such a man.
But here we are in a deadly turn. Very well.
Last night I dreamt I watched a crow perform
Neat tricks, smart feats, surprises that set us all
A-laughing, challenging him for more, when quick

As blinking up he rose, our dinner he snatched
Away into the upper branches of a tree
That rose a hundred feet above us. I peered
And squinted, finally making out his form
In upper branches, eating my supper. I took
My glass, had a better look: he was standing
A wicker basket, enjoying his picnic and laughing.

[Chuckles and shakes his head admiringly.]

I'll attack the Yellow Medicine Agency and arrest
Or kill the miscreants. I'll establish martial law
Amongst the others, preparing them for whatever
Comes in days ahead. I've no intention
Of punishing only guilty warriors. It's war,
Not for crimes alone do the people of Minnesota
Seek vengeance. From Little Crow I've learned,
He won't retreat except to strike again.
So I will, too, pursuing as long and hard
As needed. The people and voters of Minnesota
Expect as much. We'll strangle the tribe's resistance
At Yellow Medicine and Redwood Agencies. My troops
Are green but far outnumber our foes who will fight.
I've no illusions; even assistance from deserters
helping us can aid but little. How bitter,
To fight on our common ground, man against man.

[The lights go down as he smokes meditatively.]

PART

3

[Enter Taoyateduta and, in the background, three white captives, two "friendlies," and a younger warrior. Both Taoyateduta and the warrior are stripped down as for war. The "friendlies," a man and woman, both wear white person's clothes and stand behind the first captive who speaks, one on either side.]

Taoyateduta:
What began so well fell hard on rocks,
Made razor-sharp by our own kind and kin,
Ready not with rifles but with white flags waiting
As we left our blood on rock and grass,
Our red blood, their white flag of treachery and cowardice.
No betrayal is like that of your own blood.
The little sleep I had one of these last nights
Yielded a vision, sleeping or waking I know not:
A grey lump in my chest ate my guts and chest.
I wandered, only a pounding head and weary legs,
A cold wind between them, breathed by spirits
Who told me this was my father's ailment. I saw him then
As I walked aimless; he was walking before me
In a long white cape covered with egret feathers.
He turned. Only his eyes and feet remained of a man.
Where his chest should be, a live coal aglow
Beneath a coating of white ash. "Pluck this out,
So I can cool and feel the earth again," he said.
I walked up but when I arrived,
He was gone, an empty cape and pile of feathers.
I was hit by the strong north wind
Freezing my face and feet so I struggled to move.
The days heavy and hot, but the horses jumpy.
Seven-hundred thirty-eight were the braves
Who stood with us to face the soldiers,
Sibley with his army of thousands, horses and cannons.
We debated in council. I urged attack at night,
What we never have done. But no, the council would not,
Wanted to wait for morning: the better to see
Enemy and friend since we were so few, said some;
Because the greater glory, said others, too full of hope.
Old, stiff soldiers wearing masks of stone, they said,
Could never whip the braves, men of many scalps;

A faceless line cannot choke the swift bird of prey.
I had to comply or I had no army. We would wait,
Silent until Sibley moved, his soldiers strung in a thin line
Between two arms of the Yellow Medicine River,
Easy prey for us who can move in silence, hide, and strike,
Surprise upon surprise built like stacked rocks.

Captive, a young man:
I was taken captive near New Ulm.
And kept in Red Owl's camp and watched their preparation.
But as soon as the Indian men had left to fight
The Army, others came, they called themselves
The peace brigade. They'd turn us over to Sibley,
Make things right. Their English wasn't very good,
So guessing what they meant, I went with them
To their encampment. Quickly, we dug some holes
To hide in. There, I saw white captives, the first
I'd seen for weeks since the murderers killed my father,
Mother, and brother, left them there at home
And took me captive. All us hostages were scared
That Little Crow would win and have no need
For us anymore, or come back angry and murderous.
So digging kept us busy, stopped the 'membrances
That sight of others like me—speaking my own tongue—
Provoked. Oh God, I longed to talk and hear,
To shed my tears in a mother's breast, but holes
And trenches would have to serve, to hide me now,
To be my ready-made grave or earthly refuge.

Second White Captive, a woman, crying and screeching:
I don't understand, it's not acceptable, just not,
To make us lie in dirt, my baby's nursing
Here ***[she points to her breast where there is no baby]****, what madness they engage in, wanting*
No doubt to shoot us here, so why not simply
Get it over with, why torture us so,
Play-acting, promising what no Indian can give:
Salvation, troubles at an end, a day released
From pain and fear? I wish they'd killed me yesterday.
This isn't acceptable, just not acceptable, no.

Third White Captive, an older woman:
I had to dig my own hole. I had a little fire shovel, smaller than my head, but, oh, I made the dirt fly! Later, when the excitement was over, I tried to dig with that shovel again, but it didn't even break the soil! That hole was enough, more humble it could never be, to hide in when the time came.

Taoyateduta:
So it was. We positioned, waited, silent, seven-hundred,
As the sun broke through morning mist. But Sibley?
He delayed and delayed. What was he waiting for?
Soldiers ate, fed horses, shit, drank coffee, like lazy women.
Oversure? Unsure? Sure at least for their lives
That we were too few, too far, or too fearful.
The day, I thought, could be ours by chance
If not by courage, seven hundred could be plenty,
Like one bolt of lightning blasting the dry white prairie grass.
Yet then began our downfall, their sloth stole our surprise.
A wagon of soldiers left the road to look for prairie turnips,
The breadroot, blooming purple, we taught them to eat.
The wagon nearly ran over Behind-the-Wind's band in hiding.

Soldier's Lodge warrior:
We hid in place in darkness, no one heard.
We listened as soldiers sang and talked. They hitched
Their horses to a wagon as the sun began its journey,
Then they left into the tents for breakfast,
Maybe, as morning brightened. A flock of birds,
Some prairie chickens, spread out in front of us
And fed amongst the grass and breadroot. We waited.
The wagon finally moved in our direction,
Surely to turn up the hill, away
From our ravine. But no, straight on towards us
Until the birds exploded, uprose, we left our skins,
The mustering cries, the heavy beat of wings
Uprising flights of earth, as on the wagon
Crashed through grasses into sight, we rose
And fired, missed, reloaded. The white soldiers grabbed out quick
For loaded rifles. Hunters and hunted flushed.

Taoyateduta:
Shots fired, their main camp alerted, gathered as one.
We rose at once, of course, but fitfully, dozens of small groups
Thinking this must be the sign because they saw others rise,
A mistake that would be not likely in the dark or the dusk.
They armed, regrouped, and repelled our groups, held their own,
At least no room for cannon and too many moving targets.
But it was over before noon, when we scattered in three's and four's,
With only a few scalps taken. Yet many of our warriors,
For I will not call them braves, stayed on the rim of battle,
Raising white flags, even spending their shot on the ground.
Imagine! Such fine friends and kin, the weakest of the weak!
They hung back to see who would win, holding their bets.
So, we were scattered like pebbles thrown into a pool,
Ripples everywhere but in a moment invisible.
Once we were the hawk, but now the hare,
Running in circles, splitting up, dodging, hiding for safety,
Not for stealth or plan, union or courage, but for escape.

