

THE FLIGHT OF THE NEZ PERCE
by
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"Tell General Howard that I know his heart. And what he has said I have in my heart also. I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed. Looking Glass is dead. Toohoolhoolzote is dead. The old men are all dead. My brother, Ollokot, is dead. It is cold and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. Hear me, My Chiefs! My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever."

--Chief Joseph, surrendering to U.S. troops 30 miles south of the Canadian border, October 6th, 1877.

FADE IN:

EXT. NORTHERN MONTANA - LATE AFTERNOON

A gentle wind blows, swaying an ocean of tall grass across the undulating hills of the endless Montana plains.

This is epic landscape. Vast and empty, except for a distant, moving shadow...which we soon recognize as an approaching rider coming towards us on a galloping horse.

LT. JAMES BRADLEY (33) stops for a brief rest. He wears the uniform of a union soldier. It seems strange that he'd be out here all by himself. But we can tell, from the look in his eyes, that he's searching for something. But what?

Bradley checks his compass, then charges on ahead...

EXT. NORTHERN MONTANA - LATER

Bradley glides across the terrain, a spec in God's country.

And then he brings his horse to a sudden stop.

The wind blows. His eyes narrow. Something is terribly wrong.

Bradley nudges his horse forward. And then we see it, too...

There is a DEAD BODY in the grass up ahead.

Flayed with arrows. Lying in a pool of dried blood. And wearing a uniform just like Bradley's. Bradley dismounts.

He turns the corpse over and recoils at the ghastly sight. The body is mutilated. Eyes gouged. Throat cut. Head scalped.

Bradley gets back on his horse and rides towards the clearing up ahead, terrified of what he's about to discover...

Hundreds of bodies are strewn across the landscape. As far as the eye can see. On ground soaked red with blood.

This is unbelievable slaughter. An entire calvary unit annihilated, the bodies desecrated and unrecognizable.

Genitals have been ripped from one corpse and shoved down the throat of another. Heads are severed and placed on pikes.

Overwhelmed, Bradley doubles over and vomits. Wretching. Gasping. Fighting to catch his breath. Bradley suddenly hears something. Distant movement. He slowly looks up...

A WHITE HORSE stands on the other side of the battlefield. Covered in blood. Impaled with arrows. But alive.

Bradley rides over to the horse and strokes its mane, hoping somehow that the animal's haunted eyes will tell him the story of what happened here.

Those familiar with history know where we are. Others will find out soon enough. And as Lt. James Bradley takes in the epic carnage just south of the Little Big Horn River, we hear the overlapping sound of a sudden, shrieking TRAIN WHISTLE...

EXT. MOUNTAIN FOREST - MORNING

...A MIGHTY ELK looks up at a distant plume of smoke rising off the far horizon. *The Union Pacific Railroad.*

Weighing nearly a thousand pounds, surrounded by lush forest high in the mountains, the elk stares at the valley far below, regarding the smoke with curiosity...

Something stirs in the forest.

The elk tightens, *sensing danger...*and then it takes off, fleeing deep into the woods...

But it's too late. Arrows come flying from every direction. The elk crashes to the ground. Dead.

For a moment, the forest stands completely still...and then TWENTY NEZ PERCE WARRIORS step out from the timber.

They surround their kill, smiling proudly, patting each other on the back. These are all men we will come to know well...

YELLOW WOLF and WAHLITS have just recently come of age. They approach the animal like kids on Christmas.

Wahlits' father, EAGLE ROCK, stares down at the giant animal.

(Note: Except when otherwise specified, Nez Perce characters will speak in their native language with subtitles.)

EAGLE ROCK
Not bad for your first time.

Wahlits nods as TOOHOOLHOOLZOTE (50) steps into view...

TOOHOOLHOOLZOTE
Your son nearly cost us the elk,
Eagle Rock. It was *his* noise that
scared it away...
(To Yellow Wolf)
And you...your arrows missed wide.
You need practice.

BLACK OWL (25) comes to the boys' defense.

BLACK OWL
And what do you need,
Toohoolhoolzote?

TOOHOOLHOOLZOTE
A younger pair of legs. That climb
nearly killed me!

Laughter as the other men gather around...

OLLOKOT (33) steps forward with his brother...JOSEPH (37).

Joseph is their leader, their chief. We sense his seniority in the way others look to him for approval.

Joseph looks down at the elk as Ollokot kneels and offers a prayer for the animal's sacrifice. Heads bow in reverence.

But as the prayer continues, another distant train whistle is heard. Joseph looks up at the far away smoke. Somewhere deep in his soul, he knows what that train means for his people...

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - LATE AFTERNOON

Returning warriors emerge from the forest and approach a HUNDRED TIPIS scattered along the hillside.

Children see their fathers coming and run to them. Women greet their husbands. There is much joy in this village.

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - SUNSET

The rosy sunset ripples the sky with shades of pink as the tribe gathers around dozens of roaring fires to eat dinner.

YOUNG CHILDREN play while the adults laugh and talk. It's a beautiful evening. Everyone seems happy.

Joseph sits with his wife, SPRINGTIME, and his daughter, NOISE OF RUNNING FEET (11).

Ollokot sits beside his wife FAIRLAND.

Black Owl has his arm around his wife OYEMA, who is nine months pregnant. She suddenly jumps.

BLACK OWL
He's moving again?

Oyema smiles and places his hands on her belly. The proud parents-to-be laugh as the baby kicks again...

Joseph watches them with a slight smile.

Nearby, Yellow Wolf sits with his mother, SWAN LACE. On the other side of their FIRE, Eagle Rock sits with Wahlits...

EAGLE ROCK

It's getting warmer. Soon, we will not need so many fires.

SWAN LACE

I like the fires.

EAGLE ROCK

For you, Swan Lace, we will keep them going through summer.

Swan Lace smiles. Eagle Rock turns to Wahlits and finds his son fixated on a beautiful young sitting a few fires down.

Her name is LITTLE BIRD. She suddenly looks his way.

Nervous, Wahlits quickly averts his gaze.

Yellow Wolf shakes his head with a slight smile.

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - DUSK

YOUNG MEN of the tribe assemble to play STICKBALL as the last light of day begins to fade with the approaching night.

They divide into two teams and are about to begin when Toohoolhoolzote comes onto the field.

He is greeted with howls of laughter. But the game begins and the aging warrior quickly proves he belongs on the field...

This is a brutal game. Full contact sport. Bodies collide and collapse to the earth. Cuts. Scrapes. Bruises. Blood.

Women and children stand nearby, cheering the athletes.

Yellow Wolf and Wahlits advance the ball down the field... They're about to score when Ollokot intercepts...

Ollokot hurls the ball to Toohoolhoolzote, who charges down the field and passes it to Black Owl...

Black Owl scores a goal! Oyema applauds. Everyone cheers...

But, then, suddenly...Oyema doesn't look so good. She grabs her stomach...her WATER BREAKS and hits the ground.

The OLD WOMEN of the tribe quickly whisk Oyema away.

Black Owl drops his stick and runs after them...

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

The old women escort Oyema through the village and disappear inside a tipi. The last woman turns and holds up her hand...

Black Owl stops dead in his tracks.

The old woman goes inside the tipi, leaving Black Owl alone and overwhelmed as any soon-to-be father would be.

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Fairland walks at a brisk pace, clearly in a hurry. Ollokot, passing her, grabs her by the arm...

OLLOKOT

Where are you rushing off to?

He pulls her close, playfully. She struggles.

FAIRLAND

Let go of me, you fool! My sister is having a child!

OLLOKOT

They have enough women. Stay with me. Your husband has needs.

FAIRLAND

Your needs can wait.

She shakes loose from his grip and walks away...

OLLOKOT

Fairland! I'll be waiting...

Fairland looks back at her husband and smiles suggestively before disappearing from view.

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Overwhelmed, Black Owl sits down and crosses his legs.

Fairland approaches -- she glances down at Black Owl, then goes inside the tipi where her sister is giving birth.

Black Owl takes a deep breath and settles in for a long wait.

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - GAME FIELD - LATER

Grey dusk has turned to black night.

Toohoolhoolzote stands in the now empty field, mourning the loss of his beloved game. He hears distant horse hooves O.S.

RED GRIZZLY, a fierce warrior, rides into the village on an APPALOOSA HORSE whose thundering hooves shake the ground.

Toohoolhoolzote watches from a distance, concerned.

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Wahlits and Yellow Wolf watch as Red Grizzly dismounts.

WAHLITS
He came back...

Red Grizzly seems agitated; his demeanor suggests he has big news. TRIBE ELDERS surround him and urge him to calm down...

YELLOW WOLF
Let's get closer...

Wahlits nods, but then something else catches his eye...

Little Bird. Coming out of her tipi. Walking away from the village towards the nearby FOREST. BEAT.

YELLOW WOLF (CONT'D)
Go.

Wahlits nods 'thank you' and takes off after Little Bird...

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Joseph walks home with his wife and daughter. He notices the commotion surrounding Red Grizzly. Concerned, he turns to Springtime, who already knows what he's about to say...

JOSEPH
I won't be long.

Springtime nods. Joseph turns and approaches the group. Everyone sees him coming and *stops talking*. BEAT.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
What is going on here?

OLLOKOT
(To Red Grizzly)
Tell Joseph what you just told us.

Red Grizzly hesitates, then nods. He turns to face Joseph...

RED GRIZZLY
Yellow Hair is dead.

Joseph flinches. This is staggering news. Nearby, Yellow Wolf eavesdrops, stunned by what he's heard.

JOSEPH
By whose hand?

RED GRIZZLY
Sitting Bull.

TOOHOOLHOOLZOTE (O.S.)
It can't be true...

Everyone turns. Toohtoolhoolzote steps forward.

TOOHOOLHOOLZOTE (CONT'D)
I don't believe it...

RED GRIZZLY
Believe what you want. I spoke with
a Lakota warrior who was there...
Yellow Hair crossed the river of
greasy grass and attacked their
village at dawn. Sitting Bull's
warriors killed them all...to the
last man! Put them in the ground
and buried them in their own blood!

Everyone listens quietly. Nobody says a word.

Joseph glances back at the Nez Perce village. People come and
go with smiles and laughter. We see in his face what Joseph
already knows: this news would shatter their peace.

JOSEPH
I ask you not to bring this news
into our village, now.

RED GRIZZLY
But people should know! This is a
great thing that has happened--!

OLLOKOT
(Interrupting)
Red Grizzly. Do as you're told.

Red Grizzly bites his tongue and leaves.

EXT. EDGE OF THE FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

Little Bird stares up at the jeweled sky. Wahlits sneaks up
behind her. She jumps, realizes it's him...and smiles.

LITTLE BIRD
You scared me!

She hits him playfully and they both laugh. He takes her in
his arms and tries to kiss her. She leans back, resisting...

LITTLE BIRD (CONT'D)
 I can't. If I'm gone too long my
 mother will come looking for me...

WAHLITS
 It won't take long...

LITTLE BIRD
 That's what you said last time...

The memory brings a smile to his face.

WAHLITS
 Wait for her to fall asleep. Meet
 me back here in one hour.

LITTLE BIRD
 No, I can't...

WAHLITS
 Understand, Little Bird, I can't
 let you go until you say 'yes'.

She struggles to get away and laughs when he won't let go.
 Then she looks deep into his eyes. *They're in-love.*

LITTLE BIRD
 One hour?

Wahlits nods, then slowly releases her. They stand before
 each other, neither wanting to part ways.

Wahlits puts something in her hands. She looks down.

A BEAUTIFUL NECKLACE. Hand crafted. Little Bird smiles and
 then forces herself to head back to the village.

INT. JOSEPH'S TIPI - MOMENTS LATER

Joseph enters to find Springtime packing and Noise of Running
 Feet reluctantly climbing into bed.

SPRINGTIME
 What was that about?

JOSEPH
 (Hesitates)
 Nothing. Red Grizzly's just
 agitated with wild stories...
 (To Noise of Running Feet)
 Ready for bed?

NOISE OF RUNNING FEET
 I need *Hermene*...!

Joseph picks a DOLL up off the floor and hands it to her.

JOSEPH

Now get some sleep. We have a long day of travel tomorrow.

NOISE OF RUNNING FEET

Will we be home soon?

JOSEPH

Yes.

NOISE OF RUNNING FEET

I hate traveling. Why do we have to leave every winter?

JOSEPH

Because Wallowa is too cold in the winter. The hunting is bad.

NOISE OF RUNNING FEET

Then why do we stay there at all?

Joseph thinks for a moment.

JOSEPH

Long ago, before there were people, there were animals. And a terrible monster, who began to eat the animals. And one day, the coyote, who was very clever, realized that the monster had eaten all the animals except for him. So the coyote found the monster and said, "I do not wish to live alone. Here I am. Do what you will." So the monster ate the coyote, as well.

Springtime watches Joseph tell the story, smiling.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

But the clever coyote had hidden knives on his body. And when the monster ate him, the coyote climbed all the way down the monster's throat and gave the knives to the animals who were trapped there. The rattlesnake. The bear. The elk and the deer. And together, they found the monster's heart and cut it out. The monster fell down dead!

(MORE)

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

And the animals burst from his body
and thanked the coyote for their
freedom. And do you know what the
coyote did then?

Noise of Running Feet shakes her head.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

He carved up the monster and gave
his body to different areas of the
earth. Towards the sunrise and the
sunset; towards the north and the
south. And where each part landed,
the coyote named a tribe and
described what their appearance
would be. And so, the Cayuse were
formed and became small and hot
tempered. The Coeur d'Alene became
skillful gamblers. The Flatheads
and the Blackfeet...well, that's
obvious, now, isn't it?

Noise of Running Feet giggles. Springtime smiles, too.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

But then, the fox said to the
coyote, "What is the meaning of
this? You have given the monster's
body to far away lands, but you
have given *nothing* to *this land*.

(Beat)

And so, the Coyote took the blood
of the monster and sprinkled it
over the land. And from this blood
came the Nu-me-poo; the Nez Perce.

(Beat)

And we have lived there ever since.

Noise of Running Feet slowly comes to a realization:

NOISE OF RUNNING FEET
So...the land belongs to us?

Joseph smiles, then kisses her gently on the cheek.

JOSEPH

No...we belong to the land.

(Beat)

Get some sleep.

Noise of Running Feet closes her eyes.

EXT. FOREST'S EDGE - LATER

Yellow Wolf shoots ARROWS at a TARGET. Swan Lace approaches.

SWAN LACE
What are you doing?

YELLOW WOLF
Practicing. My arrows miss wide.

SWAN LACE
Can you even see what you're
shooting at?

Yellow Wolf fires. The arrow disappears into the dark woods.

YELLOW WOLF
(Being hard on himself)
Does it matter?

SWAN LACE
Where's Wahlits?

YELLOW WOLF
He had somewhere else to be.

SWAN LACE
(Smiles)
Who is she?

YELLOW WOLF
Can't say. It's a secret.

Swan Lace nods, smiling. She turns to leave...

YELLOW WOLF (CONT'D)
I heard Joseph talking with the
elders, earlier.
(Beat)
They killed Yellow Hair.

Swan Lace turns back, unsettled.

SWAN LACE
Who?

YELLOW WOLF
Sitting Bull.

Swan Lace hesitates, not sure what to say.

SWAN LACE
Don't stay out too late.

She turns and heads back to the village.

Yellow Wolf pulls back his bow and lets another arrow fly.

INT. LITTLE BIRD'S TIPI - SAME TIME

Little Bird is wide awake listening to her mother snore. She finally gets the courage to stand up and leave...

Her mother's snoring *suddenly stops*.

MOTHER (O.S.)
Little Bird. Where are you going?

Caught, Little Bird slowly turns back.

LITTLE BIRD
I thought I heard something.

MOTHER
You heard nothing. Go to sleep.

Little Bird returns to bed. Missing Wahlits already.

EXT. NEARBY FOREST - LATER

Wahlits stands alone and realizes Little Bird is not coming. He turns and walks deeper into the forest...

Up ahead, Wahlits hears VOICES. Hushed, excited whispers...

RED GRIZZLY (O.S.)
Joseph is an idiot. He'd rather die
than stand up and fight. Sitting
Bull has just proven the white man
can be defeated...

SNAP! Wahlits steps on a branch. The talking stops.

RED GRIZZLY (CONT'D)
What was that?

Wahlits comes out from the shadows. Everyone relaxes.

YOUNG WARRIOR
It's just Wahlits. He's harmless.

