"From Far Dakota's Cañons", June 25, 1876

(From Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, 1881 edition.)

From far Dakota's cañons,
Lands of the wild ravine, the dusky Sioux, the lonesome stretch, the silence,
Haply to-day a mournful wail, haply a trumpet-note for heroes.

The battle-bulletin,
The Indian ambuscade, the craft, the fatal environment,
The cavalry companies fighting to the last in sternest heroism,
In the midst of their little circle, with their slaughter'd horses for breast-works,
The fall of Custer and all his officers and men.

Continues yet the old, old legend of our race,
The loftiest of life upheld by death,
The ancient banner perfectly maintain'd,
O lesson opportune, O how I welcome thee!

As sitting in dark days,
Lone, sulky, through the time's thick murk looking in vain for light, for hope,
From unsuspected parts a fierce and momentary proof,
(The sun there at the centre though conceal'd,
Electric life forever at the centre,) Breaks forth a lightning flash.

Thou of the tawny flowing hair in battle,
I erewhile saw, with erect head, pressing ever in front, bearing a bright sword in thy hand,
Now ending well in death the splendid fever of thy deeds,
(I bring no dirge for it or thee, I bring a glad triumphal sonnet,) Desperate and glorious, aye in defeat most desperate, most glorious,
After thy many battles in which never yielding up a gun or a color,
Leaving behind thee a memory sweet to soldiers,
Thou yieldest up thyself.
Mrs. Spotted Horn Bull: A View from the Village


Note: This extract is a contemporary narrative of a witness to Custer’s Last Stand.

Like that the soldiers were upon us. Through the tepee poles their bullets rattled. The sun was several hours high and the tepees were empty. Bullets coming from a strip of timber on the west bank of the Greasy Grass passed through the tepees of the Blackfeet and Hunkpapa. The broken character of the country across the river, together with the fringe of trees on the west side, where our camp was situated, had hidden the advance of a great number of soldiers, which we had not seen until they were close upon us and shooting into our end of the village, where, from seeing the direction taken by the soldiers we were watching, we felt comparatively secure.

The women and children cried, fearing they would be killed, but the men, the Hunkpapa and Blackfeet, the Ogala and Minniconjou, mounted their horses and raced to the Blackfeet tepees. We could still see the soldiers of Long Hair [Custer] marching along in the distance, and our men, taken by surprise, and from a point whence they had not expected to be attacked, went singing the song of battle into the fight behind the Blackfeet village. And we women wailed over the children, for we believed that the Great Father [President of the United States] had sent all his men for the destruction of the Sioux. Some of the women put loads on the travois* and would have left, but that their husbands and sons were in the fight. Others tore their hair and wept for the fate that they thought was to be the portion of the Sioux, through the anger of the Great Father, but their men were not afraid, and they had many guns and cartridges. Like the fire that, driven by a great wind, sweeps through the heavy grass-land where the buffalo range, the men of the Hunkpapa, the Blackfeet, the Ogala, and the Minniconjou rushed through the village and into the trees, where the soldiers of the white chief had stopped to fire. The soldiers [Reno’s] had been sent by Long Hair to surprise the village of my people. . . .

From a hill behind the camp, at first, and then from the bank of the river, I watched the men of our people plan to overthow the soldiers of the Great Father; and before a shot was fired, I knew that no man who rode with Long Hair would go back to tell the tale. . . .

From across the river I could hear the music of the bugle and could see the column of soldiers turn to the left to march down to the river to where the attack was to be made. All I could see was the warriors of my people. They rushed like the wind through the village, . . . There had been no council the night before—there was no need for one; nor had there been a scalp-dance. . . . When we did not know there was to be a fight, we could not be prepared for it. . . .

I cannot remember the time. When men fight and the air is filled with bullets, when the screaming of horses that are shot drowns the war-whoop of warriors, a woman whose husband and brothers are in the battle does not think of the time. But the sun was no longer overhead when the war-whoop of the Sioux sounded from the river-bottom and the rave surrounding the hill at the end of the ridge where Long Hair had taken his last stand. The river was in sight from the butte, and while the whoop

*Vehicle used by Plains Indians made of two trailing poles with a net or platform between for loads.
still rung in our ears and the women were shrieking, two Cheyennes tried to cross the river and one of them was shot and killed by Long Hair’s men. Then the men of the Sioux nation, led by Crow King, Hump, Crazy Horse, and many great chiefs, rose up on all sides of the hill, and the last we could see from our side of the river was a great number of gray horses. The smoke of the shooting and the dust of the horses shut out the hill, and the soldiers fired many shots, but the Sioux shot straight and the soldiers fell dead. The women crossed the river after the men of our village, and when we came to the hill there were no soldiers living and Long Hair lay dead among the rest. There were more than two hundred dead soldiers on the hill, and the boys of the village shot many who were already dead, for the blood of the people was hot and their hearts bad, and they took no prisoners that day.