Indian man of the "Friendly" camp:
We had sent letters to Sibley at Fort Ripley.
We told him about our camp apart from the hostiles,
How we were collecting the captives and would defend them from harm.
We reported all we could about the intentions and plans for battle
Of the hostiles, but things were moving so fast. We exchanged
Two letters with Sibley. If the messengers had been caught, their scalps
Would have been taken and our plans frustrated. Sibley told the messengers
That those who didn't kill innocent settlers
Would not be tried or condemned,
But those who did must be judged. He said nothing,
I noticed, about our killing the white soldiers sent against us,
Indian soldier fighting white soldier,
Which is war, not murder. Still, we had his word.
Now, I wonder, though. I can't help but fear.

Indian Man of the "Friendly" Camp:
We few came from the friendlies to release the captives.
We stole the hostages by gunpoint. Many men had left,
So the women and elders were in charge of the captives, none

Were sure the hostages wouldn't be killed. Unwilling,
I thought, as jailers. Afraid, it seemed, they'd run
When Taoyateduta suffered defeat. They knew
Their fate was uncertain as well. The blood they kept
For future deals would blend with theirs. No need
To fire my rifle or use my knife. Surprise
Is ever the warrior of choice. Confusion, heartbreak,
Fear, the sons of chaos, were today our friends.

Indian woman of the "Friendly" camp:
Warriors came back, one by one or in little groups,
Wounded, bearing a dead man here or there.
The fighters avoided their own camp — it didn't matter now
Where they went — so they came to us friendlies, traitors
Though they considered us. They were cursing us
Half-breeds, saying some were fighting on Sibley's side
And killing Indians. Some people I knew who were hostiles
Came over and camped with us. Suddenly, they were all hot
To protect the captives and fly the white flag
or the stars-and-stripes. Right, then. Why not?
I don't think white people know one Indian from another.

[Exit captives and "friendlies."]

At that, a bloodied warrior appears near Taoyateduta,
His hair disheveled, one arm immobile, hanging limp at his side.
A soldier enters as he speaks:
It would have been well, cousin, we would have worked our work
If you hadn't waited, waited so long, too long,
Had we been up and moved as they readied for their day,
Hit them in the latrine line, between sips of coffee,
As they yawned in checking the horses' hooves and tack,
But no, you had a fixed idea, a long line between two streams
You saw in your mind, and we breaking through,
Snapping them like a dry twig. We talked you out
Of a night attack when we had no hope of sight,
Two dozen small groups, scattered here and there,
To arise from the prairie grass as they fled,
A daylight strategy clearly, we thought. But we waited

In the morning's first light for one man's word, yours,
To bring us to the fight, still we waited and yet wait for a word,
The time that never came, would never come for us.
We fought in their time, not ours. The fault is yours, Taoyateduta,
Not the ones who would not fight, much as I despise them.
You gave away our lands by treaty, you and your father,
So we were easily gulled then. We fought and failed
To regain enough to turn around a horse. To you we owe no thanks
Nor any more allegiance. Leaderless we should have been
Each day to be free of the pictures in your false dreams.
And still you dream your troubled dream, our troubles to awake.
Why are you silent now, who love to boast and shout?
You've raised the dead with your bitter whining.
Now maybe you will tell us where we can find a home.

[He turns his back, bows his head and leaves.]

A soldier in Sibley's force:
Yeah, we whipped 'em, all right. They were demons.
Probably half as many as us…maybe that…big difference…
But that would be twice as many of us for them
To kill and scalp…they didn't get far with that, though.
Fire that cannon a few times and their fire was spent.
Yeah, some fellas laid on the dead bodies
For souvenirs — a dead Indian's hair for a keepsake. . .
Give it to your sweetheart, maybe? Hard to believe.
Savages everyplace. Don't take much to turn
Some fellas. But probably went down well in the towns around here.
They'd like it. Someone said that Sibley
Called those men down for it, but I heard no more on it.
No court martials or nothing. We'll have to go with these Indians
East, I wager, to Fort Snelling or so. Keepin' them
Alive will be something unpleasant, passin' through these towns
That they burned to the ground. Don't know why we don't just keep 'em
Where they are, away from settlers and all.
Removal, I hear, is what this is all about.
But we'll move 'em out; move in land agents.
Will there be land left for a sweaty soldier?
Will this dirty soldier be here for some land?

[The soldier remains, standing silently upstage to one side.]

Taoyateduta:
Now will I kill the captives, every last one,
As burdens we cannot now afford. If dust we are,
Then as dust will we behave, light and swift,
Our own backs, our own children and women and elders,
Our own legs and arms and horses, driven by the south wind,
Blown north to find real friends without white flags.

[Antoine Campbell, kin and friend of Taoyateduta arrives. He wears a farmer's shirt and collar, leggings, and white man's hat.]

Taoyateduta:
Dear cousin, Antoine Campbell, you've come to see me
Before we flee. But you have joined the camp
Of those opposed to war. Our families' love,
Our hunting, warring, protecting our own together
Counted as nothing? Still, you spoke your views
In council openly, forthright, as men should do.
You followed through, of course, as I would expect,
As did we both. Anyway, I'm glad you came. It's good
To see you, even in my humiliation.

Antoine Campbell:
Yes, and you as well, Taoyateduta.
I bring a message from Sibley. Both he and I
Would like that you would give yourself up.

Taoyateduta [snorting derisively]:
Ah, cousin, the long merchant Sibley would like to put the rope around my neck, but he won't get the chance.

Antoine Campbell:
I don't think they will hang anybody; they never did before.

Taoyateduta:
No, cousin, anything else, but not to give myself up to hang by the neck. If they would shoot me like a man I would, but otherwise they will never get my live body.

Antoine Campbell:
If you can't do that, I would like to get the prisoners.

Taoyateduta [to himself]:
Oh, why delay? Then let them live, the captives,
Live with our false kin, their flags and weak livers,
Who cannot satisfy their women but pull out
And spill their milk on the soil like worthless men.
They called it enough fight to surrender, went into their fields
To harvest their crops of sorrow. Well, let them wait.
Our lands are lost to row upon row. We will hunt
Seeking worthier game, in better grounds, with truer men,
Wider horizons. Now we must move fast, few as we are.
Better to run, even to die than to dive for cover
in a white man's chosen hole.

Taoyateduta:
[To Antoine]
Yes, you shall have them.
[Shouting to members of the soldiers' lodge waiting on the periphery.]
To you who've fought with me, release the captives
You've held, taken from farms and towns. It's time
to move without the chains that prisoners bring,
to face the north without encumbrances.

A warrior in the chorus:
What right have you to give what I have won?
My woman merged these children with her heart, who lost
One child stolen by Ojibway and another to disease
And cold. I'll keep what bravery has given us.