Red Grizzly stares at Wahlits for a moment. BEAT.

RED GRIZZLY
Where's your girl?

WAHLITS
She never came. Her mother...

RED GRIZZLY
Old hag. Worthless woman. You
should stand up to her.

Red Grizzly approaches and offers Wahlits a BOTTLE.

WAHLITS
What's this?

RED GRIZZLY
Just drink.

Wahlits takes a sip and nearly gags. Everyone laughs.

WAHLITS
What is that?

Red Grizzly takes back the bottle.

RED GRIZZLY
Whiskey. A white man gave it to me.

WAHLITS
A white man? Where?!

RED GRIZZLY
What do you mean, *where*? They're
all over. You don't have to go too
far to find one.
(more laughter, then)
Want another?

Wahlits hesitates, then steps forward and takes the bottle.
Drunken laughter fills the woods.

INT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - LATER

The village is quiet and still. Everyone is asleep.

Except for Black Owl. Still sitting on the ground, legs
crossed, focused on the tipi where Oyema is giving birth.

Fairland comes outside. She smiles, then steps aside.

Black Owl leaps to his feet and charges into the tipi.

INT. JOSEPH'S TIPI - MOMENTS LATER

Shouts of celebration awaken Joseph and Springtime.

Joseph gets to his feet and peers outside...

Black Owl is running through the village with a NEW BORN BABY
in his arms. NEZ PERCE MEN surround him in celebration.

BLACK OWL
My son! I have a son!

Joseph watches, smiling. Springtime comes over, as well.

JOSEPH
Black Owl is a father.

SPRINGTIME
I can't think of a better way to
start the year.

Joseph puts his arm around her. They go back inside.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - AFTERNOON

The NEZ PERCE TRIBE is on the move, heading home. 800 MEN, WOMEN, and CHILDREN comprise a moving train, stretching for miles, with broken-down TIPIS, HORSES, MULES, and LIVESTOCK.

Joseph and Ollokot are in the lead. Noise of Running Feet rides with Joseph like a cherished daughter.

Springtime and Fairland ride together and talk.

Nearby, Black Owl and Oyema ride side by side, unable to take their eyes off of their NEWBORN SON.

Wahlits glances back at Little Bird. She's wearing the necklace he gave her. He smiles.

The tribe keeps moving...

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - AFTERNOON

The tribe comes over a hill, revealing a distant ridge that marks their homeland. Toohoolhoolzote is the first to notice.

TOOHOOLHOOZOTE
Wallowa!

The tribe cheers. They're home. WARRIORS ride ahead...

They reach the ridge and suddenly stop.

Joseph can tell something is wrong. He kicks his horse. Ollokot follows close behind...

Joseph and Ollokot reach the ridge and stare down at the valley below...their faces tighten with profound concern.

EXT. WALLOWA VALLEY - LATER

Joseph and Ollokot cautiously lead the tribe into the valley. Everyone seems quiet and fearful. And we quickly see why...

Wallowa is overrun with WHITE SETTLERS and MINERS.

While the Nez Perce tribe was away, an entire community sprang up in their absence. And now a standoff ensues as the Nez Perce return to the valley of their ancestors...

CUT TO:

INT. GENERAL HOWARD'S HOUSE - MORNING

GENERAL OLIVER O. HOWARD (44), a one-armed Civil War veteran, struggles to button his coat. His wife, ELIZABETH, enters.

ELIZABETH
Let me help with you that...

She stands close to her husband and does them one at a time. Tender and loving. She looks deep into his eyes.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
You'll do fine.

Howard nods and slowly exhales. He's clearly nervous. BEAT.

INT. / EXT. HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE - LATER

General Howard stares out the window as the horse-drawn carriage whisks him down the streets of Washington, D.C.

A much different place in 1877. Dirt roads lead to the White House. Horses trot down K Street instead of cars.

NEWSPAPER STANDS nearby and all around show pictures of GENERAL GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER front and center.

Giant bold headlines read: "MASSACRE AT LITTLE BIG HORN."

INT. SHERMAN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

GENERAL WILLIAM T. SHERMAN (57) sits behind his desk going through a mountain of paperwork. A CORPORAL enters.

CORPORAL
General Howard to see you, sir?

SHERMAN
Show him in, please.

Sherman stands and crosses the room as Howard enters.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)
Oliver. Great to see you. How long
has it been?

HOWARD
Since Georgia.

SHERMAN
Right. Have a seat. Can I offer you
anything? Cigar? Brandy?

HOWARD
No. Thank you.

SHERMAN
Been reading the papers? Nothing
but heartache these days...

Sherman sits down. Howard hesitates, then says--

HOWARD
I'm sorry about George, sir. I know
he was a friend of yours.

Sherman nods, faintly. Then:

SHERMAN
What do you know about the Nez
Perce Indians, Oliver?

HOWARD
(Shrugs)
Not much. Kept Lewis and Clark from
starving to death, didn't they?

Sherman motions to a FILE resting on the table...

SHERMAN
That's for you.
(As Howard opens the file)
Are you familiar with the Whitman
massacre? Men, women, and children
brutally murdered with pipe
tomahawks - if that's your idea of
not hostile, then you've got a
different definition than I do.

HOWARD
That was thirty years ago.

SHERMAN
Yeah? How long ago did Lewis and
Clark run into *their* trouble?

Sherman stands and walks over to a LARGE MAP of the WALLOWA VALLEY hanging on the far wall. Howard leans forward.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)

In 1863, a Nez Perce Chief sold the entire Wallowa Valley to the United States Government. Now, there was contention among certain groups of Indians regarding the legality of the sale. So, a compromise was reached. The valley was divided in half. The western half was opened for settlement while the eastern half was ceded back to the non-treaty Nez Perce who refused to assimilate into civilized society. In the fifteen years since that controversy, roughly half of the Nez Perce Nation has adopted white man's ways. They go to school. They attend church. They look towards the future while the other half, the non-treaty Indians, led by Chief Joseph, cling to the past.

(Turns to face Howard)

In 1873, President Grant issued an executive order reaffirming that half of the Wallowa Valley was to be reserved specifically for the non-treaty Nez Perce.

(Dramatic Beat)

That order has been overturned.

HOWARD

As of when?

SHERMAN

As of *this morning*.

Howard isn't sure what to say. Sherman crosses the room and sits down. He looks Howard straight in the eye.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)

Your orders are to proceed directly to the Wallowa Valley, where you will rendezvous with Captain David Perry, and...escort the Nez Perce tribe onto the neighboring reservation at Lapwai.

HOWARD

And if they refuse to be moved?

SHERMAN
 Then you will move them by force.
 Using any means necessary.

Howard looks at Sherman. BEAT.

HOWARD
 For Custer?

SHERMAN
 (With resolve)
 This country has endured enough
 bloodshed to last two lifetimes.
 There can not be another Little Big
 Horn. It's that simple.

HOWARD
 Yes, sir.

SHERMAN
 Good to see you again, Oliver.

Sherman stands, indicating their meeting is over. He pats Howard on the back, then returns to his desk.

Howard stands and goes to the door -- something clearly on his mind. About to leave, he stops and turns back...

HOWARD
 I don't suppose this has anything
 to do with the gold that was
 discovered out there last winter?

Sherman stops working. He slowly looks up at Howard.

SHERMAN
 Now, I thought you said you didn't
 read the newspapers.
 (Beat)
 Do me a favor, Oliver, close the
 door on your way out, alright?

Sherman returns to his work. Howard stares at him for a lingering moment, then slowly shuts the door.

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - LATER

Howard comes outside and buys a newspaper. Everyone on the crowded street is reading about Little Big Horn...

MILES (O.S.)
 Oliver?!

Howard looks up to see COL. NELSON A. MILES (38) approaching.

HOWARD
Nelson!

The two men embrace.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
What are you doing here?

MILES
Seeing the old man in half an hour.

HOWARD
I just came from there.

MILES
I figured. Can I buy you a drink?

HOWARD
You can buy me *coffee*.

MILES
Oh, God, you're still religious?

HOWARD
Afraid so.

Miles laughs and puts an arm around Howard. They cross the street and approach a nearby TAVERN.

INT. TAVERN - LATER

Shot of whiskey for Miles. Cup of black coffee for Howard. The WAITRESS smiles and leaves the two men alone.

MILES
I thought, maybe...the war had
tempered your convictions.

HOWARD
It strengthened them.

Miles picks up his whiskey. Howard, his coffee.

They toast and drink. Miles glances at Howard's newspaper. Custer is the elephant in the room.

MILES
Last I heard, you were running that
Negro University in New York?

HOWARD
That's right.

MILES

Even managed to name it after
yourself, eh?

Howard smiles, then decides to change the subject.

HOWARD

I was sorry to hear about the
promotion. Being a general's
overrated.

MILES

I'll have to take your word for it.

HOWARD

Seen anybody else we know?

MILES

Are you kidding? It's like a
goddamn West Point reunion.
Everyone's being dispatched to the
frontier. Where they sending you?

HOWARD

Wallowa.

MILES

Flatheads?

HOWARD

Nez Perce.

MILES

Oh, you got a good assignment. Nice
and easy. Sherman always liked you.
I married his niece and he'll
probably send me after the goddamn
Sioux Nation.

HOWARD

What do you mean?

MILES

What do I mean? Don't you see the
writing on the wall? We're hitting
the Indians full force. Big Horn's
changed everything. What happens
when the different tribes join
forces and we have an all out
Indian War? Cause you know that's
what they're thinking. Christ,
could you imagine? I don't know
about you, Oliver, but I had my
fill during the last great war.

HOWARD

Yeah. Me, too.

Howard sips his coffee, deep in thought.

EXT. LAPWAI SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

The school sits at the end of a town inhabited by MINERS and MISSIONARIES and NEZ PERCE INDIANS who have converted to Christianity and adopted white man's ways.

Joseph watches as dozens of NEZ PERCE CHILDREN, dressed in white man's clothing, pour out of the building...

INT. LAPWAI SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

REBECCA FULLER (37) helps a NEZ PERCE STUDENT with his homework. The door opens. She looks up. BEAT.

Joseph stands across the room, reluctant to approach.

REBECCA

(To student)

Let's continue tomorrow. Alright?

The student nods and leaves the room...

Rebecca looks at Joseph, but before she can say anything, AGENT ROBERT MONTIETH (40) bursts into the classroom...

MONTIETH

Miss Fuller! I've just heard Chief Joseph's been spotted in town...

REBECCA

I know...

MONTIETH

I think it'd be best if I escorted you home right away...

(Suddenly realizes)

Wait, how do you know?

Rebecca nods over his shoulder. Montieth slowly turns. He sees Joseph and turns white as a ghost...

MONTIETH (CONT'D)

What does he want?

REBECCA

I don't know.

MONTIETH

I'll stay with you until he leaves.

JOSEPH
 (Broken English)
 That won't be necessary. I mean
 Miss Fuller no harm. And you have
 my word I will not stay long.

Montieth looks at Joseph -- shocked.

MONTIETH
 You speak English?

REBECCA
 Robert...Joseph and I went to
 school together here in Lapwai.
 Many years ago. It's alright.

MONTIETH
 You're sure?
 (Rebecca nods)
 Alright, then...

Rebecca follows Montieth to the door and watches it shut
 behind him. Joseph slowly approaches...

JOSEPH
 I do not wish to bring you
 trouble...

She suddenly turns around and gives him a tender hug. And in
 this moment, we sense deep friendship. And a shared past.

Joseph resists for a second. And then he hugs her back.

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - LATER

Wahlits comes out of his tipi, walking at a brisk pace...

EAGLE ROCK (O.S.)
 Where do you think you're going?

Wahlits stops dead in his tracks, then slowly turns around.

WAHLITS
 Nowhere...

EAGLE ROCK
 Who is she?

WAHLITS
 There is no one.

EAGLE ROCK
 Why do you lie to your father?

Wahlits looks down, ashamed. BEAT.

WAHLITS
Because she is promised to another.

Eagle Rock nods, understanding.

EAGLE ROCK
And yet you love her still.
(a moment, then)
Back before dark. There is still
work to be done.

Wahlits smiles and quickly leaves. Eagle Rock watches him disappear into the woods, then gets back to work...

INT. LAPWAI SCHOOL - LATER

Rebecca, kind-hearted and sympathetic, sits across from Joseph at a table near the back of the room.

REBECCA
(In Nez Perce)
Your English has gotten worse.

JOSEPH
I am out of practice.

Rebecca smiles. A long silence ensues. Then:

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
White men have come before. But
never this many. And there are
soldiers, too. All over the land
that was granted to us by the great
chief in Washington.
(Beat)
Why are they here?

Rebecca hesitates, then slowly stands and goes to her desk...

She takes something out of the top drawer, then comes back and sets it on the table with a soft *thud*.

Joseph looks down. A small gold nugget. He picks it up...

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
Is this the same rock they found in
the Black Hills?
(Rebecca slowly nods)
Is it true about Yellow Hair?

REBECCA
Yes.

JOSEPH

Do white men know the difference
between the Lakota and Nez Perce?

REBECCA

Some do. But many don't.
Joseph, please...
(Beat)
Be careful.

EXT. WALLOWA VALLEY - FOREST - LATER

Eagle Rock, busy gathering firewood, stops when he hears a strange RUSTLING nearby.

He makes his way through the thick trees towards a clearing up ahead, where he discovers a RIDERLESS HORSE grazing peacefully in the beautiful meadow.

Confused and intrigued, Eagle Rock steps into the open and approaches the horse. He gently strokes the animal's mane, wondering what it could possibly be doing here all by itself.

The horse continues to graze, not bothered by Eagle Rock's presence. Eagle Rock smiles, marveling at its beauty...

And then he notices the brand seared into the horse's hide.

LARRY OTT (O.S.)

Just hold it right there.

Eagle Rock turns to find LARRY OTT, mean and terrible, approaching with TWO BUDDIES. Their guns raised.

LARRY OTT (CONT'D)

Think you can just steal my horse?

Eagle Rock doesn't understand English. But the guns and the tone let him know he's not welcome.

EAGLE ROCK

Your horse is hungry. Your
settlements do not have good
grazing. That is why he came here.
(Motions to his mouth)
To eat.

LARRY OTT

Anybody understand what the hell
this Indian is saying?

The white men laugh and shake their heads. Larry Ott points to the brand on the horse's hide...

LARRY OTT (CONT'D)

Listen, now, I realize y'all ain't
much for personal property, but
this here brand means the animal's
mine. You understand?

Eagle Rock slowly nods. Hoping to avoid trouble, he takes a few cautious steps back, then turns and walks away...

Larry Ott and his friends watch in total disbelief.

LARRY OTT (CONT'D)

Now where in God's name does he
think he's going?

(Shouting to Eagle Rock)

Hey! I don't know what they do to
horse thieves where you're from but
you don't get to just walk away...!

Larry Ott fires a shot past Eagle Rock's head! Eagle Rock drops to his knees and looks back, terrified.

Larry Ott, gun raised, motions "come here." Eagle Rock stands and slowly approaches...

FRIEND #1

Larry? What ya gonna do?

LARRY OTT

Teach 'em a lesson...

Eagle Rock reaches striking distance. Larry Ott slams the butt of his rifle into Eagle Rock's face...

Eagle Rock falls to the ground. Larry Ott kicks him, cracking his ribs. The white men howl with laughter...

But then Eagle Rock grabs Larry Ott's foot and twists his ankle. Larry Ott drops to the ground...

FRIEND #1

Whoa...!

Eagle Rock attacks Larry Ott, hitting him again and again...

FRIEND #2

Larry?

LARRY OTT

Goddamnit, would you get this son
of a bitch off me?!

The two friends raise their guns, nervous to fire...Eagle Rock raises his arm, exposing his chest...

Friend #1 fires! The bullet rips into Eagle Rock's torso. He hits the ground, still alive, and tries to crawl away...

Larry Ott gets to his feet and grabs his friend's gun...

LARRY OTT (CONT'D)
Give me that...

He walks over to Eagle Rock and takes aim as the wounded warrior desperately tries to crawl away...

His friends look away...the crack of a rifle explodes like thunder and then fades away like the vanishing tide.

The horse takes off into the woods as the two friends work up the courage to look up and face what has been done.

Eagle Rock's lifeless body lies beneath Larry Ott's smoking rifle. A pool of blood around his head.

FRIEND #1
Jesus. Now what?

Larry Ott lets the smoke clear, then turns to his friends.