Red Cloud’s Speech to the Secretary of the Interior, 1870


The Great Spirit has seen me naked; and my Great Father, I have fought against him. I offered my prayers to the Great Spirit so I could come here safe. Look at me. I was raised on this land where the sun rises—now I come from where the sun sets. Whose voice was first sounded on this land? The voice of the red people, who had but bows and arrows. This Great Father says he is good and kind to us. I don’t think so. I am good to his white people. From the word sent me I have come all the way to his home. My face is red; yours is white. The Great Spirit has made you to read and write, but not me. I have not learned. I come here to tell my Great Father what I do not like in my country. You are all close to my Great Father, and are a great many chiefs. The men the Great Father sends to us have no sense—no heart. What has been done in my country I did not want, did not ask for it; white people going through my country. Father, have you, or any of your friends here, got children? Do you want to raise them? Look at me; I come here with all these young men. All of them have children and want to raise them. The white children have surrounded me and have left me nothing but an island. When we first had this land we were strong, now we are melting like snow on the hillside, while you are grown like spring grass. Now I have come a long distance to my Great Father’s house—see if I have left any blood in his land when I go. When the white man comes in my country he leaves a trail of blood behind him. Tell Great Father to move Fort Fetterman away and we will have no more trouble. I have two mountains in that country—the Black Hills and the Big Horn Mountain. I want the Great Father to make no roads through them. I have told these things three times; now I have come here to tell them the fourth time.

I do not want my reservation on the Missouri; this is the fourth time I have said so. Here are some people from there now. Our children are dying off like sheep; the country does not suit them. I was born at the forks of the Platte, and I was told that the land belonged to me from north, south, east, and west. The red man has come to the Great Father’s house. The Ogalallas are the last who have come here; but I come to hear and listen to the words of the Great Father. They have promised me traders, but we have none. At the mouth of Horse Creek they had made a treaty in 1862 [probably the Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1868], and the man who made the treaty is the only one who has
told me truths. When you send goods to me, they are stolen all along the road, so when they reached me they were only a handful. They held a paper for me to sign, and that is all I got for my lands. I know the people you send out there are liars. Look at me. I am poor and naked. I do not want war with my Government. The railroad is passing through my country now; I have received no pay for the land—not even a brass ring. I want you to tell all this to my Great Father.

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**The Fort Laramie Treaty with the Sioux (Lakota), 1868 (Excerpts)**

(As found in Albert L. Hurtado and Peter Iverson, eds., *Major Problems in American Indian History*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1994.)

**Article 1.** From this day forward all war between the parties to this agreement shall forever cease. The Government of the United States desires peace, and its honor is hereby pledged to keep it. The Indians desire peace, and they now pledge their honor to maintain it.

If bad men among the whites, or among other people subject to the authority of the United States, shall commit any wrong upon the person or property of the Indians, the United States will, upon proof made to the agent and forwarded to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs at Washington City, proceed at once to cause the offender to be arrested and punished according to the laws of the United States, and also re-imburse the injured person for the loss sustained.

If bad men among the Indians shall commit a wrong or depredation upon the person or property of any one, white, black, or Indian, subject to the authority of the United States, and at peace therewith, the Indians herein named solemnly agree that they will, upon proof made to their agent and notice by him, deliver up the wrong-doer to the United States, to be tried and punished according to its laws; and in case they wilfully refuse to do so, the person injured shall be reimbursed for his loss.

**Article 7.** In order to insure the civilization of the Indians entering into this treaty, the necessity of education is admitted... and they therefore pledge themselves to compel their children, male and female, between the ages of six and sixteen years, to attend school... and the United States agree that for every thirty children between said ages who can be induced or compelled to attend school, a house shall be provided and a teacher competent to teach the elementary branches of an English education shall be furnished, who will reside among said Indians, and faithfully discharge his or her duties as a teacher.

**Article 16.** The United States hereby agrees and stipulates that the country north of the North Platte River and east of the summits of the Big Horn Mountains shall be held and considered to be unceded Indian territory, and also stipulates and agrees that no white person or persons shall be permitted to settle upon or occupy any portion of the same; or without the consent of the Indians first had and obtained, to pass through the same; and it is further agreed by the United States that within ninety days after the conclusion of peace with all the bands of the Sioux Nation, the military posts now established in the territory in this article named shall be abandoned, and that the road leading to them and by them to the settlements in the Territory of Montana shall be closed.
Our Life's Last Chapter (Excerpts)


Our women's hearts fell when the fiat went forth that there was to be a summer campaign, with probably actual fighting with the Indians. . . .

Sitting Bull refused to make a treaty with the government and would not come in to live on a reservation. Besides his constant attacks on the white settlers, driving back even the most adventurous, he was incessantly invading and stealing from the land assigned to the peaceable Crows. They appealed for help to the government that had promised to shield them. . . .

A picture of one day of our life in those disconsolate times is fixed indelibly in my memory. On Sunday afternoon, June 25, our little group of saddened women, borne down with one common weight of anxiety, sought solace in gathering together in our house. We tried to find some slight surcease from trouble in the old hymns; some of them dated back to our childhood's days, when our mothers rocked us to sleep to their soothing strains. I remember the grief with which one fair young wife threw herself on the carpet and pillow her head in the lap of a tender friend. Another sat dejected at the piano and struck soft chords that melted into the notes of the voices. All were absorbed in the same thoughts, and their eyes were filled with faraway visions and longings. Indescribable yearning for the absent, and untold terror for their safety, engrossed each heart. The words of the hymn,

E'en though a cross it be
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
came forth with almost a sob from every throat.

At that very hour the fears that our tortured minds had portrayed in imagination were realities, and the souls of those we thought upon were ascending to meet their Maker. On July 5—for it took that time for the news to come—the sun rose on a beautiful world, but with its earliest beams came the first knell of disaster. A steamer came down the river, bearing the wounded from the battle of the Little Big Horn, of Sunday, June 25. This battle wrecked the lives of twenty-six women at Fort Lincoln, and orphaned children of officers and soldiers joined the cry to that of their bereaved mothers.

From that time the life went out of the hearts of the "women who weep," and God asked them to walk on alone and in the shadow.