Taoyateduta:
Remember how you felt to lose a child to theft.
Now, let the captives alone. Too many women
And children have died already. If you had killed
No one but men, we could perhaps make peace.
Now let them go.

[Exit Antoine Campbell, Taoyateduta, and the soldiers' lodge warriors. They

pass the incoming "hostiles" man and woman, dressed traditionally (he, for war). They pause and watch Taoyateduta leave.]

Indian man from the "Hostiles" camp:
We came back in disarray. Humiliated.
Our plans spoiled by an accident, is what I heard.
We discovered that the traitors had taken our captives and wanted
To fight us. I wanted to. How could we lose everything like that?
We had nothing to hold up against Sibley and the white thieves.
Nothing. Nothing but sky, empty sky.
Taoyateduta agreed and then changed his mind:
Too many of his own half-breed kin, maybe, were captives.
I don't know. We packed up and went north with the others,
Looking over our shoulders. Behind us, for the blink of an eye,
I saw what might have been.

Woman from the "Hostiles" camp:
I couldn't breathe.
We were moving so fast though I was with child.
I had to care for two white children while my man was in battle—
So frightened, so stoic they were. I had to be stern
With them for I was afraid of being too careless
So that they'd run away. Frightened they were but not trembling.
We were outside the camp a little so I did not surrender them
When the friendlies came to take them away. When the men started returning,
They told us to pack quick what was loose and get ready to move.
But my man never came back. He was killed by bullets
Near where the chief Mankato fell. My man
Was scalped by the white soldiers I heard later
When some women thought I couldn't hear. Taoyateduta came—
So much confusion—and then ordered the captives released.
Two Indians from the other camp then came to us to take those not taken before.
I gave them up as everyone was leaving.
The children went one way and we another,
Following my husband's old father and cousins and my sister.
Had we been aware of feeling anything, we'd have known
Our hearts were bursting. Were soldiers out to pursue us?

[Exit both man and woman from the "Hostiles" camp. Enter a newspaper man and Samuel Brown, watching them go.]

Newspaper Reporter:
The followers of Little Crow went north and west.
The peace party gathered, the captives released, and awaited
Orders. Sibley's army had them pack
And march to the Upper Agency, food being scarce.
Meantime, Indians had crowded into the camp,
Avoiding harm from Little Crow's retreat,
Hoping food and shelter followed compliance.
From one-hundred-fifty lodges the camp had grown
To two-hundred-forty-three, or twelve-hundred-fifty
Indians, plus cattle, horses, lodges, and goods,
A goodly bunch of humanity. The army moved
Them east to Upper Agency, a caravan strung
Like Israelites, a river of men and women and children.
Where then we did not know, but rumor had
The separation of the guilty and bringing them
To justice in the military practice of war.
Releasing them, the innocent and helpful,
Never seemed to be the army's plan.
Whatever fairness the friendly Indians sought
Awaited marches that removed them from the land.

[As Samuel Brown speaks, a group enters one by one, standing near one another to form a chorus: Thomas Wilkinson, A.J. Van Vorhes, Frederick Brandt, Jane Swisshelm. Van Vorhes and Swisshelm hold copies of their newspapers, from which they read.]

Samuel Brown:
My name is Samuel Brown, a mixed blood from the Friendlies
I am now under General Sibley's command.
I feel no guilt at all in telling this.
At Yellow Medicine, where we gathered Hostiles and Friendlies as one,
the Indians all were put to work harvesting
potatoes and gathering corn. As a mixed blood
who assisted in the friendlies camp, I had been detained
until my identity was confirmed. Once released,
at once I was enrolled as a U.S. scout,
detailed for duty with Major Thomas J. Galbraith,
United States Indian Agent. Our task
At first was securing the Indian men from the camp

Before the Indians suspected that all, not only some,
Were subject to prosecution and put up for trial.
I was to gain their confidence 'til the strategy worked.
We used as bait the annuity money expected
At any moment, which the Indians were sorely needing.
So here was how the ruse was set in motion.
I was ordered one day to inform the Indians that the annuity roll was to be prepared the next morning, and that they must all come at an early hour and present themselves to the agent at the warehouse and be "counted." They were delighted to learn that they were at last to get their money. The annuity payment for that year had not yet been made, and this ruse worked like a charm. About 8 o'clock the next morning the Indians flocked to the warehouse anxious to be "counted." Major Galbraith, Captain Whitney and two or three "clerks" were found seated at a table behind one end of the building with pens, ink, paper, etc., hard at work on the "rolls" while one of the officers and myself were stationed in a doorway at the opposite and further end. As each family would step up to the table one of the "clerks" would rise and count or number them with his finger, one, two, three, etc., and after announcing the result with a flourish and motioning for them to pass on, a soldier would step up and escort the Indians to the other end of the building where I was stationed. As they reached the farther end and turned the corner and came in front of the doorway, I would tell the men to step inside and allow the women and children to pass on to the camp, telling them, as I was instructed to do, that the men as heads of families must be counted separately, as it was thought the government would pay them extra. I would take their guns, tomahawks, scalping knives, etc., and throw them into barrels, telling them they would be returned shortly. In this way we succeeded in arresting and safely detaining in custody 234 of Little Crow's fiercest warriors. And since the Indian men outnumbered the soldiers two to one and were fully as well armed, I think that in this case "the end justified the means."

Thomas Wilkinson, missionary:
I am Thomas Wilkinson. Call me a servant
Of God. I interpreted for some of these so-called trials
As men, chained together, were brought in groups
Of five or six, often tried at once.
The names were confused or mistaken. No one was allowed
Advice or a chance to present contending evidence.
In the last ten days, two-hundred-fifty cases

Were tried, I heard. The proceedings were all in English
Though few defendants could understand the charges.
My services were sometimes required to confirm the evidence
The prosecutors presented, never for pleas,
Defense, or questions. No judgments required translation.
Where I knew that Sibley had assured the Indians that no one
Serving their cause in battle would stand condemned
For being a soldier in the field, the trial judges
Told me that any action of war was taken
To be a capital crime. This beastly travesty
Of trials yielded three-hundred-three men
Condemned to execution, with most defendants
Unaware of their convictions. Rumor
Held among the troops of hangings soon,
The justice war provides to satisfy the victors.
As troubled as I was, what could I do?
But after several days, a wire from Washington:
The President wanted to see the trial records
As he alone must order executions.
There'd be no summary judgement. I, for one,
Rejoiced that cooler heads might win, but justice
Must be deaf and blind as never before.

A.J. Van Vorhes, editor of the *Stillwater Messenger*:
Stillwater Messenger, an editorial, November 12, 1862, by A.J. Van Vorhes, editor. In the name of a thousand murdered victims on our frontier—in the name of scores of violated women and a thousand desolated farms, and hundreds of burned dwellings—in the name of rivers of scalding tears, and of suffering and anguish which can never be written up—in the name of an outraged people whose vengeance can only be satiated by the blood of their destroyers—in the name of Christianity and common humanity, we warn you PRESIDENT LINCOLN, and you, SECRETARY STANTON never issue an edict [of blanket pardon] in the face of this people! . . . We tell you plainly and soberly [that] ten thousand men can be found who will dedicate their hopes, their fortunes, and if need be their lives, to the extermination of that race. The war against the rebellion will pale in the presence of the intensity of the war against the savages. "NO PEACE!—DEATH TO THE BARBARIANS!" is the sentiment of our people.