LARRY OTT
Let's go find my horse.

One by one, the three men turn and walk away...

As they disappear into the forest, we slowly pan down to find Eagle Rock's fingers twitching...He's still alive.

EXT. WALLOWA VALLEY - EVENING

Joseph arrives on horseback and discovers the tribe in panic. Ollokot breaks away from the elders and quickly approaches...

JOSEPH
What's happened?

INT. EAGLE ROCK'S TIPI - MOMENTS LATER

Eagle Rock is on his death bed, surrounded by friends. His face a mesh of blood and pulp. How he's alive is anyone's guess...

Joseph enters with Ollokot and looks down in horror. BEAT.

EAGLE ROCK
Who's there? Joseph?

Joseph sits down beside Eagle Rock and leans close. It takes Eagle Rock a long time to say the following:

EAGLE ROCK (CONT'D)
 Tell my son...no vengeance. He will
 only make his people suffer...if he
 seeks revenge.

Joseph slowly nods as Eagle Rock's breathing grows weaker.

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Wahlits and Little Bird come into the village having spent the day together. They're happy and laughing...until Wahlits sees the large gathering outside his father's tipi.

Realizing something must be wrong, he quickly approaches...

INT. EAGLE ROCK'S TIPI - CONTINUOUS

Eagle Rock is dead.

Everyone in the room is quiet. Nobody knows what to say.

Joseph unfastens the BEADED NECKLACE around Eagle Rock's neck. He looks at it for a long, sad moment.

There is a sudden commotion outside. Everyone looks up.

EXT. EAGLE ROCK'S TIPI - CONTINUOUS

Joseph comes outside and sees Wahlits being restrained by Yellow Wolf and Black Owl. Other tribe members stand nearby.

Joseph walks over and gives Wahlits his father's necklace.

Wahlits looks at it for a heartbreakin moment, then charges into his father's tipi. His screams pierce the night...

Joseph looks at Yellow Wolf and Black Owl, then turns and sees Toohoolhoolzote watching from a distance...

Ollokot steps through the crowd and approaches Joseph. BEAT.

OLLOKOT
 Brother...what should we do?

Joseph looks at Ollokot and says the simple truth:

JOSEPH
 I don't know.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - MORNING

A thundering LOCOMOTIVE discharges an ocean of steam.

General Howard steps onto the platform.

CAPTAIN DAVID PERRY (27) is waiting. He steps forward.

PERRY

General Howard? David Perry. If you'll follow me, sir, I have horses standing by...

Howard nods and follows Perry down the platform...

EXT. WALLOWA VALLEY - SUNSET

Howard and Perry ride towards the Wallowa mountains...

PERRY

Most of them have never seen a train up close. They see distant plumes of smoke and think it's some great iron monster.

Perry laughs, then realizes Howard is only half-listening.

PERRY (CONT'D)

We....ah....have four divisions of calvary stationed nearby...just south of here...I thought it best to keep the troop presence in the valley to a minimum in the hopes of maintaining peace and order.

HOWARD

That's good thinking.

PERRY

Thank you, sir.

(Beat)

Is it true what they say about you?

HOWARD

What do they say about me?

PERRY

That you marched with General Sherman through Georgia.

(Beat)

All the way to the sea.

Howard doesn't answer. Perry takes that as a 'yes'.

PERRY (CONT'D)

That must've been something...

Howard watches as the sun drops behind the mountains.

HOWARD
Beautiful country.

PERRY
What's that, sir?

HOWARD
I said it's beautiful country.
(Beat)
It'd be hard to leave.

INT. LAPWAI - EVENING

Howard and Perry ride down the street and stop at the HOTEL.

PERRY
Your room's ready. Rest of your things should be here by morning.

HOWARD
Thank you, Captain.

PERRY
Will you be needing anything else?

Howard nods over Perry's shoulder...

HOWARD
What's going on at the courthouse?

Confused, Perry turns. The courthouse lights are on. Dozens of horses wait outside for their owners.

PERRY
Oh...trial's under way.

HOWARD
What's the charge?

PERRY
Murder.

Howard looks at Perry, concerned.

INT. COURTROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The courtroom is packed and segregated. The Nez Perce cram in the back. Whites and Christian Indians sit in the pews.

Larry Ott and his buddies sit at the defendants' table.

Howard and Perry step inside and discreetly observe.

PERRY
(To a nearby MINER)
What's happening?

MINER
Jury's reached a verdict...

Perry nods. He turns back to Howard.

HOWARD
When did this happen?

PERRY
Few days ago. Trial went fast.
Prosecution didn't call any
witnesses.

HOWARD
Why not?

PERRY
Nez Perce Indians refuse to swear
an oath on the Bible.

BAILIFF (O.S.)
All rise!

Everyone seated stands as the ALL WHITE JURY returns...

Howard looks over at the Nez Perce. Joseph is among them.

Joseph suddenly turns and looks right at Howard...

HOWARD
Who's that?

Perry turns, looks. BEAT.

PERRY
That's Chief Joseph.

Howard and Joseph size each other up from across the room...

JUDGE
Has the jury reached a verdict?

JURY FOREMAN
We have, Your Honor.

JUDGE
In the matter presently before this
court, how does the jury find?

JURY FOREMAN
We find the defendants not guilty
on all counts, Your Honor.

The whites applaud as Larry Ott and his buddies receive congratulatory pats on the back...

Joseph turns and leaves the courtroom peacefully. The rest of the Nez Perce follow his example -- even Wahlits.

Howard watches them leave, slowly, one at a time.

INT. HOWARD'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Howard unpacks. He hangs a fresh uniform in the closet and sets some files down on the desk. He places a copy of *The Holy Bible* on his bedside table. It looks worn and well read.

Something catches Howard's eye. Outside, distant fires light up the night. Howard opens the window...

The summer breeze carries sounds of far away chanting...

EXT. WALLOWA VALLEY - SAME TIME

Eagle Rock's funeral. Warriors dance around fires as tribe members join in a mournful wail, savage and stirring.

Toohoolhoolzote, Ollokot, Black Owl, Oyema, Fairland, Springtime, Noise of Running Feet, Swan Lace, Yellow Wolf, Joseph...almost everyone participates.

Red Grizzly lurks in the shadows, watching.

EXT. WALLOWA VALLEY - CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Wahlits sits by himself, staring down at a plot of disturbed earth that marks his father's grave.

Little Bird approaches and puts her arms around him. Wahlits collapses into her embrace.

The mighty wails of the Nez Perce tribe float high into the night sky and threaten to shake heaven itself.

INT. HOWARD'S HOTEL ROOM - PRE-DAWN

The room is still and silent for a brief moment. Then there is a gentle knock...and the door slowly opens.

Captain Perry pokes his head inside and finds General Howard fully dressed, at his desk, reading his Bible.

Perry clears his throat. Howard finally looks up.

PERRY

Ready when you are, sir.

Howard closes his Bible, collects his things, and stands.

HOWARD

Let's go.

EXT. WALLOWA VALLEY - SAME TIME

Joseph stands beside Ollokot and Toohoolhoolzote in the grey light of early morning. They look tired, but focused.

Distant horse hooves are heard. The three men stare O.S.

OLLOKOT

Here he is.

LOOKING GLASS (45) comes riding up and dismounts.

Fierce, intelligent, attractive, Looking Glass is chief of a Nez Perce settlement along the nearby Clearwater River.

JOSEPH

Good to see you, Looking Glass. I only wish it were under happier circumstances.

LOOKING GLASS

News of Eagle Rock's death filled my heart with great sadness. How is his son? How is Wahlits?

JOSEPH

His burden is heavy. But he has promised to honor his father's wishes and has sworn no acts of vengeance will follow.

Looking Glass nods. BEAT.

TOOHOOLHOOLZOTE

Are there white men along the Clearwater?

LOOKING GLASS

No. Not yet. Is is true there is a new White Chief from Washington?

(they nod)

What does he want?

JOSEPH

(dramatic beat)

Let's find out.

EXT. LAPWAI GARRISON - MORNING

A column of SOLDIERS stand at attention, waiting.

Howard looks over at Perry. *Are they coming or not?*

And then there is a distant rumble...

Joseph, Ollokot, Toohoolhoolzote, and Looking Glass come riding into the garrison with HUNDREDS of WARRIORS...each on an APPALOOSA HORSE, faces PAINTED RED, in FULL BATTLE DRESS.

PERRY

Jesus...

The warriors circle the perimeter...

Joseph dismounts, then raises his hand.

For a moment, the garrison stands at the brink of war...

Joseph *puts his hand back down.*

And with that signal, *every warrior disarms.*

Rifles, bows, knives, arrows are thrown to the ground. Even Red Grizzly reluctantly disarms. It's a remarkable gesture.

Howard and Perry sigh with relief. BEAT.

EXT. LAPWAI GARRISON - LATER

Howard sits at a table. Perry stands nearby at attention. The Nez Perce sit on the ground, Joseph front and center.

A WHITE TRANSLATOR stands between the two groups. BEAT.

JOSEPH

General Howard, I suspect I know the reason you are here. We will not sell the land. The land is *our mother.* You do not sell your mother. We will not sell the land.

Howard waits for the translation. BEAT.

HOWARD

Well, Joseph...my understanding is that the land was *already sold to us.* By a Nez Perce Chief in 1863...

Joseph responds before the translator has finished...

JOSEPH

Chief Lawyer did not sell you the land because it was not his to sell. He does not speak for us and he does not speak for the land. Suppose I come to you and say I want to buy your horses. And you say no. So I go to your neighbor and say, "Sell me Howard's horses." And he does. If the Nez Perce sold the land, this is the manner in which it was done.

Again, Howard waits for the translation.

HOWARD

I suppose that's a matter of opinion, now isn't it?

Joseph stares at Howard. BEAT.

JOSEPH

Our people have inhabited this land since the beginning of time. The white man arrived less than seventy winters ago. I know because my own father kept Father Lewis and Father Clark from starving. He gave them food and canoes and helped them find the great ocean to the west.

Joseph stands and approaches Howard's table...

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

All we want is to live in the land of our ancestors. When so many of you came looking for gold, we let you search. When you have murdered our people, we have not sought revenge. We have not made war on you like the Lakota or the Crow. And when some of our people chose to adopt white man's ways and follow the white man's Book of Heaven, we let them go and live their lives as they saw fit according to their own hearts. My own father converted to the white man's religion and named me Joseph. Through it all, we have always lived in peace.

Howard stares at Joseph, listening to the translation. BEAT.

HOWARD

I know you have, Joseph.
 (Gathers his thoughts)
 What I have come here to say will
 be difficult for many of you to
 hear. But if you'll just give me
 some time to explain...

Joseph holds up his hand, silencing the translator. He's had enough of this. He looks right at Howard.

JOSEPH

(In English)
 Time to explain? Why do you need
 time to explain?

HOWARD

Because it's complicated.

Joseph sets the gold nugget Rebbecca gave him on the table.

JOSEPH

(In English)
 Lies are complicated. It does not
 take many words to speak the truth.

Howard's eyes narrow. He stands. The translator gets ready...

HOWARD

Very well. The *truth* is that the Nez Perce have not had any legal claim to this land since they *sold* it in 1863. I stand here at the request of the President and on his authority. My orders are simple and will be executed. You are hereby ordered to leave this valley and go onto the reservation at Lapwai. I'm not here to buy your land, Joseph. I'm here to throw you off of ours.

Joseph stares at Howard, enraged. The translator finishes.

JOSEPH

(In English)
 And if we refuse to go onto the reservation?

HOWARD

Then I will send soldiers to put you there.

Toohoolhoolzote can take no more. He stands, approaches.

TOOHOOLHOOLZOTE
 What is this? Who are you?! Who are
 any of you?! What man dares to tell
 another *where* he can go and *how* he
 can live?!

Howard looks at Toohoolhoolzote. Without flinching, he says:

HOWARD
I...am that man.

In a burst of anger, Toohoolhoolzote swings at Howard...

Howard ducks, grabs his arm, twists it behind his back, and slams Toohoolhoolzote down on the table. Hard.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
 Men, stand guard!

The nearby soldiers take aim on the unarmed warriors. BEAT.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
 (To Toohoolhoolzote)
 Do not underestimate me. I may be missing an arm, but I will put you down. You are outmatched. You are outnumbered. Do not forget this.
 (To nearby GUARDS)
 Lock him in the jail.

The guards take Toohoolhoolzote away. Howard turns to face a visibly shaken Joseph. BEAT.

JOSEPH
 (In English)
 We do not desire war.

Howard looks at Joseph long and hard, then walks away.

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - NIGHT

A roaring fire dances orange on the bodies of Nez Perce warriors and elders. Joseph and Ollokot stand before the tribe. Looking Glass is present, as well.

NEZ PERCE WARRIOR
 Howard has shown us the rifle!

Many voice their agreement...

BLACK OWL
 Joseph...what should we do?

JOSEPH
We must try to keep the peace.

RED GRIZZLY
What peace? Eagle Rock is dead.
Toohoolhoolzoote is in jail. And
the whites are all over the land.
We are already at war!

More shouts of agreement. Joseph waits for everyone to quiet.

JOSEPH
Are you really so eager to go on
the warpath, Red Grizzly?

RED GRIZZLY
The whites can be beaten. Sitting
Bull beat them. We can beat them.
War is the answer!

JOSEPH
War is never the answer!
(a moment, then)
It is always a failure of mankind.

Silence. The fire crackles. And then:

SWAN LACE
I've heard terrible stories about
the Cheyenne being loaded onto the
white man's iron monster. They say
it eats coal and breathes smoke and
takes you to The Hot Place where
you die...
(Beat)
I wonder if they'll send us there.

Everyone sits, quietly gripped by fear.

EXT. FOREST - LATER

Wahlits lurks in the shadows. DRUNKEN LAUGHTER is heard O.S.

There is a cabin in the clearing up ahead. Larry Ott sits on
the porch with his buddies, drinking whiskey, toasting their
freedom, and howling at the full moon...

Wahlits raises his rifle, taking aim...his finger tightens
around the trigger. All he has to do is squeeze.

His breathing grows heavy. His arms begin to shake.

He lowers the gun and drops to his knees. He can't do it.

EXT. LAPWAI RESERVATION - MORNING

Joseph and Ollokot ride onto the reservation with Howard. Barren and empty. They take a cautious look around...

HOWARD

What do you think? Not a bad plot of land. Best part is no white men anywhere in sight. You can come and go and live your life any way you please. Just like you said.

Joseph and Ollokot ride between a pair of EMPTY HOUSES.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Ever sleep indoors? More inviting than the ground, believe me. Especially when it rains.

Joseph slowly turns his horse around to face Howard.

JOSEPH

If we accept your proposal, how long will we have to move?

HOWARD

I can give you thirty days.

Joseph glances back at the empty reservation. BEAT.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

'Mind if I ask your real name? Your Indian name, that is. The name you were given before your father baptized you Joseph.

JOSEPH

You would find it difficult to pronounce.

HOWARD

Try me.

JOSEPH

Hinmuutu-Yalatlat.

Howard gasps -- that's quite a name.

HOWARD

You're right. I *would* find that difficult to pronounce.

Joseph smiles, faintly. BEAT.

JOSEPH

Do you know why I let you put
Toohoolhoolzote in jail yesterday?

HOWARD

I wasn't aware that you let me do
anything.

JOSEPH

If you had been harmed, we would
have been blamed. *That's* why I let
you take Toohoolhoolzote away and
that's why my father turned away
from your church and your customs.
Because the white man says one
thing and does another. He offers
treaties and then breaks them. His
word is like the wind.

HOWARD

Is that so? Well, let me tell you
something...that man who stood
trial the other day...Larry Ott.
He's a murderer. And I'm sure you
blame us for his freedom, but he'd
have been convicted if just one of
you had testified...

(Beat)

Is laying your hand on our holy
book really that offensive to you?

JOSEPH

Yes.

HOWARD

In God's name, why?

JOSEPH

Because, General Howard, we can
tell the truth without raising our
hands.

Joseph kicks his horse and rides past Howard, away from the
reservation, back towards Wallowa. Ollokot follows...

HOWARD

Joseph!

Joseph and Ollokot stop and look back. BEAT.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Thirty days...or I send the entire
American army against you.

Joseph and Ollokot turn and gallop away.

EXT. WALLOWA VALLEY - LATER

Joseph and Ollokot come to a clearing at the fork of the LOSTINE and WALLOWA RIVERS. The area seems sacred.

They dismount and kneel before a GRAVE. BEAT.

JOSEPH

I often wonder what he would do if he were alive today.

OLLOKOT

Do you feel his presence?

JOSEPH

I feel his *shadow*.

OLLOKOT

Before he died, he begged us never to sell the land, Joseph.

JOSEPH

I know. I was there.

(Beat)

I do not wish to sell our country. I do not wish to sell the bones of our father and mother. But I do not want war. I do not want bloodshed. I do not want my people killed.

(Beat)

I do not want *anybody* killed.

OLLOKOT

You would give up our father's grave?

JOSEPH

I would give up everything rather than have the blood of whites upon the hands of our people.

Not wishing to argue, Ollokot stands and leaves.

Joseph stares at the grave in silence.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

Don't watch us, now.

EXT. LAPWAI JAIL - EVENING

A SOLDIER stands guard. Howard approaches on horseback.

HOWARD
Corporal...

SOLDIER
Sir?

HOWARD
Release the prisoner.

The soldier turns and disappears inside the jail...moments later, Toohoolhoolzote comes outside, rubbing his wrists...

He looks down the street and sees Howard talking to Joseph. *The two men shake hands.* Toohoolhoolzote can't believe it...

EXT. WALLOWA VALLEY - NIGHT

Joseph and Ollokot stand before an agitated tribe, listening to a cacophony of protest..."What have you done?" "We can't leave!" "Your father never would've let this happen!" Etc.

Black Owl, Oyema, Swan Lace, Fairland, and Yellow Wolf all stay silent, their faces sad. Even Springtime remains quiet.

Joseph looks devastated. Nearby, Looking Glass watches...

EXT. LAPWAI - LATER

Howard and Perry walk towards the hotel.

HOWARD
I leave tomorrow for Washington. I trust you'll make sure the Indians have relocated to the reservation in no less than thirty days time.

PERRY
Yes, sir. And congratulations.

They stop at the hotel entrance. Howard looks at Perry.

HOWARD
Congratulations? For what?

PERRY
For resolving the situation peacefully. For bringing balance and justice to the valley.

HOWARD
Yes, well...good night, Captain.
Wallowa is now under your command.

Howard goes inside the hotel. Perry takes a deep breath.

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - LATER

Joseph and Looking Glass walk along the edge of the village.

LOOKING GLASS

I knew your father well. He did not live in such complicated times. All I know for sure...is he would do what was best for his people.

JOSEPH

And what will you do?

LOOKING GLASS

Continue to live in peace. And pray that gold is never found along the Clearwater.

Joseph smiles. The two men clasp hands.

LOOKING GLASS (CONT'D)

Goodbye for now, my friend.

JOSEPH

Safe journey.

Looking Glass climbs onto his horse and gallops away...

INT. WAHLITS' TIPI - SAME TIME

Wahlits sits with Little Bird.

WAHLITS

I had him in my sights...and I couldn't do it. I'm such a coward.

LITTLE BIRD

No. You are brave. What's more important? Your anger...or the final wishes of your father?

Little Bird pulls him close and tries to comfort him...

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Little Bird's mother storms through the village and disappears inside Wahlits' tipi, emerging seconds later dragging Little Bird by the arm...

Wahlits follows close behind...

LITTLE BIRD

Mother! No! Listen to me...!

MOTHER

Horrible girl! You should be
ashamed of yourself! You have no
business being in there with him.

(To Wahlits)

And you! Stay away from her!

LITTLE BIRD

Mother...! No! Mother...!

(Dramatic Beat)

We are married!

Mom stops. Heads turn. Little Bird breaks free and goes to
Wahlits. He puts his arm around her. It's true. Married.

Little Bird's mother slowly approaches...

MOTHER

Married?

LITTLE BIRD

Wahlits is my husband...

MOTHER

You are to be the wife of another!

LITTLE BIRD

But...I love Wahlits.

She slaps her daughter. Hard. Little Bird sobs...

MOTHER

Married...what kind of *coward*
marries in secret...?

(To Wahlits, with hatred)

Oh...I suspect I know...the same
coward who lets the man who killed
his father walk free without
lifting so much as a finger.

She spits at Wahlits' feet and storms off, leaving the lovers
alone. But the damage has been done...

Little Bird is devastated. And Wahlits looks shell-shocked.

He sees Yellow Wolf and Swan Lace staring at him. Ashamed and
overwhelmed, Wahlits turns and runs away...

Nearby, Red Grizzly watches, sensing an opportunity...

EXT. FOREST - LATER

Red Grizzly and his gang of warriors find Wahlits sulking in
the shadows. They surround him. Wahlits looks up. BEAT.

RED GRIZZLY

The old hag has a point, you know?
Why have you done nothing? Did you
not love your father?

WAHLITS

Of course I did!

RED GRIZZLY

Your father deserves vengeance.

WAHLITS

I promised...

RED GRIZZLY

You *promised*? The white man also
promised...promised *justice*. He
broke his promise. You are no
longer bound by yours.

WAHLITS

The thought of that man alive makes
me sick.

RED GRIZZLY

Really? Then why don't you do
something about it?

Red Grizzly offers Wahlits a bottle of whiskey. Wahlits
hesitates, then starts drinking. Red Grizzly smiles. BEAT.

INT. JOSEPH'S TIPI - LATER

Joseph stares at Noise of Running Feet, fast asleep.
Springtime crosses the room and puts her arms around him.

SPRINGTIME

We could use some more meat.

JOSEPH

I'll slaughter a calf tomorrow.

(Beat)

We should start thinking...about
making preparations to leave.

For a long time, Springtime does not respond. Then she slowly
lets go of her husband and goes to bed without saying a word.

INT. HOWARD'S HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Howard packs to go home. His clothes. His files. His Bible.

He shuts off his light and goes to sleep.

EXT. LARRY OTT'S CABIN - LATER

Larry Ott's cabin sits peacefully in the still night...

But then Wahlits, Red Grizzly, and a dozen YOUNG WARRIORS emerge from the woods. Their faces red with war paint.

They approach the cabin with quickening speed...

INT. LARRY OTT'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

The warriors kick down the door and charge into the house, guns raised. They find it empty...

Looks like Larry Ott has packed and left town...

EXT. LARRY OTT'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

The warriors come outside, not sure what to do.

And then Red Grizzly sees a light in the far distance. A cabin. And the owners are obviously home.

Red Grizzly nods, "Let's Go." The warriors follow...

INT. NORTON RANCH - SAME TIME

The NORTON FAMILY has just finished dinner.

MR. NORTON plays cards with three FRIENDS. MRS. NORTON does the dishes. At the table, their SON (4) eats his dinner...

The men see the warriors approaching the house...

MR. NORTON
Kill the lights! Stay down!

Mrs. Norton blows out the lanterns. The house goes dark.

She grabs her boy and takes cover.

The men get their guns and rush outside...

EXT. NORTON RANCH - CONTINUOUS

...They take cover and set their sights on the warriors.

Red Grizzly holds up his hand. The warriors stop. BEAT.

MR. NORTON
What do you want?!

For a long time, nobody answers. Then:

RED GRIZZLY
LARRY OTT!!

MR. NORTON
He ain't here! And I don't know where he is, neither! Wouldn't be surprised if he up and left...! He had a feeling you boys would come looking for him.

The warriors have no idea what Mr. Norton is saying...

INT. NORTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Norton peers out the window.

SON
Mommy...?

MRS. NORTON
Shhhhhh! Stay down.

She forces him out of sight, then glances at a shotgun hanging on the far wall. Waiting for her use...

EXT. NORTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Wahlits turns to Red Grizzly.

WAHLITS
We should leave...

RED GRIZZLY
Quiet!

WAHLITS
These men have done nothing wrong!

Red Grizzly gives Wahlits a look that says, "You better shut up right now." And Wahlits does just that. BEAT.

The stand off continues. Neither side backing down...

And then the following happens very quickly:

One of the Norton Men tries to shift his position and knocks over a stack of FIRE WOOD...the warriors go for their weapons ...another Norton Man FIRES HIS GUN. He misses...

All hell breaks loose...*twenty rifles erupt at close range...*

INT. NORTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Bullets smash windows and pierce the walls...

Mrs. Norton throws her body around her son as a shield...

EXT. NORTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The Norton men fire hastily. Nervous, they miss.

The warriors quickly overwhelm them. When the smoke clears, four white men lay dead on the ground.

It grows very quiet. The warriors catch their breath, realizing they are all alive and without injury.

Red Grizzly takes in the victory. Smiling, he turns...

...and sees Mrs. Norton on the porch with a shotgun...!

She pulls the trigger. *Click.* The gun misfires.

Red Grizzly hurls his tomahawk at her...

It slams into the door. She stumbles into the house...

INT. NORTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Norton grabs a KNIFE from the kitchen...

Red Grizzly knocks it from her hand, then hits her again and again until she stops resisting...

And then he starts to rape her...

Wahlits enters, horrified by what he sees. He grabs Red Grizzly and tries to pull him away...

The other warriors come in and drag Wahlits back outside. He fights and struggles the entire way...

Red Grizzly finishes his brutal assault and tosses Mrs. Norton to the ground like a rag doll. BEAT.

She slowly gets up and turns around...

Red Grizzly stands at the doorway with his BOW AND ARROW pointed her way...He fires!

The arrow slams into Mrs. Norton's chest.

She hits the floor with a sickening *thud*.

Satisfied, Red Grizzly turns and leaves.

Hiding under the bed, Mrs. Norton's young son stares at his mother's lifeless body as blood begins to pool on the floor.

EXT. NORTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The warriors light TORCHES and set the house on fire.

Filled with blood-lust, they let out terrifying screams as flames engulf the house, burning bright in the black night...

Wahlits watches, deeply conflicted...

The warriors turn and leave. One at a time. The last warrior heaves a final torch at the house...

INT. NORTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

...the torch flies through the window and lands next to Mrs. Norton...*who is still alive*. Her eyes flutter open. She coughs blood and gasps for air...

Through the smoke and the heat, she somehow finds the strength to break the arrow sticking out of her breast.

And then she picks up her son and charges out the door as flames spread all around them...

EXT. NORTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Norton avoids looking at the bodies on the ground.

Carrying her son, she limps away from the fire and death, towards the pitch black night and the cold, lonely woods...

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - LATER

Dawn is fast approaching. The village is asleep.

Red Grizzly and the warriors return, shouting, screaming, firing their guns into the air...

WARRIORS

It has begun! The war has begun!

Their shouting continues as the village awakens. Hundreds of people scatter. As the news spreads, panic grows.

Many warriors seem excited. But the elderly, the women, and the children all seem frightened by what is happening.

Yellow Wolf finds Wahlits and grabs him by the arm.

YELLOW WOLF

What have you done?

WAHLITS

Have you seen Little Bird?

Yellow Wolf shakes his head, "No". Wahlits pulls free and goes to look for her...

EXT. WALLOWA RIVER - DAWN

Ollokot holds down a calf so Joseph can slit it's throat.

Yellow Wolf suddenly appears, galloping towards them full speed. He brings his horse to an abrupt stop.

Joseph and Ollokot wait for him to catch his breath...

YELLOW WOLF
There have been killings.

EXT. MEADOW - DAWN

A peaceful clearing at the edge of the forest.

Mrs. Norton stumbles out of the timber. Clothes drenched in blood, arrow stub sticking from her breast, holding her boy under her arm, she limps towards a nearby SETTLEMENT...

MEN working in the field see her coming and run towards her.

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - MORNING

Joseph and Ollokot arrive to find the village in panic.

Toohoolhoolzote is arming for war. Many others, including Black Owl and Oyema, are preparing to leave...

Joseph sees Springtime up ahead. He fights his way through the crowd, finally reaching her...

JOSEPH
Where's Noise of Running Feet?

SPRINGTIME
She's home...Joseph, what are we going to do?!

JOSEPH
Prepare to leave. Now.

EXT. NEZ PERCE VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Ollokot charges through the village, looking for *someone...*

Wahlits, searching for Little Bird, turns around just in time for Ollokot to slap his face. Wahlits falls to the ground.

Red Grizzly swings at Ollokot. Ollokot flips Red Grizzly over his back and onto the ground.

Nearby WARRIORS restrain the other WAR PARTY INDIANS.

RED GRIZZLY
You fools! You act like women and
do nothing? The war has begun!

Ollokot grabs Red Grizzly by the throat.

OLLOKOT
You're the fool. You've stuck a
knife into all of our backs.

Joseph rides over and stares down at the prisoners. BEAT.

JOSEPH
They're going to hang you. All of
you. And I'm going to let them.
(And then, to Wahlits)
So much for promises made to a
dying father.

The words hit Wahlits hard. He sees Little Bird staring at
him from a distance and hangs his head in shame...

GUNSHOTS SUDDENLY RIP THROUGH THE VILLAGE...

VIGILANTES are shooting from the trees. Warriors return fire,
driving them back as women and children take cover...

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
(To Ollokot)
Strike all the tipis. We must be
gone before the sun enters the sky.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - AFTERNOON

Howard sits on a bench waiting for his train.

He notices a LITTLE GIRL on the opposite platform staring at
his missing arm. He smiles and waves.

The Little Girl hesitates, then waves back.

STATION MANAGER (O.S.)
General Howard?
(Howard looks up)
Message for you, sir.

Howard unfolds the piece of paper and reads. BEAT.

A TRAIN WHISTLE shrieks O.S. But Howard doesn't look up.

He stares at the piece of paper, unable to believe it. The
message reads, "WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF AN INDIAN WAR."

Howard stands and leaves. The Little Girl watches him go.

EXT. WALLOWA VALLEY - LATER

Joseph and Ollokot supervise as the Nez Perce tribe leaves their homeland. *Eight hundred people, mostly women, elderly, and children - all running for their lives.*

Wahlits, Red Grizzly, and the War Party Indians have their arms tied behind their backs and are escorted as prisoners.

Black Owl and Oyema ride with their infant son.

Yellow Wolf rides with Swan Lace.

Most of the Indians are on foot. They run, fast and strong.

High on the distant bluffs and well out of range, white vigilantes continue to fire at the fleeing tribe.

EXT. LAPWAI - SAME TIME

People stand in the street, listening to far away gunshots.

Rebecca comes out of the school. She walks down the street, staring towards the distant mountains. Afraid for Joseph...

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Hidden in the dark woods under the cover of night, the Nez Perce try to sleep. But most eyes are wide open.

Little Bird approaches Wahlits.

A WARRIOR standing guard blocks her path. But her eyes tell him to stand aside, which he does.

Little Bird sits down beside Wahlits. BEAT.

LITTLE BIRD
Are you alright?

Wahlits nods, trying to be brave.

WAHLITS
And you?

Little Bird doesn't answer. She looks deep into his eyes.

LITTLE BIRD
Is it true...about the white woman?

Wahlits stares at her through the darkness. Then:

WAHLITS
I tried to stop it. Please believe
me. I tried to stop it.

Little Bird looks away. He has just broken her heart.

She removes the necklace he gave her and sets it down in the dirt. And then she stands and walks away.

Wahlits watches her go. He has already lost everything.

Nearby, Yellow Wolf and Swan Lace have watched the entire exchange. They stare at Wahlits with horror and sympathy.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Sounds of a nearby OWL vibrate through the peaceful woods.

Oyema is awakened by the sound of a SNAPPING BRANCH. She opens her eyes, but doesn't move a muscle. And then:

HUSHED WHISPERS and crunching FOOTSTEPS, coming closer... LANTERNS and TORCHES suddenly visible through the trees. A VIGILANTE ARMY, maybe fifty in number, approaches...

Paralyzed by fear, the Nez Perce stay absolutely still.

Oyema glances down at her sleeping baby...

The torches come closer and begin to pass the tribe...

ANOTHER LOUD SNAPPING BRANCH! Oyema's baby begins to cry... just for a split second...and then, suddenly, it stops.

Everyone looks out at the torches. *Did they hear the baby?* They keep moving. The answer appears to be 'no'.

Relieved, everyone looks back at Oyema...their eyes go wide.

Oyema is covering her baby's face with her hand, smothering him in a desperate attempt to save the tribe...

The last few torches pass and disappear into the woods...

Oyema, in an agony we can only imagine, waits for the sound of their footsteps to grow faint...and then cease.

Oyema lifts her hand. But it's too late. Her baby is dead.

Black Owl comes over and kneels beside her. Oyema can not bring herself to look at him.