Frederick Brandt:
My name is Frederick Brandt. Though only 21,
I am a major in the Minnesota State Militia. The U.S. Army
Under Colonel Sibley wanted to move the savages
From their agencies through New Ulm, my town, upriver to Fort Snelling—
For what purpose I do not know. As though to insult every white resident
Of these fair cities along the route, they strut
And protect these savages even as we struggle to bury our dead.
Along with hundreds of other men, I demanded—
By a formal letter delivered to Colonel Sibley—
That he surrender any men who took part in the attacks on our town.
He agreed only to move his hellish caravan south
As they went on their way. We tried to intercept him nonetheless,
But Sibley defended his demons with a company of 160 soldiers
Armed with loaded rifles. They even charged our armed citizens
With bayonets bared. But for the women and children among us,
They might well have wreaked violence against us,
Their own race, preferring to protect the guilty
From our justice. I and some others were arrested
And detained until their caravan had passed.
I will not rest until we have accomplished
What Lincoln and Sibley will not—the execution of every Indian
Capable of war-making in Minnesota now or in the future.

Jane Grey Swisshelm, editor of the *St. Cloud Democrat*:
St. Cloud Democrat, an editorial, November 13, 1862, by Jane Grey Swisshelm, editor. It rests upon the people who do not expect to make money by the Red Fiends to arm themselves and see to it that every Sioux found on our soil gets a permanent homestead 6 ft. by 2. Shoot the hyenas and ask no odds of any man. But we do not know a Minnesotian who is not sworn to this. Exterminate the wild beasts, and make peace with the devil and all his host sooner than with these red-jawed tigers whose fangs are dripping with the blood of the innocents! Get ready, and as soon as these convicted murderers are turned loose, shoot them and be sure they are shot dead, *dead*, Dead, DEAD! If they have any souls the Lord can have mercy on them if he pleases! But that is His business. Ours is to kill the lazy vermin and make sure of killing them.

Samuel Brown:
In the procession eastward, I went along with Col. Marshall's detachment—the train measuring about four miles in length. At Henderson, we found the streets crowded with an angry and excited populace, cursing, shouting and crying. Men, women and children armed with guns, knives, clubs and stones, rushed upon the Indians, as the train was passing by, and before the soldiers could interfere and stop them, succeeded in pulling many of the old men and women and even children from the wagons by the hair of the head, and beating them, and otherwise inflicting injury upon the helpless and miserable creatures. I saw an enraged white woman rush up to one of the wagons and snatch a nursing babe from its mother's breast and dash it violently upon the ground. The soldiers instantly seized her and led or rather dragged the woman away, and restored the papoose to its mother—limp and almost dead. Although the child was not killed outright, it died a few hours after. The body was quietly laid away in the crotch of a tree a few miles below Henderson and not far from Faxon. I witnessed the ceremony, which was, perhaps, the last of the kind within the limits of Minnesota; that is, the last Sioux Indian "buried" according to one of the oldest and most cherished customs of the tribe.

[Enter the chorus of the condemned, and Abraham Lincoln. To one side, Lincoln chants the litany of executables, and on the other side Colonel Miller and Thunder Paints Itself Blue talk above the litany.]

Abraham Lincoln: Ordered that of the Indians and Half-breeds sentenced to be hanged by the Military Commission of Colonel Brooks, Lt. Colonel Marshall, Captain Grant, Captain Bailey, and Lieutenant Olin, and lately sitting in Minnesota, you cause to be executed on Friday the nineteenth day of December, instant, the following names, to wit

Te ha hdo ne cha—case number 2 by the record
Tazon, alias Plaw doo ta—case number 4 by the record
Wy a tah to wan—case number 5 by the record

Colonel Miller speaks to the condemned men through the translator: Tell these thirty-nine condemned men that the commanding officer of this place has called to speak to them upon a very serious subject. Their great Father at Washington, after carefully reading what the witnesses testified to in their several trials, has come to the conclusion that they have each been guilty of wantonly and wickedly murdering his white children. And for this reason he has directed that they each be hanged by the neck until they are dead, on next Friday, and that order will be carried into effect on that day, at ten o'clock in the forenoon.

Hinhan shoon koyag mani — case number 6 by the record
Maza bomidu — case number 10 by the record
Wapa duta — case number 11 by the record
Wahena — case number 12 by the record
Sna mani — case number 14 by the record
Ta te mi na — case number 15 by the record
Rda inyanke — case number 19 by the record
Dowan niye — case number 22 by the record
Ha pan — case number 24 by the record
Shoo kan ska — (White Dog) — case number 35 by the record
Tunkan icha ta mani — case number 67 by the record
Ite duta — case number 68 by the record
Amdacha — case number 69 by the record
Hepidan, or Wanne-omnu ha tan — case number 70 by the record
Marpiya te najin — case number 96 by the record
Henry Milord, a Half Breed — case number 115 by the record
Chaskay dan, or Chaskay etay — case number 121 by the record
Baptiste Campbell, a Half Breed — case number 138 by the record
Tate kage — case number 155 by the record

A prisoner named Thunder Paints Itself Blue to Wabasha, who stands to one side, hands crossed over his mid-section and looking down:
You have deceived me. You told me that if we followed the advice of General Sibley, and give ourselves up to the whites, all would be well – no innocent man would be injured. I have not killed, wounded, or injured a white man, or any white persons. I have not participated in the plunder of their property; and yet today, I am set apart for execution and must die in a few days, while men who are guilty will remain in prison.

Colonel Miller:
Of the number originally condemned, the President has chosen
But thirty-nine for death. This will not please
The citizenry, who prefer revenge to justice.
I'm told the trials were transparently flawed to his eye,
The exercise of civil justice being obscured
By evidence, advocacy, and pleas, all lacking.
Well, this is war, not the courthouse in Springfield.
These people have no rights apart from those
We give them in mercy, precious little of which
They've shown to us. Nonetheless, the commander-in-chief

Hapinkpa — case number 170 by the record
Hypolite Auge, a Half Breed — case number 175 by the record
Nape shuha — case number 178 by the record
Wakan tanka — case number 210 by the record
Tunkan koyag I najin — case number 225 by the record
Maka te najin — case number 254 by the record
Pazi kuta mani — case number 264 by the record
Tate hdo dan — case number 275 by the record
Waxicun na, or Toon kan shkan shkan mani hay — case number 318 by the record
Aichaga — case number 337 by the record
Ho tan inku — case number 333 by the record
Cetan hunka — case number 342 by the record
Hda hin hda — case number 359 by the record
Woda hin hday — case number 373 by the record
Oyate tonwan — case number 377 by the record
Mehu we mea — case number 382 by the record
Wakinyan na — case number 383 by the record}

Has so ordered. These thirty-nine will swing.