EXT. FOREST - DAWN

The tribe gets up and starts moving...

Oyema is frozen in the same position. She can't move. Can't breath. Black Owl sits nearby, somber and grief-stricken.

The tribe moves past them. Sympathetic glances go unreturned.

Finally, Black Owl tries to take the dead child from Oyema. She tightens her grip, then finally lets go.

Black Owl stands and walks into the forest to bury his son. Oyema remains still as the tribe shuffles past her...

EXT. NORTON RANCH - MORNING

General Howard arrives on horseback to find the meadow crowded with SOLDIERS, NEIGHBORS, and VOLUNTEERS.

He sees Mrs. Norton wrapped in a blanket, surrounded by friends. He dismounts and approaches.

HOWARD
Mrs. Norton?

She doesn't respond. Howard turns to a nearby DOCTOR.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Is she going to be alright?

NEIGHBOR
What in the hell kind of question
is that? Of course she ain't gonna
be alright. Look around you!

Howard glances back at Mrs. Norton. She remains unresponsive.

HOWARD
Who's the ranking officer on site?

A nearby SOLDIER steps forward. Howard turns to face him.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Where's Captain Perry?

SOLDIER
Dispatched with two divisions early
this morning. Thought he might be
able to overtake them...

HOWARD
Where's my cavalry? Have they been
ordered to assemble?

SOLDIER

Yes, sir. Cavalry and infantry are standing by, awaiting orders.

HOWARD

We move out immediately.

SOLDIER

Yes, sir.

The soldier salutes and leaves with a sense of urgency.

Nearby, we find that Rebecca has arrived to see for herself if the rumors are true. She can't believe it.

Howard stares at the ground where great pools of dried blood mark where each body fell. He slowly turns around...

Mrs. Norton is staring at him from a distance.

Howard hesitates, then walks away from the smoldering ash, feeling Mrs. Norton's stare the whole way.

Reaching his horse, Howard prepares to mount up...

MRS. NORTON (O.S.)

General Howard?

Howard slowly turns to face her. Everyone quiets. BEAT.

MRS. NORTON (CONT'D)

Kill them all.

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - RIDGE - DAY

Warriors line the ridge overlooking the majestic canyon. Ollokot comes over and takes position beside Joseph.

OLLOKOT

Everything you asked for has been done. We're ready.

JOSEPH

Toohoolhoolzote?

Ollokot nods towards the CANYON FLOOR...

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - FIELD - SAME TIME

Toohoolhoolzote and Black Owl lead a team of TWENTY WARRIORS. They spread out across the canyon floor and crouch down -- disappearing into the TALL GRASS.

Warriors on HORSES take position behind THICK TREES...

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - RIDGE - SAME TIME

Joseph and Ollokot continue to watch and wait.

OLLOKOT
How much time do you think we have?

JOSEPH
Not long.

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - REAR GUARD - SAME TIME

We find the women and children stationed far away from what will be the front lines of the battlefield.

Oyema sits alone, wrapped in a veil of grief.

Fairland comes over and kneels beside her. Oyema collapses into tears. Fairland comforts her sister as best she can.

Nearby, Yellow Wolf loads his rifle. Swan Lace approaches.

SWAN LACE
Promise me you'll be careful.

YELLOW WOLF
I promise.

He turns to go. She grabs his arm. BEAT.

SWAN LACE
You're all I have.

Yellow Wolf kisses her on the cheek, then leaves to join the warriors. Swan Lace watches him go, afraid.

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - RIDGE - SAME TIME

Red Grizzly, Wahlits, and other "war party" Indians are escorted to the ridge and forced to sit down.

Yellow Wolf follows close behind, taking position along the ridge not far away from Joseph and Ollokot.

The WIND blows, bringing with it the sound of an approaching ARMY. Warriors raise their rifles, taking aim.

HUNDREDS OF SOLDIERS come into view on the far side of the canyon. It's an intimidating arrival. The Nez Perce tribe may be eight hundred strong, but most are women and children. The warriors are outnumbered more than two to one.

A WARRIOR raises a large, WHITE FLAG into the air. It unfurls and flaps in the breeze, easily visible for miles.

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - PERRY'S POSITION - THAT MOMENT

Captain Perry stares through BINOCULARS at the billowing white flag. He's flanked by several CORPORALS.

CORPORAL

I'll be damned. We caught 'em.

PERRY

Of course we did. They're trapped between the canyon and the river with nowhere to go. Suing for peace is their only option...

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - RIDGE - SAME TIME

Joseph, Ollokot, and four other WARRIORS mount their horses.

The prisoners are led over the ridge. Wahlits glances at Yellow Wolf before disappearing from view.

Joseph rides over to Yellow Wolf and the other warriors lining the ridge. He speaks loud enough for all to hear:

JOSEPH

If fighting begins, shoot the soldier with the horn first.

YELLOW WOLF

What? Why?

NEZ PERCE WARRIOR

Horns don't fire bullets. Guns do.

JOSEPH

Shoot the soldier with the horn, first. After that, you may fire at men with guns.

Joseph turns and descends the canyon...

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - PERRY'S POSITION - SAME TIME

Perry watches as Joseph leads six warriors and the train of prisoners towards the center of the canyon floor.

Perry spurs his horse forward. Along with six soldiers of his own, he goes out to meet Joseph half way...

Nearby, American soldiers stand ready, bracing for the worst.

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Joseph and his warriors reach the middle ground first.

The white flag continues to flap in the wind.

The war party prisoners stand silent.

Perry and his men come riding into view. They stop just a few yards from Joseph. BEAT.

PERRY
I'm listening.

JOSEPH
(In English)
These are the young men who did the killing. They acted on their own with no authority. I give them to you now so that you may judge them as you will.

PERRY
And your people?

JOSEPH
We will go to the reservation as General Howard said.

Perry glances at his men, not sure he heard right...

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - RIDGE - SAME TIME

U.S. Troops take aim at Joseph and the six warriors below.

Among these soldiers is HENRY FITZGERALD. He puts his finger on the trigger and stands ready...

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Perry nudges his horse closer to Joseph...

PERRY
Of course, we'll require you to surrender your weapons. And you're hereby ordered to proceed back to Lapwai immediately.

There's a SNAKE on the ground, slithering between horses...

PERRY (CONT'D)
We'll make sure your women and children are well fed. I know they've had a long journey.

JOSEPH
Thank you.

Perry nods and the war party prisoners are taken into American custody. The deal is just about closed...

...when suddenly the snake on the ground spooks one of the Nez Perce horses. It rears up. The warrior's arms flail...

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - RIDGE - THAT MOMENT

Henry Fitzgerald sees the spooked horse and FIRES his gun...

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - FIELD - THAT MOMENT

The CRACK of a rifle is heard and then the bullet explodes into the shoulder of the warrior holding the WHITE FLAG...

And the battle begins...

The Battle of White Bird Canyon

An AMERICAN BUGLER blows his horn...six bullets rip his body apart before he's completed the first bar.

The American army is thrown into disarray...

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - RIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Yellow Wolf and the other warriors watch the army scatter. They open fire on the other soldiers...

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The Nez Perce outflank the Americans on every side. Fire rains down from the hills above.

American soldiers are shocked to see RIDERLESS HORSES charging their way...until they realize that Nez Perce warriors are clinging to the SIDES of their horses, hidden from view, and firing rifles underneath their horses' necks!

Toohoolhoolzote and Black Owl pop out of hiding and lead their warriors in a charge towards the Americans, killing soldiers in brutal hand-to-hand combat.

Sensing the battle is lost, Captain Perry retreats - as does every other soldier on a horse.

After several grueling, bloody moments, the battle is over.

The bodies of so many dead American soldiers litter the beautiful canyon. The rest retreat, running for their lives.

And not one single Nez Perce warrior has been killed.

Joseph and Ollokot take in the sobering sight. This is the most dramatic defeat for the U.S. Army since Little Big Horn.

Toohoolhoolzote and Black Owl, covered in blood, unleash screams of victory, raising their rifles high in the air...

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - RIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Swan Lace, Oyema, and Fairland stare down at the screaming warriors as cries of victory erupt around them.

Yellow Wolf stands nearby with his smoking rifle and screams with the other warriors lining the canyon ridge...

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Ollokot takes out his knife and stands before Red Grizzly. For a moment, it seems that Ollokot is going to *kill him*.

But instead, he cuts Red Grizzly's restraints. The other prisoners are set free, as well...

Ollokot storms off, angry and frustrated. Red Grizzly basks in his reprieve. Wahlits rubs his wrists.

The victory screams get louder, echoing off the canyon walls.

EXT. PLATEAU - LATER

The Nez Perce come to a STEEP DECLINE.

CAMERA CRANES up and over as they make their way down to the SNAKE RIVER...more than a thousand feet below!

The sight takes our breath away.

EXT. SNAKE RIVER - FERRY CROSSING - LATER

The FERRY OWNER, a white man, comes out of his house, armed with a RIFLE. His WIFE follows close behind.

FERRY OWNER
Stay inside.

She goes back in the house and shuts the door.

Joseph and Ollokot approach on horseback.

FERRY OWNER (CONT'D)
What do you want?

JOSEPH
(In English)
Need to use ferry.

FERRY OWNER
No chance in hell. Get off my land!

Ferry Owner raises his gun, taking aim. Behind Joseph and Ollokot, 800 Nez Perce come into view!

Overwhelmed by the sight, Ferry Owner lowers his gun. BEAT.

FERRY OWNER (CONT'D)
You have any idea how high the river is? It's flooding! You'll never get across!

Joseph gives him a look as if to say, "We'll see."

CUT TO:

EXT. SNAKE RIVER - LATER

The Nez Perce dive into the raging water and swim more than 130 feet to the other side. Heads strain to stay above water. Horses kick and swim with all their might.

They use the ferry to transport children and elderly.

Ferry Owner watches it all with absolute disbelief.

EXT. WHITE BIRD CANYON - LATER

General Howard walks through the tall grass while AMERICAN SOLDIERS bury the dead. In Howard's eyes, there is an anger we have not seen before. Focused and intense.

Captain Perry approaches from behind. BEAT.

PERRY
Was Georgia anything like this?

HOWARD
What was that?

Howard turns around. Perry starts to stumble.

PERRY
I just...I said...

HOWARD
Speak up, Captain. I can't hear you. And talk fast. Cause you got a lot of explaining to do.

PERRY
Sir?

HOWARD

Do you know what General Sherman said to me when he gave me my orders? "No more Little Big Horns." What do you call this?

PERRY

It shouldn't have happened.

HOWARD

But it did happen. Under *your* command, Captain.

PERRY

(Fumbling for excuses)

We had the high ground, superior numbers, veteran forces who had been tested in battle...

HOWARD

They lured you into a trap.

PERRY

I don't see how. They're just...

Perry catches himself too late.

HOWARD

Go on. They're just *what*? Ignorant savages? Superstitious people? Never seen a train before, how could they beat a modern army?!

Howard gets right in Perry's face and points to the ridge.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Look! They fired on you from the south ridge, drawing you further into the canyon, then they swept around from the rear. Now I don't know if you have a name for that, but at West Point, we used to call it a *flanking maneuver*. Worst thing you can ever do is underestimate your enemy. They set the trap, waited for you in the canyon, and then blew your command straight to hell. Didn't they?

PERRY

(hesitates, then)

Yes, sir.

Disgusted, Howard turns and walks away.

EXT. LOOKING GLASS'S VILLAGE - DAY

The village sits along the beautiful CLEARWATER RIVER.

Looking Glass comes out of his tipi...there are a few precious moments of peace...and then the SCREAMING begins...

Looking Glass turns and sees an approaching ARMY...

Women and children run for their lives. Warriors brace for attack. Gunshots rip through the village...

EXT. SNAKE RIVER - MORNING

Howard watches as the mighty current overturns a RAFT filled with his men, sweeping them down river.

Frustrated, he turns to the Ferry Owner.

HOWARD

How did the Indians get across?

FERRY OWNER

They just dove in and swam to the other side.

Howard stares at the river, dumbfounded. Then he realizes:

HOWARD

They know where the current breaks.

(To Ferry Owner)

Where's the next place to cross?

FERRY OWNER

Half a day's ride south of here.

Howard stares at the river and shakes his head.

EXT. RIDGE - LATE AFTERNOON

The Nez Perce tribe continues its long exodus. Curving over a hill, stretching for miles, they walk towards the horizon.

Joseph, Ollokot, and Toohoolhoolzote sit on their horses and stare solemnly at something OFF SCREEN.

Distant shouting gets their attention. They turn and see Looking Glass approaching from the south, leading the battle weary survivors of his village.

Looking Glass waits for his people to absorb into the tribe, then rides over to join Joseph, Ollokot, and Toohoolhoolzote.

The four men look at one another, then stare, once again, at something far in the distance: the Wallowa Mountains.

Already more than two hundred miles away, the four Nez Perce leaders take a final, lingering look at their home, realizing perhaps, that they will never see it again.

And then they turn and join their people eastward bound.

INT. SHERMAN'S OFFICE - MORNING

Sherman leans against his desk, facing a team of ADVISORS.

SHERMAN

What am I supposed to tell the President? How do I explain to the mothers of all those dead American soldiers, not to the mention the public to whom we promised there would be no more Little Big Horns? This is not acceptable!

An ADVISOR motions to a LARGE MAP on the wall.

ADVISOR

Sir, if I may draw your attention to the map for a moment, we have five divisions closing in on the Nez Perce as we speak...

A SOLDIER quietly enters and hands Sherman a message.

ADVISOR (CONT'D)

...Colonel Wallace is marching with his troops from Ft. Camus. Captain Whipple is coming from the South. General Stephenson, the East. Colonel Monroe, the South East. And, of course, General Howard will continue his pursuit from the West. It's only a matter of time. The noose is tightening. They may not know it yet, but the Nez Perce have already been defeated.

Sherman, busy reading, finally looks up.

SHERMAN

They've crossed the Snake.

ADVISOR

I beg your pardon, sir?

SHERMAN

The Snake River. The Nez Perce
crossed it. Two days ago.

ADVISOR

That's impossible...

Sherman hands him the message so he can read for himself,
then crosses the room to take a closer look at the map.

SHERMAN

Which means, assuming I'm reading
this map correctly, they just
outmaneuvered our entire army.

ADVISOR

This can't be. Our calculations
were precise.

SHERMAN

Well, how did you factor foot
speed? Running or walking?

ADVISOR

Sir?

SHERMAN

Their speed. Running or walking?

ADVISOR

Well...walking, naturally.

SHERMAN

There's your problem. White men
walk. Indians run.

Everyone in the room stiffens. Nervous glances are exchanged.
The Advisor takes a moment to gather his thoughts.

ADVISOR

Sir, I can't help but wonder, in
view of this recent development,
whether we might consider...
relieving General Howard of his
command?

SHERMAN

What? Why would I do that?

ADVISOR

The defeat at White Bird...

SHERMAN

That was Perry's debacle.

ADVISOR

Perry was under Howard's command.

(Beat)

I like Howard, sir. I think we all do. But, you know better than anyone, he was with you in Georgia. Do you really believe he has the stomach for this sort of thing? What I mean to say is...will he push through to the very end?

Sherman's eyes narrow. Staring at the map, he seems to see something the others have missed.

SHERMAN

General Howard stays. And you tell the commanders of the other four divisions when they converge, they are hereby ordered to turn over their command to General Howard.

(Off Advisor's look)

Don't look at me like that. I have my reasons.

EXT. WEIPPE PRAIRIE, IDAHO - DAY

The Nez Perce make their way across a beautiful ocean of flowers - purple, white, yellow - in full bloom. Beyond the prairie lies the LOLO TRAIL and the BITTERROOT MOUNTAINS.

Joseph signals the tribe to stop. He turns to face them.

JOSEPH

It was at this very spot that our fathers met the white chiefs Lewis and Clark and made the fateful choice to help them. It is fitting that we are here now...because another choice is before us. And I can not make it alone.

(Beat)

We can not go North. Flatheads hold that land and would not welcome us. To the South, there is nothing but desert and white men...

LOOKING GLASS

We could go East.

OLLOKOT

And risk dealing with the Crow?

LOOKING GLASS

They hate the White Man...

JOSEPH

No. They *fear* him. And they would betray us to win his favor...

TOOHOOLHOOLZOTE

We should stand and fight! We have beaten the white soldiers once, already. We can do it again!

JOSEPH

They are too many. They will keep coming. And then winter will arrive and we will starve. Look at us! We are mostly women and children. We can not fight a war...

BLACK OWL

We could if we were greater in number. If we could unite the tribes. I tell you, the white man would fear *us*, then...

Red Grizzly rides forward.

RED GRIZZLY

I'll tell you something else about the White Man. Not only is he weak and lazy...he is *tired* of fighting. Just a few winters ago, there was a great war in the East. And more soldiers were killed than there are stars in the sky. Demonstrate force and the White Man will fold like a blade of grass.

OLLOKOT

I am not interested in anything you say, Red Grizzly. If we were not desperate for warriors, I would shoot you myself for what you have brought upon our people.

Joseph glances at his brother, concerned.

LOOKING GLASS

We should head East and join with the Crow.

OLLOKOT

And if that fails?

LOOKING GLASS

Then we go North. To Canada.

Everyone looks up. Someone has finally said it.

JOSEPH
Sitting Bull is in Canada.

LOOKING GLASS
So are his five thousand warriors.
He'll help us.

OLLOKOT
Do you know how long it will take
us to get there? A hundred moons.
It will be winter by the time we
arrive. We will freeze to death if
the soldiers don't kill us first...

LOOKING GLASS
We can make it. A new country. And
with the strength of Sitting Bull's
numbers, we could come back and
reclaim Wallowa...

Joseph turns and looks out at his people, their faces seem
focused and alert, clearly captivated by this idea. BEAT.

JOSEPH
So be it.

INT. HOWARD'S TENT - MORNING

Howard sits at his desk writing some correspondence. Captain Perry enters. Howard doesn't look up.

PERRY
Sir? Some Bannock Indians have come
to meet with you.

Howard stands and follows Perry out the door.

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Howard walks with Perry through the camp. Their numbers have tripled in size. Clearly, the other divisions pursuing the Nez Perce have converged with Howard's command.

A group of SIX BANNOCK SCOUTS stand waiting up ahead.

HOWARD
Good afternoon. Speak English?

One of the Bannock Scouts nods. Howard addresses him.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
 As I'm sure it's been explained, we
 are in pursuit of a fugitive band
 of Nez Perce Indians. I need scouts
 who know the land and can serve as
 guides and interpreters.

BANNOCK SCOUT
 How much you pay?

HOWARD
 Ten dollars a day.

BANNOCK SCOUT
 To each?

HOWARD
 That's right.

BANNOCK SCOUT
 We want whiskey, also. And guns.

HOWARD
 No. I don't do that. And there will
 be no scalping, either. You hear
 me? If we engage in battle, you
 will not take hair from the bodies
 of the dead. That's the deal. Ten
 dollars a day. Take it or leave it.

The Bannock Scout reluctantly nods 'yes'.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
 (To Perry)
 Get these men some food.
 (As he walks away)
 We leave in one hour!

EXT. SNAKE RIVER PLAINS - DAY

General Howard's giant army comes charging over the ridge.
 Every man on a horse, in hot pursuit.

God help the Nez Perce if this army catches them.

EXT. WEIPPE PRAIRIE - DUSK

The Nez Perce continue their flight.

Joseph sees two SCOUTS approaching. He rides over to meet
 them. Ollokot and Looking Glass follow close behind.

JOSEPH
 What news?

SCOUT #1
Howard. We saw him.

JOSEPH
How far?

SCOUT #2
Day's ride. Maybe less. His numbers
have increased. Every man on a
horse and gaining fast!

Joseph turns to Ollokot and Looking Glass.

JOSEPH
We ride through the night.

Looking Glass and Ollokot nod in agreement, then kick their horses and follow Joseph back towards the fleeing tribe.

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - NIGHT

The Americans sit around campfires, eating dinner. A distant COYOTE howls at the moon...

EXT. LOLO TRAIL - NIGHT

The Nez Perce hear the same coyote as they enter the thick timber of the LOLO TRAIL. Tired from walking all day, they keep going -- deeper into the trees...

Oyema brings her hand to her chest. She's sore.

Ollokot and Fairland ride together. Both look tired.

Little Bird's mother begins to drift asleep. Toohoolhoolzote rides up and gives her a gentle nudge. She snaps awake.

LITTLE BIRD
Thank you.

Toohoolhoolzote nods "you're welcome" and rides ahead.

Nearby, Wahlits rides alone. He stares at Little Bird. In his hands, he holds the necklace she returned to him.

Swan Lace rides on the other side of the trail.

Yellow Wolf rides next to her. He stares through the trees at Red Grizzly, riding awake and alert. Like a predator.

Near the front, Springtime holds her sleeping daughter and struggles to stay awake. Joseph rides up beside her.

JOSEPH
Give her to me...

Joseph lifts Noise of Running Feet into his arms. Springtime rubs her tired eyes.

The tribe presses forward. Everyone struggles to stay awake.

Near the back of the line, Black Owl sees something strange: a RIDERLESS HORSE walking alone through the trees...

EXT. WEIPPE PRAIRIE - MORNING

Morning sun beats down on the face of a young NEZ PERCE BOY, still asleep on the ground where he fell off his horse.

Shadows fall across his face. The boy opens his eyes. Bannock Scouts are standing over him.

They grab his hair and lift the boy to his feet...

EXT. WEIPPE PRAIRIE - LATE AFTERNOON

Howard arrives with the rest of his men. Captain Perry rides over to greet him with a sense of urgency.

HOWARD
What is it?

PERRY
Scouts captured a prisoner.

INT. TENT - MOMENTS LATER

The young Nez Perce boy has been beaten terribly. His face is swollen and bleeding. He sits quietly, in great pain.

Howard and Perry enter. Howard sees the boy and looks to Perry for an explanation.

PERRY
I wasn't here when they found him.

Howard stares down at the young boy. BEAT.

INT. TENT - LATER

An ARMY DOCTOR attends to the boy's wounds.

A Bannock Scout stands nearby. Howard stares at him. The Indian's eyes betray no remorse.

The doctor finishes and shuts his bag.

HOWARD

Thank you.

The doctor nods and leaves. BEAT.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

(To Nez Perce boy)

Are you hungry? Would you like
something to eat?

(To Bannock Scout)

Tell him what I just said.

The Bannock Scout steps forward and translates.

The young boy shakes his head, "No."

Howard unfolds a map and slides it across the table.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I need to know where the Nez Perce
are planning to make their final
stand. Can you tell me?

The Bannock Scout translates. The young boy looks at Howard,
confused, and says nothing. BEAT.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Why did Joseph decide to cross the
Snake River?

The Bannock Scout translates. Again, the boy says nothing.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Understand, you're going to tell me
what I need to know one way or the
other. Which way did they go?

The Bannock Scout translates. And this time the boy speaks...

BANNOCK SCOUT

He says it is too late. You won't
find them. They're already gone.

HOWARD

Yes, I understand that, but where
have they gone?

BANNOCK SCOUT

He says they've disappeared into
the timber and you won't find them.

HOWARD

The timber? What timber?

(Suddenly realizes)

(MORE)

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Are you trying to tell me they've
started up the Lolo Trail?

The young boy, sensing he's made a mistake, says nothing.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Why would they do that? The Lolo
Trail takes them into the
Bitterroot Mountains, the
Bitterroot Mountains take them into
Montana. That's Crow Country. If
they go East, they'll be trapped in
Yellowstone Park, if they go West,
they'll run back into us. If they
go North, it'll be nothing but wide
open plains as far as Canada--

Howard suddenly stops. His eyes go wide. He gets it. He stands up and quickly leaves the room.

EXT. WEIPPE PRAIRIE - LATER

Storm clouds gather in the darkening sky. Strong gusts of wind
blow through camp. Howard hands a message to a SOLDIER.

HOWARD
Wire ahead to Charles Rawn in the
Bitterroot Valley. Warn him eight
hundred Indians will be coming down
out of the mountains. They should
lock their doors, board their
windows, and stay inside.

Howard hands the soldier another envelope. This one sealed.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
And send this to General Sherman in
Washington.

SOLDIER
Yes, sir.

The soldier climbs on his horse and gallops away. Howard
watches him disappear into the dark night. BEAT.

PERRY (O.S.)
They were going to surrender.

Howard slowly turns and finds Perry standing nearby.

HOWARD
What was that?

PERRY

At White Bird. They were going to surrender and turn over the warriors who committed the raid on Norton's Ranch.

(Beat)

We fired first.

Another strong gust of wind whips through the camp as THUNDER ERUPTS overhead. Howard looks to the sky...

EXT. LOLO TRAIL - SAME TIME

The Nez Perce hear the thunder, too, as they march through the heavy timber. It starts to RAIN. A torrential downpour.

The tribe keeps moving as the ground begins to soften...

A LARGE MUDSLIDE suddenly sweeps twenty Nez Perce down the hillside, slamming them hard into trees, breaking bones...

Red Grizzly rides past the injured Nez Perce. Caring only for himself, he doesn't stop.

Yellow Wolf and Wahlits dismount and help the wounded as the blinding rain continues to pound the earth.

Joseph watches a GIANT TREE shake loose in the mud and fall to the ground with a deafening thud. He gets an idea...

JOSEPH

(To Ollokot)

Let's push them all down.

Ollokot stares at Joseph through the rain, confused.

EXT. LOLO TRAIL - MORNING

The day is bright and beautiful after the epic rainstorm.

Howard follows the Bannock Scouts into the forest of the Lolo Trail...*they soon stop dead in their tracks.* BEAT.

What Joseph and the Nez Perce have left in their wake will soon become known as "The Bloody Trail." Fallen trees, boulders, and jagged branches obscure the path for miles!

Howard's men try to make their way, but soon horses are breaking legs, stumbling, and tripping...

One horse falls and impales itself on a jagged tree branch. Its death screams are terrible...

EXT. BITTERROOT MOUNTAINS - DAY

The Nez Perce make a steep climb up the mountains. Another harrowing drop that makes our palms sweat. Two PACK MULES suddenly fall to their deaths. The tribe keeps climbing...

EXT. LOLO TRAIL - DAY

Howard's men use AXES to cut their way across the trail, inching forward at a snail's pace.

Howard looks back at the dying animals in their wake. A literal "trail of blood" as far as the eye can see...

EXT. BITTERROOT MOUNTAINS - DAY

A BALD EAGLE soars in the deep blue sky...

The Nez Perce move along the steep mountain ridge, stunning views in every direction. Joseph and Springtime ride beside each other, staring at the horizon, ten thousand feet high.

SPRINGTIME
Beautiful.

Joseph looks at her, then nods. They keep riding...

EXT. BITTERROOT MOUNTAINS - LATE AFTERNOON

The tribe comes out of the mountains, descending towards the BITTERROOT VALLEY. A SMALL TOWN, far in the distance, sits nestled between thick forest and rolling hills.

Looking Glass shouts to several members of his village...

LOOKING GLASS
There should be no trouble with the whites in this area! And you are not to cause any! They are not the ones who attacked us in Wallowa! They are not our enemy!

Red Grizzly, riding nearby, looks over at Looking Glass.

RED GRIZZLY
You're as foolish as Joseph. All whites are the enemy.

Looking Glass doesn't respond. Red Grizzly rides on ahead.

EXT. TOWN - LATER

The street is empty. Buildings are boarded up. Everything is quiet and still, like the calm expecting a storm.

People have locked themselves indoors. They cram close together and nervously wait for the Indians to arrive...

In the far distance, the Nez Perce come into view...

The tribe pours into town like a great flood, filling the entire width of the street!

People watch with amazement as hundreds of Indians fly past their windows and pass through the town...

A SALOON OWNER stands on his balcony and watches the tribe move beneath him like a giant stampeding herd...

PROSTITUTES peer out their bedroom windows with curious smiles spread across their tired faces...

Joseph rides down the street, making eye contact with those who stare at him through boarded up windows...

The remaining tribe members pass through the town. Residents come outside and watch them grow small in the distance...

EXT. BITTERROOT VALLEY - LATER

The tribe rests after a long day's march.

Oyema sits quietly by herself...

The old women approach. Oyema looks up. She knows what's coming and struggles as they take hold of her...

They tear off her shirt and force her to expel the BREAST MILK from her body. Oyema sobs -- devastated, heart-broken.

Those nearby watch with sympathy, knowing it must be done.

The old women bind Oyema's breasts with thick strips of canvas, then they stand and leave, one at a time...

Oyema remains on the ground, sobbing...

Fairland kneels and gently strokes her sister's hair...

Nearby, Black Owl watches. Not sure what to do.

EXT. BITTERROOT VALLEY - SAME TIME

Looking Glass walks through the camp.

He discovers a few WARRIORS with some STORE BOUGHT GOODS.

LOOKING GLASS
Where did you get those?

The warriors stay silent. Looking Glass steps closer.

LOOKING GLASS (CONT'D)
Where?

INT. STORE - LATER

The store has been ransacked.

A MOTHER hides beneath the counter with her TWO DAUGHTERS.

Her husband, the STORE OWNER, peers out the shattered windows with a SHOTGUN in his hands...

Out the window, Looking Glass comes into view...riding towards the store with FIVE APPALOOSA PONIES in tow...

STORE OWNER
(To Wife, Kids)
Stay down!

Store Owner levels the shotgun and prepares to fire.

Looking Glass puts the ponies in the corral and then marks each one with the store owner's branding iron.

And then he climbs on his horse and rides away.

Store Owner lowers his gun, amazed.

EXT. BITTERROOT VALLEY - LATE AFTERNOON

The beautiful afternoon sun casts long shadows.

SETTLERS kneel beside their CHILDREN on the high bluffs and watch the long Nez Perce train march into the twilight hours.

A LITTLE GIRL waves. A distant WARRIOR waves back. The tribe keeps moving -- deeper into Montana...

EXT. STEAMBOAT "ROSEBUD" - DECK - MORNING

General Sherman sits with his advisors, staring out towards the southern bank of the Little Big Horn River.

In the distance, a new MILITARY FORT is under construction.

ADVISOR
Better tell the boys to hurry
building that thing. The Nez Perce
might pop over that ridge any
moment from what I hear...

Nervous laughter all around. Sherman smiles.

A young SOLDIER approaches and hands him a message..

SHERMAN
Thank you.

Sherman opens the envelope and begins reading...

ADVISOR
Anyway, I hear the Cheyenne campaign is winding down nicely. Last of the hold outs have been relocated to Oklahoma, "the hot place," as they call it. The Crow and Blackfeet have been subdued. Even the Pawnee have been broken. As soon as we've dealt with this pesky Nez Perce rebellion, we can put the whole damn thing to rest...

SHERMAN
(Re: Message)
Howard has lost more ground.

An awkward moment. No one is surprised.

ADVISOR
Well, I hate to say I told you so, sir, but...

SHERMAN
It's exactly what I wanted.

Everyone looks around the table, confused.

ADVISOR
I'm sorry, sir? Am I to understand you want the Nez Perce to escape?

SHERMAN
No. I just want them to *slow down*. And the more Howard falls behind, the more likely that will happen.
(Dramatic Beat)
It'll give Gibbon more time to intercept them from the East.

The table goes deathly quiet. BEAT.

ADVISOR
Gibbon? Has he been *dispatched*?

SHERMAN
I dispatched him *before* we left Washington to come here.

Everyone absorbs the news, shocked.

ADVISOR

My God. John Gibbon. Imagine what he'll do to them.

SHERMAN

Doesn't matter. After all, the only good Indian is a dead Indian.

Silence falls on the table and Sherman realizes that the young soldier is still standing nearby at attention.

SHERMAN (CONT'D)

That'll be all, son.

SOLDIER

Yes, sir.

The soldier salutes and leaves. Sherman turns and stares across the river at the new Fort being built. BEAT.

ADVISOR

What's the name?

Sherman, lost in thought, is slow to respond.

SHERMAN

Hmmm?

ADVISOR

The new post. Have you decided on a name, yet?

SHERMAN

Oh...yeah.

(Dramatic Beat)

Fort Custer.

EXT. BIG HOLE, MONTANA - SUNSET

Two NEZ PERCE SCOUTS stand atop a high mountain summit and survey the vast Montana Territory. Nothing in sight.

EXT. BIG HOLE, MONTANA - NIGHT

The Nez Perce dance around roaring fires, celebrating.

Springtime finds Joseph sitting alone. She sits down beside him and waits for him to look at her.

SPRINGTIME

What is troubling you?

JOSEPH

The moon is high. They should be sleeping.

SPRINGTIME

They are *happy*. So should you be.
Howard has not been seen for days.
It's over. *We won*.