[Exit Lincoln and Miller. Enter the newspaper man, a priest, and the chorus of those about to hanged.]

Newspaper reporter, reading:
By-line from me, the special correspondent to *The New York Times*, from Mankato, Minnesota, Friday, December 26, 1862. On Friday morning we were permitted to visit the condemned. They were lying around the floor chained together in pairs, and as some suspicions had been aroused in the minds of the keepers, by reason of certain singular movements on Thursday night, each pair had been firmly chained to the floor. Consequently there was no moving about, their locomotion being entirely obstructed. It was a sad, a sickening sight, to see that group of miserable dirty savages, chained to the floor, and awaiting with apparent unconcern the terrible fate toward which they were then so rapidly approaching. As the hour appointed for the execution drew near, the clergymen in attendance addressed the prisoners in feeling and eloquent terms. They bade them nerve themselves for the terrible ordeal through which in a few brief hours they were to pass, and looking to the Great Spirit for aid to make a firm resolve to be brave and die nobly, like men.

In the midst of the remarks of Father RAVOUX, old PTAN-DOO-TAH broke out in a most lamentable and unearthly wail; one by one took up the lay, and ere long the walls resounded with the mournful "death-song."

[The prisoners sing the "death song."]

A prisoner interrupts:
It wasn't a death song. It was a song for the land, a life song.
A lamentation. Look in your holy book.
Maybe you'll understand a little.

Newspaper reporter:
Soon after, the irons were removed from the limbs of the prisoners, and their arms tied behind them—previous to which they expressed a wish (which we all gratified) to shake hands with the clergy and reporters present. The white caps were then placed upon their heads and pulled down over their faces, after which they were rolled up again so as to leave the face exposed, and now the culprits stand nervously awaiting the moment of their removal to the scaffold. Precisely at the time announced—10 A.M.—a company, unarmed, entered the prisoners' quarters, to escort them to their doom. Instead of any shrinking or resistance, all were ready, and even seemed eager to meet their fate.
Nearly all these Indians were painted up in war style, and were hung in their blankets. The half-breeds wore citizens' dress. As they marched from the prison to the scaffold all joined in wailing and singing, and hopped along on

one foot. Those professing to be Christianized sang:
"I'm on the iron road to the spirit land," while the "bucks" sang a war song.

[Exit the priest and prisoners, leaving only the reporter looking offstage.]

Rudely they jostled against each other, as they rushed from the doorway, ran the gauntlet of the troops, and clambered up the steps to the treacherous drop. As they came up and reached the platform, they filed right and left, and each one took his position as though they had rehearsed the programme. Standing round the platform, they formed a square, and each one was directly under the fatal noose. Their caps were now drawn over their eyes, and the halter placed about their necks. Several of them feeling uncomfortable, made severe efforts to loosen the rope, and some, after the most dreadful contortions, partially succeeded. The signal to cut the rope was three taps of the drum.

All things being ready, the first tap was given **[sound of a drum]**, when the poor wretches made such frantic efforts to grasp each other's hands, that it was agony to behold them. Each one shouted out his name, that his comrades might know he was there. The second tap resounded on the air **[sound of a drum]**. The vast multitude were breathless with the awful surroundings of this solemn occasion. Again the doleful tap breaks on the stillness of the scene **[a third sound of the drum]**. Click! goes the sharp ax, and the descending platform leaves the bodies of thirty-eight human beings dangling in the air.

The greater part died instantly; some few struggled violently, and one of the ropes broke, and sent its burden with a heavy, dull crash, to the platform beneath. A new rope was procured, and the body again swung up to its place. It was an awful sight to behold. Thirty-eight human beings suspended in the air, on the bank of the beautiful Minnesota; above, the smiling, clear, blue sky; beneath and around, the silent thousands, hushed to a deathly silence by the chilling scene before them, while the bayonets bristling in the sunlight added to the importance of the occasion.

At first every one seemed stupified by the sight before them, but only a moment elapsed before a low murmur ran through the crowd, and culminated in a few cheers. One little Hungarian boy, by the gallows, had lost his father and mother at the hands of the savages, and he shouted aloud "Hurrah, hurrah!" for he saw the murderer among the prisoners, and rejoiced in his fate.The physicians having announced life extinct, the bodies were roughly cut down, and all buried in one large hole in a sand-bar in the river.

[Exit newspaper man.]

Union Pacific man:
And so it happens as we foretold, well, almost
So—more have died then needed had only
Commerce held the reins of history and not
The other way around. Still, Providence and the courts
Have ruled "the land's for whites." It's best to move
The red men out where they're no danger for now,
To build a wall of wildness 'twixt them and us.
In time, the wildness too we'll have, converting
Empty savage space to farms and towns,
To rail stops, real estate, banks, and churches. Meanwhile,
Their lands, annuities, treaties—null and void—
"extinguishment of title" it's called. Their land's
Now wholly open to settlers. Their cash annuities
Paid to towns as reparation for their war.
This trying to be productive and white: conversion,
Farming, houses for lodges, kitchen knives
For scalping knives, our careful attempts to avoid
The land they claimed, our tries at teaching them English;
The sickness, hunger, grubby unwashed gazes,
Hands outreaching for alms—all this, new settlers
Hated, where the noble savage was nowhere seen.
Enclosure. That's their future. The wide encampments
We can't use. The isolating walls
Despair alone can build. Why slaughter those
En masse that starvation may dispatch?

[The Union Pacific man exits.]

[Enter Taoyateduta from one side. He has been watching for some time in the shadows.]

Taoyateduta:
Even now, the ice lingers on the rivers that surround us,
Red and Pembina fingering amidst snow, icy shores,
inlets, beaver-coves fringed along their piled logs,
Broad sweep of snow with paths of ice and water.
We have been frozen over and over this winter. Now is time

For green shoots, long hidden beneath the snow,
Time to raise our necks from yokes of ice,
After pulling our camp like oxen from one drift to another.
From the treachery of Wood Lake, frozen
Forever in our poet's memories, carved on our faces
With the ancestor's flint. My heart still cracks with anger
For those smooth-faced cowards. Now, though, is surely a different day.
This vision must surely soon come to pass.
Now must the circle grow like a lake in spring.
We must flow together, thousands moving,
Seeking a high place to gather and prepare,
Dakota bands, Ojibway, Mandan, Crow,
Old enemies flowing together as one people,
Together to force a home for hunting and lamenting
A peaceful death for elders, honor for warriors,
For children someday to remember the strong dead.
Yet here we are: pursued, apart, exhausted,
While brothers die without us there. For what?
Without a great inflowing of the bands, our water
Will never prevail to break the winter's hold
And force the white man's armies to talk or die.
Now must we counsel with them all, our cousins,
Treachery aside, as all are now pursued,
The lies revealed again by which we've bartered.
But our journey over frozen waters has been but division and pain.
After our shame, we retreated north to the Spirit Lake,
Where thousands gathered, many of the circle drawn in.
I considered where next to travel, who to take,
Then followed the great river of the west to its people,
Yanktons and Yanktonais, cousins by their mouths
But not their hearts. Yes, they heard us, but they turned,
Skulking away to hunt without an answer to my plea.
Unity must wait. To the mountains then up north, the Painted Woods,
For Mandans, Hidatsa, and Arikara. But they were ready.
They knew of our struggles and our flight, and threatened us,
Would hand us to the blue coats, they said, or kill us themselves
As cursed people, the bringers of death and trouble.
So, here we are, at the meeting of two rivers,
One of hope still frozen and another of dread.
At Spirit Lake, I spoke to Standing Buffalo