Joseph looks at her for a very long time. Then:

JOSEPH

What did we win?

Hold on Springtime. She can not answer.

SUPER WIDE SHOT - The Nez Perce fires can be seen for miles.

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

COLONEL JOHN GIBBON (30s) comes into the pitch black room and urgently awakens a SLEEPING SOLDIER...

GIBBON

James! James! Get the men ready at once! We move out in an hour.

Gibbon leaves. The soldier sits up and lights his bedside lantern, revealing himself to be:

LIEUTENANT JAMES BRADLEY, the man who discovered Custer's slaughtered men at Little Big Horn.

EXT. GIBBON'S CAMP - 2:30 A.M.

300 AMERICAN SOLDIERS, James Bradley among them, stand at attention as Colonel Gibbon addresses them:

GIBBON

Our scouts have found the Nez Perce camp. Just twelve miles from here, in the Big Hole Valley. If we march right away, there's a chance we can overtake them before sunrise.

(Beat)

I know you're all tired. But we have been given our orders by General Sherman, himself. These fugitive Indians have slaughtered innocent Americans and now aim to join forces with the Sioux. And you all know what *they're* capable of. It's fallen on us to stop them.

(MORE)

GIBBON (CONT'D)

(Beat)

Let's move out.

And with that, Gibbon's men march forward...

EXT. STEAMBOAT "ROSEBUD" - DECK - SAME TIME

The soldier who delivered Sherman's message earlier stands on the deck, unable to sleep, trying to light a cigarette...

SHERMAN (O.S.)

Need a hand?

The soldier turns, stunned. Sherman approaches, strikes one of his own matches, and lights the boy's cigarette. BEAT.

SOLDIER

Thank you, sir. Couldn't sleep.

SHERMAN

Me neither.

Sherman uses the same match to light his CIGAR...

SOLDIER

They're out there, somewhere,
aren't they? The Nez Perce?

Sherman throws the match overboard and lets out a great big puff of thick cigar smoke.

SHERMAN

When the battle starts, we should
be able to hear it.

SOLDIER

You think Gibbon's men will get
there in time?

SHERMAN

I do. Because there's something
fueling their legs that's gonna
make them march faster than any
army on earth.

SOLDIER

What's that?

SHERMAN

Revenge.

(Off Soldier's look)

You don't know who Colonel Gibbon
is, do you, son?

The soldier reluctantly shakes his head...

EXT. FOREST - SAME TIME

Gibbon's men, profoundly determined, march through deep forest towards the Big Hole Valley. OVER;

SHERMAN (V.O.)

...Colonel John Gibbon commands the 7th Cavalry of the United States Army. He should've been with Custer when he made his final stand, but he was a day late. His men found the mutilated bodies. Friends. Brothers. For them, this is very personal. So they'll get there. Over steep terrain, on empty stomachs and weary legs, they'll get there. You can rest assured.

As Sherman speaks, we see the resolute faces of Gibbon's men. And we know that Sherman is right. They'll get there.

EXT. STEAMBOAT "ROSEBUD" - DECK - CONTINUOUS

Sherman takes another long puff on his cigar and then throws it overboard. He turns back to the soldier.

SHERMAN

I should get back to bed. I'm not as young as I once was. Goodnight.

The soldier salutes. Sherman goes back inside. BEAT.

EXT. BIG HOLE, MONTANA - NIGHT

A brilliant FULL MOON hovers above the valley floor.

INT. BLACK OWL'S TIPI- CONTINUOUS

Oyema is talking in her sleep. Black Owl touches her gently on the shoulder. She stops...

BLACK OWL

What is it?

OYEMA

I thought I heard the baby.

Black Owl doesn't know how to respond. He gets up and leaves.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - SAME TIME

Black Owl comes outside. A few other warriors are up already.

SQUAWS begin to light their MORNING FIRES...

INT. OLLOKOT'S TIPI - SAME TIME

Fairland sleeps peacefully. Ollokot forces himself to get up.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - SAME TIME

Wahlits stares at the necklace Little bird returned to him.

INT. JOSEPH'S TIPI - SAME TIME

Ollokot kneels and gently wakes his brother .

OLLOKOT
It's almost morning.

Joseph nods and slowly gets to his feet...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Joseph and Ollokot walk through the camp. The number of people up and about is quickly growing...

Nobody senses danger on the far side of the valley floor...

EXT. FOREST / MOUNTAIN SIDE - SAME TIME

Gibbon's army lies waiting, hidden in the trees.

They load their RIFLES and fix BAYONETS. Nearby, SOLDIERS work to assemble a HOWITZER CANON...

The soldiers watch as the morning fires begin to light up the hollow tipis like JACK-O-LANTERNS. One after another...

SOLDIER
God, there's hundreds of 'em...

The soldiers' breathing grows heavy. Gibbon looks at his men.

GIBBON
Get ready, boys.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - SAME TIME

Joseph walks through the camp and approaches Black Owl.

JOSEPH
Round up the horses.

Black Owl jumps on his APPALOOSA HORSE and rides off towards the HERD...in the same direction as Gibbon's hidden army!

EXT. FOREST / MOUNTAIN SIDE - SAME TIME

Gibbon's army watches Black Owl come closer...they level their rifles, awaiting orders...

Black Owl soars across the valley floor, the bright MOONLIGHT keeping him in full view...

Gibbon raises his hand...

Black Owl gallops closer...

Gibbon brings his hand down.

FORTY RIFLES fire at once! Black Owl's body is torn apart. He falls from his horse and hits the ground dead. BEAT.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - THAT MOMENT

Everyone looks up, not sure what has just happened. A terrifying, surreal moment hangs in the air...

And then, from the distant trees, comes a MIGHTY YELL...

SOLDIERS
FOR CUSTER!!!

SMOKE fills the valley floor as hundreds of RIFLES explode.

The Americans charge, taking the Indians by surprise...

So begins one of the bloodiest massacres in American history.

The Battle of Big Hole, Montana

The AMERICAN HOWITZER rains death from the hills above as soldiers swarm the tipis, engaged in hand-to-hand combat.

Rifles and revolvers in full play. Bayonets slicing and stabbing. Powder burns. Smoke-filled air and savage screams. The ground covered with dead and dying women and children.

All as the surrounding tipis are set on fire...

CUT TO:

Joseph grabs his family and heads for the river...

CUT TO:

Toohoolhoolzote knocks a soldier down and cuts his throat.

Red Grizzly fights with fury, killing one soldier after another. He's unstoppable.

Looking Glass and the rest of the warriors fight as best they can, but are quickly driven back by overwhelming numbers...

CUT TO:

Absolute chaos. Figures dart in and out of the thick gun smoke. Bullets fly in every direction.

Every few seconds, a howitzer canon shell explodes, tearing bodies apart and showering the earth with blood and dirt.

A SOLDIER sees one of his friends being dragged into a tipi.

He rushes in, kills the SQUAW who was about to kill his friend, then runs a bayonet through a SCREAMING BABY...

...Only to be shot himself the next instant by a barrage of gunfire ripping the tipi apart...

CUT TO:

Little Bird is thrown to the ground by a soldier. She struggles...about to be overwhelmed...when Wahlits suddenly throws the soldier off her and dashes his brains with a rock.

Breathing heavy, Wahlits turns to face Little Bird. His eyes grow wide. *She has been shot in the chest!*

LITTLE BIRD
Wahlits...

She collapses into his arms. He lowers her gently to the ground as the battle continues all around them...

WAHLITS
I'm sorry...

Little Bird gently touches his face.

And then a sudden EXPLOSION consumes them both.

CUT TO:

Joseph hurries to get his family to safety...

He glances back at the raging battle, deeply conflicted.

Springtime looks at him. She understands.

SPRINGTIME
Go and fight.

Joseph hesitates, then nods.

JOSEPH
 (Re: Their daughter)
 Get her to the river...

And with that, Joseph heads back into the fray...

CUT TO:

Yellow Wolf and Swan Lace race to safety. Yellow Wolf sees the Howitzer on the hillside. He stops.

SWAN LACE
 What is it?

Yellow Wolf looks around. He sees Fairland running nearby...

YELLOW WOLF
 Fairland!

Fairland turns and runs over to them.

YELLOW WOLF (CONT'D)
 (To Swan Lace)
 Go with Fairland...

SWAN LACE
 No. You're coming with us...

Fairland puts her arm around Swan Lace and pulls her away...

SWAN LACE (CONT'D)
 No! Yellow Wolf!

But he has already started running towards the howitzer!

CUT TO:

Springtime and Noise of Running Feet run for their lives...

Bullets whiz past their heads. Suddenly, *Springtime* is shot twice! She falls to the ground and does not get back up.

NOISE OF RUNNING FEET
 Mother! Mother!

Noise of Running Feet desperately tries to jostle her awake, but Springtime is unresponsive.

NOISE OF RUNNING FEET (CONT'D)
 (Sobbing)
 Mother! Get up, Mother!

Springtime does not answer. The fury of battle continues...

Noise of Running Feet senses she must flee. She forces herself to leave her mother and run away on her own...

CUT TO:

Swan Lace and Fairland are cut down by gunfire.

They fall to the ground and roll to the bottom of the hill, where they remain...lifeless.

CUT TO:

Noise of Running Feet comes up over a hill and, suddenly, we realize...she's heading back towards the village!

We follow her through the camp. People are dying all around her. She somehow manages to make her way, unharmed...

She reaches the charred remains of a TIPI and stops.

She finds HERMENE, her doll, lying on the ground. Burned but still recognizable. She picks it up...

Noise Running of Running Feet turns and takes in the slaughter going on all around her. Fresh tears pour down her face. She looks lost. And we realize why she came back:

She's looking for her father...

BOOM!! A Howitzer shell EXPLODES nearby and Noise of Running Feet disappears into an ocean of smoke...

The smoke clears and we find her STILL ALIVE, coughing, bleeding, clutching her precious doll...

She gets to her feet. And runs...heading for the river.

Soldiers shoot at her, missing narrowly.

She reaches the river, clogged with bodies, both American and Indian. She crawls into the waters and joins the corpses...

She floats down river, clutching her doll tightly as she leaves the madness behind her...

CUT TO:

Yellow Wolf charges through the chaos. He flags down a HORSE and gallops towards the distant howitzer...

BOOM! The horse rears up and falls down...Yellow Wolf hits the ground hard, his leg pinned by the fallen horse.

Yellow Wolf reaches for his rifle, just beyond his grasp...

Soldiers fire all around him...

Desperate to free himself, Yellow Wolf draws his knife...

YELLOW WOLF
(To Horse)
Sorry, my friend...

He digs the knife into the horse's back!

The horse kicks up. Yellow Wolf grabs his rifle and charges for the howitzer, just a hundred yards up the hill...

CUT TO:

Two SOLDIERS man the howitzer...

Soldier #1 suddenly gets a bullet in the head!

His body crumples to the ground. Soldier #2 looks up just in time to see Yellow Wolf bury a knife into his chest...

Yellow Wolf turns to the howitzer and finds the fuse is already burning! He throws all his weight against the canon and manages to move its aim just as...BOOM!

CUT TO:

The howitzer canon explodes into the American soldiers!!!

Everyone takes notice. A sudden shift in momentum.

Joseph and Looking Glass summon their men and charge back into the village, overwhelming the battle-weary Americans...

Toohoolhoolzote sees Gibbon retreating on his horse. He aims his rifle...and fires!

Gibbon's shoulder explodes in a puff of red. He falls off of his horse and hits the ground.

Toohoolhoolzote drops his gun, draws his knife, and charges towards the American leader, screaming...

An AMERICAN SOLDIER comes out of nowhere and buries his bayonet in Toohoolhoolzote's side!

Toohoolhoolzote knocks the soldier down and kills him.

He removes the bayonet from his body with great pain.

He may be dying, but he's going to take the American leader with him. He grabs Gibbon's hair and steadies his knife...

But then another American bayonet stabs Toohoolhoolzote in the back. And then another. And another.

Half a dozen American soldiers surround Toohoolhoolzote and stab him to death. They free Gibbon and join the RETREAT...

CUT TO:

Joseph, Ollokot, and Looking Glass drive the remaining Americans out of their village, screaming after them...

CUT TO:

Yellow Wolf watches the Americans retreat. Slumped against the howitzer canon, he struggles to catch his breath.

CUT TO:

Warriors return to take in the aftermath...

More than a hundred Nez Perce, mostly women and children, have been slaughtered. And an equal number of American soldiers litter the ground beside them.

Little Big Horn was a ghastly sight, but this is worse. There were no children at Big Horn, no dead women clutching babies in their arms. The aftermath of Big Hole is horrifying.

Joseph frantically searches for his family...

He passes death with every footstep, reluctantly looking at bodies, fearing each one might be his wife or daughter...

Joseph comes down a hill and finds Yellow Wolf holding Swan Lace in his arms. She's badly wounded, but still alive...

YELLOW WOLF (CONT'D)
I never should have left you...

Swan Lace, in great pain, gently shakes her head...

SWAN LACE
You turned the tide of battle...
(Beat)
So much for arrows missing wide.

Yellow Wolf manages a small laugh. BEAT.

Nearby, Ollokot clutches Fairland's dead body and sobs.

Joseph watches with profound heartache.

LOOKING GLASS (O.S.)
Joseph...

Joseph turns to face Looking Glass.

JOSEPH
What is it?

LOOKING GLASS
It's Springtime.
(Beat)
She's over here.

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - EVENING

General Howard arrives to discover Gibbon's camp turned into a makeshift HOSPITAL filled with wounded and dying soldiers.

A handful of ARMY MEDICS struggle to save those they can...

Howard finds Gibbon on a gurney in the middle of the room.

HOWARD
John...what happened?

It takes Gibbon a long time to find words...

GIBBON
The Indians...drove us back...we lost...so many men, I don't know how many...really...I...

MEDIC (O.S.)
I NEED A TOURNIQUET! SOMEBODY GET ME A TOURNIQUET!

Howard looks up. A YOUNG SOLDIER is about to have his LEG AMPUTATED...several soldiers hold him down...

Howard unfastens his belt as he crosses the room...

HOWARD
Here. Use this.

The medic glances at the belt.

MEDIC
That'll work.

The restraining soldier takes the belt and wraps it tightly around the young soldier's wounded leg...

The medic picks up a RUSTY SAW, caked with blood...

HOWARD
Give him something to bite down on.

A small PIECE OF WOOD is placed in the soldier's mouth.
The medic begins to operate, cutting the limb like firewood.

EXT. HILLSIDE - SAME TIME

Yellow Wolf stares at the distant American camp. He can hear the soldier screaming as his leg is cut off.

He turns and heads back to the Nez Perce camp...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Joseph watches as MEDICINE MEN attend to Springtime.
Yellow Wolf cautiously approaches. BEAT.

YELLOW WOLF
Will she live?

JOSEPH
They don't know.

YELLOW WOLF
(a respectful pause, then)
Howard is here.

Joseph takes a deep breath, not sure what to say.

He suddenly sees something in the far distance...

Noise of Running Feet is coming down the hill! Joseph runs over and picks her up in his arms -- relieved beyond words.

JOSEPH
Oh, I thought I'd lost you...

He holds her tightly. She's still wet from the river.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - LATER

Joseph slowly walks through the camp...

Nearly everyone has been wounded. The air is filled with death wails and funeral chants.

Joseph discovers Little Bird's mother, sobbing. Her daughter is dead. An old woman, all alone. She has nothing and nobody.

Joseph hears a BABY CRYING. He makes his way through the bodies and discovers an infant in the arms of a DEAD MOTHER.

He stares down at the crying child. BEAT.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Oyema sits, shaken and forlorn. She now mourns the death of her husband and sister in addition to her child.

Joseph approaches with the crying baby...

Oyema looks up and immediately understands. Without words, she takes the child from Joseph and unbinds her breasts.

She puts the child's mouth to her nipple. The crying stops.

Joseph watches for a moment, then he turns and leaves.

EXT. BIG HOLE BATTLEFIELD - NIGHT

Howard and Perry walk quietly among the fallen bodies. Perry takes in the slaughter and slowly comes to a realization...

PERRY

It was the plan all along, wasn't it? We keep the Indians at a slow pace. Gibbon intercepts them and finishes the job. Sherman knew they'd be looking for revenge...

Howard doesn't answer. He stares at the bodies littering the ground. So many women and children...

HOWARD

You asked about Georgia?