Who earlier had counseled me not to fight the settlers.
He had left then, came north to Spirit Lake
After we spoke, he took his people north
There, he's met acceptance as we've been driven out.
So, here we've perched, watching how he's fared.
We may follow. No. Follow we must.
What other hopes do we have to settle our elders?
We are not all fighters here. We are women and children
And those hardened from so many years of struggle.
This, I owe them. Still, I hate to bow
Before the British. My grandfather fought for them,
His friends died when their cause chanced to be ours
Against the Americans and Ojibways. But no thanks
Did he receive, just the spite he earned as easily
By dealing with their enemies, the other children of lies.
Here, I bring only trouble, much my own making, north.
Standing Buffalo lacked those stones around his neck.
I have nothing to offer in exchange for their protection,
Even war on their behalf with so few warriors left.
From the east like a rising eclipse is Sibley's army
Ready to pursue me here. There is no choice.
Fort Garry lies across the border, the white governor,
The red troops, from there to Hudson's Bay
A world more open, where we could be left in peace.
We'll parade in high ritual—the English love that—
We'll nod our heads to reverence the governor, as they do
(Bishop Whipple taught me that trick),
And wear the beads and feathers, play the drums,
But leave behind the rifles, axes, and the scalps.
We'll do the dance like birds that seek a mate.
Yes, Standing Buffalo passed through and onwards,
But I know the outcome for us: as wind catches
A tree's top limbs that crack and fall, branch
To branch until at last to earth, so will we fall;
The wind that kills us, the repute that runs before;
The earth, the leaving of our group in peace, splintered,
The women, children, elders there by stealth
Or plan, while the few warriors who will, can return
Home with me, to hear what spirits counsel,
And one last time to hunt before the fences rise.

PART

4

[Taoyateduta is dressing for his entrance into Fort Garry, Canada. He puts on a broadcloth suit, deerskin leggings over his trousers, and two sashes made of scarves, one over his chest (a Union Jack) and a second around his waist. He continues to dress as he talks to the reporter, who enters as Taoyateduta is buttoning his dress shirt.]

Reporter:
Chief, may I speak to you? I'm correspondent
For the *St. Paul Daily Press*.

Taoyateduta:
Ah, a reporter.
What's your name?

Reporter:
I'm William
I live here in Fort Garry.

Taoyateduta:
A Canadian reporter.
That's even better. I wouldn't speak to an American.
They and I, we've had some differences of late.

Reporter:
So I've heard. People are wondering, though,
What you want here at Fort Garry.
You're running from the American army, are you not?

Taoyateduta:
Have you ever lived off charity, Mr. Rowland? The leavings
Of one man's hand when that man had taken your land,
Been proven to be your enemy, pissed on your trust,
Regarded you as less than a man, an object of fun?
We're here to offer ourselves, our loyalties and guns,
To Britain and to meet with Mr. Dallas, the leader
Of Fort Garry, the Queen's man in charge.
We stand to offer everything.

Reporter:
And in return?

Taoyateduta:
A place to live in peace, to see our kin,
To hunt, to raise our children in the old ways
As men of peace should do with self-respect.

Reporter:
Are you not concerned the Americans will learn
Of your flight and pursue you here?

Taoyateduta:
I'll kill the Americans
Should they dare cross the border. They won't, you know.
They're women, not men, and Sibley will be called away
To the rebels in the south. The Great White Father needs men,
Is desperate for soldiers. They know we'd kill them all.

Reporter:
And what if Governor Dallas turns you away?
Where would you go then? What would you do?
To the western Montana territory to be with other Sioux?

Taoyateduta:
Why would he turn us down, a powerful people
Declaring loyalty to his nation and his queen? A fool
Might do as much. Dallas is no fool.

Reporter:
Do you know the fate of those you left behind?
We read of executions, thirty-nine—

Taoyateduta:
Thirty-eight, in the town along the river.
Not all were fighting beside us. Some were peaceful.
They would have hanged us all, but for Lincoln's pen.

Reporter:
The others have been moved—

Taoyateduta:

Yes, downriver on a boat
And put in a prison camp like animals in cages.
Perhaps they'll kill them all or move us west
To land that is neither ours nor theirs, Crow land,
Or No-man's-land because whites haven't settled there yet—
Their view—places, no doubt, where no game runs,
No water flows, and nothing edible grows.
I will fight them until none can ride or shoot,
Until their unborn children cannot find fathers among the living.

[He finishes dressing as the reporter withdraws to one side and takes notes. Taoyateduta withdraws upstage. Enter Alexander Grant Dallas, governor of the Hudson's Bay Company of the Fort Garry region, with an aide dressed as an army officer behind him. Dallas is wearing civilian dress pants and a dress shirt, almost the spitting image of Taoyateduta's, and he finished dressing as he talks. As a final addition, he wears a sash across his chest bearing the Union Jack and the Hudson's Bay seal.]

Dallas:
So, this fellow's arrived with several hundred followers.
Behind him by several weeks, if I hear you correctly,
There is an expeditionary army pursuing him, still on the Minnesota River
And could, if they were adequately prepared, start north along the Red River.
How many, did you say?

Officer:

The newspapers are saying two thousand.

Dallas:
Two thousand troops moved over five hundred miles
With support and heavy weapons—and back again—
To chase down five or six dozen murderous Indians.
What part of man's fearful imagination have these savages slapped?
Still, this offers a trick the Americans could take if they chose.
In hot pursuit, they might cross into the Crown territory
Or insist on our apprehending this Little Crow and delivering him.
Most of our men were sent east last month as a contribution
To Fort William, so we're ill-prepared for either exigency.

Officer:
I would estimate, again, that we're at a minimum, sir.

Dallas:
You advised against our contribution, I will not soon forget.
If we can send this fellow and his band away
Peacefully, we can use it to require more hands here.
What's this man like?

Officer:
Changeable
To extremes, sir, rather like prairie weather.
Dealt for years honorably, dependably with the whites.
His grandfather, father, and he himself signed treaties
And gave up lands, then got fed up, it appears,
And led the most vicious insurrection anyone can remember.
By all accounts, fearless. Ojibway and Cree
Hate him and would attack him were he here.
One finds such admirable qualities in some of these.

Dallas:
A waste, really. Anyway, we don't want his leadership to spread.

Officer:
I'd also remind you, sir, of the local American party,
Who see no reason to expend precious loyalties
On London when they could look to Washington or St. Paul.

Dallas:
I've unfortunately not forgotten for a moment. Damn 'em.
So, it's clear then: there's certainly no place for him here.
I expect he'll run south to the mountains. I would.
Probably all that's left to him anyway. If he moves fast,
He could take a trick of his own before winter sets in,
Even if there's no chance of the game itself being his.
Tow-ya-tay-data, Tow-ya-tee-dootam. Oh, damn.
I've said it too often and can't remember what's right.
That French missionary—Father Dernier—helped me with it,
He said they'd be forgiving with someone who tried.
I told him I held the trump cards so I didn't care.

I don't sound at all the way Father Derriere said it. **[They laugh.]**
Ah well, everyone knows diplomacy has its limits.

[Taoyateduta and a dozen men process into a room where Dallas and the aide are standing to receive them. There is pomp, with Taoyateduta's troupe moving by half-steps and chanting. They move in a circle before the Canadians and end with Taoyateduta's men stepping back to leave the chief facing Dallas, who seems to be a little alarmed at the military formation of the Indians. He fidgets but does not flinch. The aide rests his hand on the hilt of his sword. Dallas looks distractedly at Taoyateduta's sashes as the chief speaks.]

Taoyateduta:
Your Eminence, we have not met before. I greet you
On behalf of my people, those here and those far away,
For my kin, who knew your people well and fought
Beside them in yesteryear. I am pleased to meet you.
I have come to pledge my loyalty to your queen and country,
To swear again, as we did in my grandfather's time
Our blood and strength allied with yours, this country
To protect from the hungry enemies lying in wait.
Ours will be settling peaceably but fighting with honor.

Dallas:
My government must thank you for your legacy, particularly your grandfather's
For past service to our nation. Your memory is keen, Towyateeduta,
Though a pity your grandfather departed unhappy with our alliance.
I greet you in the name of the Crown and Hudson Bay Company
And recognize your offer of service and request for shelter.
But men must talk before allegiances and shelter are granted.
You come to Canada after fighting a war in the south,
Against Federal troops in Minnesota. You're fleeing
From the fate of many of your tribe, who have been detained,
Some hung, and others swept from the land
To places considered safer for the general citizenry.
I shall not mince words.
You, Towyateeduta, are a wanted man.
Tell me, why should I chance a war with the Americans
Over one renegade warrior and his small band?

Taoyateduta:
I had believed you were a man of strength and courage.
Now I hear the words of cautious strategy,
Of a man afraid of stepping onto the ice,
Which no Canadian should be afraid to do.
We will defend ourselves from the American and defend you, too.
Shoulder to shoulder will we fight for you and the Queen
So the American will fear us and leave Canada alone.

[A long pause. Dallas fidgets and glances at the aide.]

Dallas:
I must convey your proposal to the Governor-General
In the east, so I cannot promise you refuge in Canada.

Taoyateduta:
My kin have been welcomed without conditions or hesitation.
I see. **[A pause.]** May I speak to you, then man to man?

Dallas:
Yes, of course. **[They withdraw a few feet away from the others' earshot.]**

Taoyateduta:
It's the elders, women, and children I fear for.
Should they return, their lives will surely be over.
Between us, I do not care what happens to me,
But those who are weak we should not send to wolves.
We are men, after all, not beasts.

Dallas:
That's a fair request. As a Christian I cannot ignore it.
Find sponsors among our tribes to shelter your people
And I will not object. Just mind that none be warriors.

Taoyateduta:
So, you are a man of spirit, after all. I am grateful.
I have but one more request: a letter to Sibley
To ask for clemency should we others return to Minnesota.

Dallas [pausing]:
You would return? Good heavens, man, why?
The mountains lie to the west, a vast area
That still has game. You don't strike me as a farmer.

Taoyateduta:
This leading takes us where we would not go,
For the sake of our people, who must be led, not coerced.
Yes, we can hide behind the council or the laws,
We can clean our guns endlessly for a hunt that never comes,
We can wait to see what the spirits will bring to pass,
But such are the ways of cowards, not leaders.
When the running buffalo draw us into the hunt, we go.
Do you understand?

Dallas [pausing]: I will write to General Sibley.

[Dallas turns and Taoyateduta returns to his previous place. The men face one another. Dallas bows from the neck and leaves with the aide, pausing for a moment to look back at Taoyateduta, who after a moment turns and processes out with his men, slowly, with dignity, heads high. On an empty stage, enter Wowinape, a teenager, dressed in traditional garb and wrapped in a blanket. He is a small presence on a great stage and glances around him where the others have exited and then looks at the ground as he begins to speak.]

Wowinape:
My name is Wowinape. Taoyateduta is my father.
I went with Father to Canada after we retreated from Sibley.
I went with him when everyone else scattered,
Like sparrows flying from dogs or like melting snow.
In my heart I know I cannot blame them—the time
Of our people had not yet come. God was waiting.
This was what happened to us, returning, Father and me.
When we were coming back to our own land, Father said he could not fight the white men, but would go below and steal horses from them, and give them to his children, so that they could be comfortable, and then he would go away off. Away off.
Father also told me he was getting old, and wanted me to go with him to carry his medicine bundles. He left his wives and other children behind.

There were sixteen men and one woman in the party that went below with us. We had no horses. We walked all the way down to the settlements. Father and I were picking red berries near Scattered Lake at the time he was shot. It was near night. He was hit the first time in the side, just above the hip. His gun and mine were lying on the ground. He took up my gun and fired it first, and then fired his own. He was shot the second time when he was firing his own gun. The ball struck the stock of his gun, and then hit him in the side, near the shoulders. This was the shot that killed him. He told me that he was dying, and asked me for water, which I gave him. He died immediately after. When I heard the first shot fired, I laid down, and the man did not see me before father was killed.

I took both guns and the ammunition and started to go towards Devil's Lake, where I expected to find some of my friends. I carried both guns as far as the Sheyenne River, where I saw two men and was scared. I threw my gun and the ammunition down. After that I traveled only in the night, and as I had no ammunition to kill anything to eat, I had not strength enough to travel fast. I went on until I arrived at Devil's Lake, being so weak and hungry that I could go no further. I had picked up a cartridge near Big Stone Lake, which I still had with me, and loaded father's gun with it, cutting the ball into slugs; with this charge I shot a wolf, ate some of it, and got the strength to travel. I stayed at the lake until I was captured, twenty-six days after my father was killed.

[Taoyateduta enters upstage in white face, with a grey hood over his head, his arms crossed at the wrists, held below his waist. Enter Nathan Lamson from one side downstage.]

Nathan Lamson:
My name is Nathan Lamson and I am applying
For my reward for killing the Indian chief
Little Crow. I have already received some money:
Yes, the $25 bounty for killing
An Indian wandering around our state. I showed
The chief's scalp as proof. The body is identified
As Little Crow now although his head
Was removed by an Army officer and taken
For the skull. Still, those who knew the chief
Had seen the telltale wounds on his hands and wrists.
The bounty, I believe, is $500. I am here
To receive it now as thanks from a grateful state.

[Exit Wonwinape and Nathan Lamson. Taoyateduta remains in dim light upstage to the end of the play, head bowed, ashen-colored. Now enter Jack Frazer, wearing work gloves and carrying a claw hammer, ignoring the presence upstage.]

Jack Frazer:
So, here we are: the end of the story, the lay
Of the land as sung by some writer or passing minstrel.
Of course, there ain't nothing finished about any of this.
[Chuckles and shakes his head.]
You'd think it'd be easier to see the past than the future,
But it's hard – maybe impossible – to see what it was like back then.
At best, I can tell you, you see what it's like today,
Then you read the tracks backwards. This animal came from somewhere.
But does it matter? I don't know. Can't answer that.
You can know for sure that we're all dead, the land
Is sold and settled, the plaques went up and came down.
The executions were only thirty-eight;
The others – the bands of Dakota living in Minnesota—
Most were shipped to Iowa and then Nebraska—
But I guess you've been told that. Of those people, many dying and diseased,
Most went on west into leaner exile yet.
Others drifted trying to stay out of sight.
And others dulled their senses to avoid the madness.
The leaders Wabasha, the one called Little Six,
And Medicine Bottle had tried to stay in Canada,
But the U.S. Army paid some guys to drug them
And take 'em 'cross the border. Hung 'em at Fort Sibley.
The generations saw and learned from this
Harsh lessons on turning away a brother in need,
Refusing to stand as one. One day, the *Lakota* people
Formed alliances, bonds that made a great army.
Defeated, yes, but feared as the others had been despised.
But once they hung the ones they wanted to,
Exiled and starved most of the rest of them,
There was a mighty odd turn. A couple generations downstream,
The danger safely past, the conquerors' minds
Turned nostalgic. The warriors became the noble savages
Of story and legend. We were part of a big show.

A big show. Imagination darkens the differences
Between you and me, I guess. Meantime, I'm out
Mending fences around the house Henry Sibley sold me
For a thousand dollars. Not a bargain, really,
But it came with land…a bit for cows and horses.
A place where I thought my ghosts would be put to rest.
So, here we are: ghost fences fixed by a ghost Indian
For ghost horses. Still, everywhere you look there are fences,
Old and new. When you settle, that's just what you do.
Might as well be clear: fences are walls,
And fences or walls leave a legacy for our children.
I know what you're thinking, it's hard to know the truth
Whether you're there then or here now.
In truth, people's goods and evils are hidden
Behind their backs with time. We become just ancestors.
But here's a thought, though: T'ain't smart to think you own anything.
The land soaks up everyone's blood. It's a just earth.
My wife, bless her, used to say we're just weathering the storms.
I don't know nothing about storms anymore, but over there,
Outside, just behind your backs, I hear bones rattling.

[Lights go down on Frazer, stage forward, then on Taoyateduta: still upstage, head bowed, ashen-colored.]

Sources

Throughout, I have leaned heavily on the compelling history found in *Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux* by Gary Clayton Anderson (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986), an account of the primary persons and complex web of events and influences that gave rise to the overt violence of 1862. In addition, I have drawn on the research and selections in *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862,* eds. Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan K. Wordsworth (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), in Scott W. Berg's *38 Nooses: Lincoln, Little Crow, and the Beginning of the Frontier's End* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), particularly for the aftermath of the war; in Henry Sibley's *Iron Face: The Adventures of Jack Frazer, Frontier Warrior, Scout, and Hunter* (Chicago: Caxton Club, 1950) for portraits not only of Jack Frazer but of the frontier before its transition to farming and inundation with settlers; and in Harriet E. Bishop's *Dakota War Whoop: Or, Indian Massacres and War in Minnesota of 1862-3* (Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, 1970) for accounts of white captives. These and other accounts supplement the documents I've found in the National Archives to give the imagination much to work with.

Realizing that I could have weighed down that imagination with more and more citations meant to create authenticity, I am to face the firing squad comprising those who know much more than I, have read more deeply and widely on these matters, and have (perhaps) a more energetic constitution for detail. I am truly grateful for the energies not only of the writers I've cited but also for the many professional and lay historians who have recently resumed the task of revealing evidence, piecing together plausible narratives, and sifting the grain from the chaff of earlier accounts. Given this abundance, I pray that I haven't strayed too far from a plausible narrative.

Plato held poets accountable for lying. Readers (generally) charitably conclude that we may lie without knowing better. As poet and armchair historian, I must be held accountable for lying while knowing better. How do I defend myself? Instead of answering to Plato, I have chosen to answer to the demands of the narrative: How true is the story I'm telling? Thus, I must ask readers and listeners not only for their indulgence but for their own experiences of humanity. I trust that you will find that this subject reaches beyond the bitter

events in the upper Midwest in 1862 because the world still has not outgrown racism, fear of the other, brutality, spite, unresolved and unreconciled claims about land and home, or the durable curse of colonialism and racial privilege.

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Taoyateduta: "Taoyateduta is not a coward. . . " As told by Wowinape, Taoyateduta's son, to H.L. Gordon, and quoted in *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862*, eds. Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988, pp. 40-42). See also *Minnesota History* 38 (September 1962, p. 115).

Cecelia Campbell Stay's account of the conversation between Antoine Campbell and Taoyateduta about the release of captives. From "Camp Relief in 1862," Sioux Uprising Collection, Division of Libraries and Archives, Minnesota Historical Society. Quoted in *Through Dakota Eyes*, pp. 252-253.

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Quotations from Minnesota editorials and the portrait of Frederick Brandt were drawn from *38 Nooses*, Scott W. Berg, Chapter 15 and pp. 155-156, respectively.

Colonel Miller's delivery of the sentence on the thirty-eight condemned Dakota and the response of Thunder-Paints-Itself-Blue are recorded in the St. Paul Press, December 28, 1862, and quoted in *38 Nooses*, Scott W. Berg, pp. 228-230.

President Lincoln's list of the condemned and the account of the December 26, 1862, hangings in Mankato, Minnesota: From StarTribune website, December 26, 2015 reproduction of *New York Times* account of hangings, published December 26, 1862: mstartribune.com/dec-26-1862-38-dakota-men-executed-in-mankato/138273909. Accessed 1 December, 2016. See also "The US-Dakota War of 1862": usdakotawar.org/history/aftermath/trials-hanging (see Related Documents for Lincoln's list). Accessed 1 December, 2016.

Account of Taoyateduta's visit to Fort Garry: "From Little Crow: His Visit to Fort Garry," *The St. Paul Daily Press*, Tuesday, June 23, 1863.

Wowinape's statement about Taoyateduta's death: From *St. Paul Pioneer*, August 13, 1863. Quoted in *Through Dakota Eyes*, pp. 279-282.