(Beat)

It was a lot like this.

There is a slight RUSTLING SOUND. Howard looks up.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Hey! Stop that!!

Up ahead - BANNOCK SCOUTS are scalping Nez Perce corpses! Howard chases them away. He stops to catch his breath...

Looking down, Howard suddenly freezes.

He's standing over the body of Toohoolhoolzote.

Howard kneels beside the man he locked in prison, now dead with vacant eyes. Howard gently closes them. BEAT.

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - LATER

James Bradley is having a terrible nightmare...

He finally bolts awake and breathes a long sigh of relief.

EXT. NEARBY MEADOW - MOMENTS LATER

Bradley leaves the camp and walks across the peaceful meadow, trying to shake the ghosts from his mind...

He hears something up ahead. A distant, familiar sound.

And then Bradley abruptly stops...

A RIDERLESS HORSE COVERED IN BLOOD! Standing alone in the meadow, soaked in beautiful moonlight.

Could this be the same horse from Little Big Horn? Is it even real? Bradley can't be sure. He approaches carefully and gently strokes the animal's mane.

Lost in a world of thought and fantasy, Bradley doesn't hear the galloping HORSE HOOVES approaching behind him...

A SUDDEN, TERRIFYING SCREAM!

Bradley turns around. A PIPE TOMAHAWK slams into his face!

Six Nez Perce warriors charge past Bradley's corpse and disappear into the night on a rampage of revenge...

INT. SHERMAN'S OFFICE - MORNING

General Sherman is reading a newspaper. The front page story is all about Chief Joseph. The headline, in giant bold letters, reads: "**HEROIC RETREAT**". Sherman is not amused...

A YOUNG SOLDIER nervously enters and sets another newspaper down on Sherman's desk. This one with an even bigger headline: "**RED NAPOLEON**".

Sherman slowly lowers the first newspaper and picks up the second. His brow furrows. He can't take it anymore...

In a sudden burst of anger, Sherman knocks everything off his desk and onto the floor...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - DAWN

Joseph watches as the tribe begins to move. Slowly, silently, heads hanging low. Their spirits profoundly broken.

Nearby, Springtime sits on a horse. She looks pale and sick.

JOSEPH
Can you ride?

Springtime manages a nod.

EXT. MONTANA - AFTERNOON

The tribe marches across the endless landscape...

Looking Glass rides over to Joseph.

LOOKING GLASS
I need you to come with me.

Joseph looks up at him. BEAT.

EXT. CLEARING - LATER

Joseph follows Looking Glass through thick forest trees towards a CLEARING up ahead...

They see the smoke first. And then the CABIN being consumed by flames. Joseph dismounts, knowing what he's about to see.

He walks towards the burning house and then makes his way around back where he finds a FAMILY OF FIVE slaughtered.

Husband, wife, two teenage boys, one little girl. Flayed with arrows. Dead on the ground and already beginning to rot.

The little girl has an arrow through her head.

Joseph stares at the bodies for a moment. Then, not saying a word to Looking Glass, he turns and leaves...

Joseph walks back to the woods and disappears behind some trees...where he falls to the ground and begins to sob.

SLOW FADE TO:

EXT. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - DAY

The Nez Perce tribe comes into the park and slowly makes its way across the beautiful terrain...

EXT. TARGHEE PASS - DAY

The tribe comes over the pass and goes around HENRY LAKE, moving deeper into Yellowstone.

The colors are beginning to turn. Fall quickly approaches.

The Nez Perce look tired and wounded. This is no longer the tribe that scaled the Bitterroot Mountains and crossed the Snake River. These people are now staring into the gulf.

EXT. OLD FAITHFUL - DAY

The mighty GEYSER explodes into the sky.

Some Nez Perce regard it with wonder. Most are too tired to notice. The tribe keeps moving...one painful step at a time.

EXT. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - DAY

Joseph holds his daughter close and rides beside Springtime, who jostles painfully as her horse moves forward.

Joseph waits for her to look at him. BEAT.

JOSEPH
Still with me?

Springtime nods. But it's unconvincing.

Joseph sees Red Grizzly riding nearby. The two men stare at each other for a moment...

Joseph turns back to his family and keeps moving forward.

EXT. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - DAY

Another day. More marching. Swan Lace suddenly falls to the ground. She can no longer walk on her own.

Yellow Wolf bends over and picks her up in his arms.

SWAN LACE
Put me down.

YELLOW WOLF
You can't walk.

SWAN LACE
I'm your mother. I carried you. You
don't carry me. Put me down.

Yellow Wolf ignores her. He keeps walking. BEAT.

SWAN LACE (CONT'D)
And how long do you think you can
keep this up?

YELLOW WOLF
We'll soon find out...

He looks down at her. And then, the simple truth:

YELLOW WOLF (CONT'D)
You're all I have, too.

EXT. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - EVENING

The tribe comes to a stop after a long day of marching.

An OLD WOMAN suddenly collapses from exhaustion. A few people surround her, but it is too late. She is already dead.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - NIGHT

Lit by fires, members of the tribe enact a smaller version of the "funeral dance" - a somber, poetic display...

Swan Lace watches intently, the fire bouncing off her face...

Joseph, arms wrapped around Springtime, also watches.

Oyema sits nearby, gently rocking her new baby to sleep.

Red Grizzly lurks in the shadows. He sees Ollokot standing a few feet away. The two men stare at each other for a moment, then Red Grizzly turns and disappears into the darkness.

EXT. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - MORNING

Howard rides next to Perry, leading his army through the park. The soldiers and their horses seem tired.

The wind blows. Perry looks up at the grey skies...

PERRY
Wind's getting colder...
Seasons are turning.

Howard remains quiet. The Americans keep moving forward...

EXT. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - LATE AFTERNOON

Yellow Wolf, exhausted from carrying Swan Lace, falls to the ground. The tribe keeps moving past them...

Yellow Wolf tries to pick her up. She resists.

SWAN LACE
Leave me.

He tries again. She slaps his face. Hard.

SWAN LACE (CONT'D)
Leave me, I said.

YELLOW WOLF
Why?!

SWAN LACE
You know why. Now, go.

She turns away, refusing to look him in the eye.

YELLOW WOLF
Mother, please! Mother!

She keeps looking away, stone-faced and resolute. Refusing to even look at her son. Yellow Wolf starts to cry...

Looking Glass finally steps forward and pulls him away...

YELLOW WOLF (CONT'D)
No! Mother! No!

Swan Lace keeps looking down. But as soon as Yellow Wolf has disappeared around the bend, she looks up...

And we can tell that her heart is breaking...

EXT. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - LATER

Joseph rides up beside Springtime. Overwhelmed by pain, she looks at him -- quietly pleading for some kind of relief.

SPRINGTIME
I'm cold...

Joseph tries to rub her shoulders for warmth.

NOISE OF RUNNING FEET (O.S.)
I'm cold, too...

Joseph looks down at his daughter with aching eyes. There is nothing he can do -- and it's breaking his heart.

Suddenly, GUNSHOTS are heard up ahead... Joseph kicks his horse and gallops towards the front of the line...

EXT. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - CONTINUOUS

TWO WHITE MEN, carrying MAPS and surveying equipment, are forced to their knees as Nez Perce warriors surround them.

Joseph climbs off his horse and slowly approaches...

OLLOKOT
(To Joseph)
They were sleeping when we came upon them. They fired first. They always fire first.

Joseph looks at the two men, now trembling with fear...

MAN #1
Please, don't kill us. We don't mean no harm. We thought you aimed to steal our goods...

JOSEPH
 (In English)
 Who are you? Why are you here?

MAN #1
 We're on assignment...we're
 cartographers. We make maps.

JOSEPH
 (Confused)
 Maps?

MAN #1
 That's right.
 (To Man #2)
 Show him, Harold.

Man #2 (HAROLD) opens his case and pulls out a dozen hand-drawn maps. Joseph studies them carefully. BEAT.

HAROLD
 (Suddenly realizes)
 You're Chief Joseph, aren't you?

Joseph doesn't answer. He hands the maps to Ollokot and Looking Glass. As they discuss, Harold turns to Man #1...

HAROLD (CONT'D)
 He's the one who's been in all the
 papers! I told you we needed to
 leave this place, Martin...
 (Beat)
 The minute we saw *soldiers*, we
 should've known there was trouble!

Joseph, Ollokot, and Looking Glass stop talking. They look over at Harold with sudden interest. *Soldiers?*

EXT. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - LATER

Harold spreads one of his maps out on the ground. Joseph kneels. Looking Glass and Ollokot stand nearby.

HAROLD
 Saw 'em about three days ago,
 heading west...

JOSEPH
 (In English)
 Where?

HAROLD
 (Points)
 Here. And here.

Ollokot and Looking Glass exchange a nervous glance.

JOSEPH

How many?

HAROLD

Five hundred, maybe more.

Joseph stares at the map -- deep in thought. Then he stands to face Ollokot and Looking Glass.

OLLOKOT

If that man is telling the truth,
we'll run right into them.

LOOKING GLASS

Howard's coming from behind. Can't turn around. We're trapped.

OLLOKOT

We can't face *another* army. How many times can we fight and win?

Frustrated, Ollokot storms off. Looking Glass watches him go, then turns back to face Joseph...

LOOKING GLASS

(Re: Harold and Martin)
What should we do with them?

Joseph hesitates, unsure.

And then Red Grizzly suddenly steps forward...

RED GRIZZLY

Kill them! Did you learn nothing at Big Hole? All whites are the enemy!

Ollokot stands nearby, a rage building inside of him...

RED GRIZZLY (CONT'D)

They'll tell the soldiers where we are! There is no difference between one group of whites and another. Kill them. They would not think twice about killing you.

Before Joseph can respond, Ollokot suddenly steps forward and forces the two men back to their knees.

He starts to load his rifle. Joseph approaches -- alarmed.

JOSEPH

What are you doing, brother?

OLLOKOT
 They'll warn the soldiers, Joseph.
 Red Grizzly is right. He was *always*
 right. I see that now.

Martin tries to stand. Ollokot kicks him to the ground. The two men tremble, sensing the end is near...

Those nearby seem conflicted by what's happening. Frantic glances are exchanged as the tension mounts...

JOSEPH
 We do not kill women and innocent men. That has never been our way.
 (Steps closer)
 Ollokot, they are not the ones who killed your wife.

Ollokot hesitates, then raises his gun to fire...

...But Joseph grabs the barrel and places it against his own chest, right over his heart!

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
 Now you pull the trigger and kill me first. I would give up my own life to undo the killing of white men by my people. Because now we are no better than they are!

Joseph pushes hard on the rifle. Ollokot stumbles backwards. Everyone is speechless. The dust slowly settles...

HAROLD
 Um...Chief?

Joseph looks down at Harold. BEAT.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
 There's something...we could show you that...might...be useful.

Joseph hesitates, then slowly kneels. Harold grabs his map and carefully wipes the dirt away.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
 There's a gulch about three miles from here. Nobody knows about it. It's a thousand feet down and real narrow. One, maybe two body lengths wide, tops. If you can get there, it'll take you out of the park. The soldiers will never see you... You'll go right under 'em.

Joseph stares at the map and slowly nods. He looks up and finds Harold holding a picture of his family...

HAROLD (CONT'D)
Sir, please....I got a wife and a
little girl. I just want to see 'em
again, I'm begging you...

Joseph holds up his hand and Harold stops talking. Joseph stares at him for a lingering moment, then faintly nods.

JOSEPH
Go.

Harold and Martin hesitate, then they leap to their feet and charge into the woods as fast as their legs will carry them.

Hold on Joseph -- staring at the map...

EXT. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - LATER

Harold and Martin, lucky to be alive, run for their lives through the thick forest trees...

SOLDIER (O.S.)
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE!

Harold and Martin stop *dead in their tracks*. Who said that?

TWENTY AMERICAN SOLDIERS reveal themselves -- hidden in the trees, guns raised. The men breath a sigh of relief.

EXT. CLARK'S FORK CANYON - LATER

Joseph leads the tribe into the gulch of Clark's Fork Canyon ...so narrow that two horses can barely walk abreast. Looking Glass rides up beside Joseph...

LOOKING GLASS
Are you sure about this?

Joseph doesn't answer. He keeps pressing forward.

EXT. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - LATE AFTERNOON

Swan Lace lies dead on the ground.

General Howard dismounts. A few SOLDIERS gather behind him.

SOLDIER
They're leaving their elderly
behind. Won't be long now.

Howard stares at Swan Lace for a long, sad moment.

HOWARD

Alright. Let's go.

EXT. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - EVENING

Harold and Martin are led through the thick trees towards a clearing up ahead...where a LARGE ARMY has made camp...

INT. MILES' TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Harold and Martin are shown inside. A COLONEL and several MILITARY ADVISORS are waiting for them...

SOLDIER

These are the men we told you about, sir...

The Colonel turns around, revealing himself to be:

NELSON A. MILES - the man who bought General Howard a cup of coffee back in Washington.

MILES

Wonderful.

(To Harold & Martin)

Have a seat.

INT. MILES' TENT - LATER

Harold and Martin sit with Miles and his advisors -- a map of Yellowstone spread out between them.

MILES

You're sure they went this way?

Harold and Martin both nod.

ADVISOR

Sir, you know what this means?
They've made it into northern Montana. There's nothing standing between them and Canada, now.

MILES

Sure, but the country's wide open from this point on. As far as the eye can see. No place to hide.

Miles stares at the map with a faint smile.

MILES (CONT'D)

Tell the boys to get ready...

(Beat)

The chase is on.

EXT. NORTHERN MONTANA - DAY

The Nez Perce come out of the gulch at CLARK'S FORK CANYON. Every direction is as far as the eye can see. The weather is growing colder, darker -- threatening bring snow any moment.

EXT. NORTHERN MONTANA - EVENING

Joseph stands on a hillside overlook with TWO SCOUTS.

JOSEPH

Now that the country is flat, it is important to be on the lookout for people. A stampeding herd, a flock of birds changing course...those are the signs to watch for. If you see soldiers, then it's too late.

The Scouts nod, then stare out at the empty landscape.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - NIGHT

The freezing Nez Perce exhale visible breath into the night air. Joseph wraps his arms around Noise of Running Feet.

NOISE OF RUNNING FEET

I'm so cold. Can't we light a fire?

JOSEPH

No, the soldiers would be able to see it. Try to sleep. Morning will be here soon.

Noise of Running Feet closes her eyes. Joseph looks up at Springtime -- her eyes are growing vacant...

Nearby, Ollokot sees Oyema struggling to keep her baby warm. He offers her his blanket. She hesitates, then takes it.

OYEMA

Thank you.

Ollokot nods. Staring at the child, he tries to forget about his sorrow and the terrible cold piercing his body.

EXT. MISSOURI RIVER - MORNING

The Nez Perce cross the Missouri River, tired and hungry.

Light rain pours down on them. It's cold. Joseph and Looking Glass glance up at the sky...

LOOKING GLASS

Don't snow...

Near the back of the line, an OLD WOMAN falls down...dead. The tribe keeps moving, unable to stop. We slowly PAN UP to reveal a DOZEN BODIES scattered in the distance.

EXT. NORTHERN MONTANA - LATE AFTERNOON

The tribe keeps marching through the cold wind and rain. Joseph sees a group of INDIAN RIDERS in the far distance.

LOOKING GLASS

Crow?

Joseph nods. BEAT.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - NIGHT

Joseph and Looking Glass sit with the CROW WARRIORS.

CROW WARRIOR

We come with good news.

JOSEPH

We could use some.

LOOKING GLASS

We need food. And clothes. Anything you can spare.

The Crow Warriors glance at each other, confused.

CROW WARRIOR

No. We do not mean...we can not help you. Not like that.

(Beat)

There are too many whites. Since Yellow Hair was killed, there have been more soldiers. More forts. The whites are everywhere and more are coming each day. The white man has great power. His voice travels faster than the wind and his iron monster takes red men to *The Hot Place* where they die.

LOOKING GLASS

I don't understand. You said you brought good news? What is it?

CROW WARRIOR

(dramatic beat, then)

Sitting Bull has returned.

Joseph suddenly looks up. This is big news.

CROW WARRIOR (CONT'D)

It is only a rumor. But we believe
 he is nearby. Find him. You have
 come so far and risked so much.
 Your lives. The future of your
 people. And you are so close.

Joseph hesitates, then slowly nods as the cold wind blows...

EXT. NORTHERN MONTANA - NIGHT

Miles and his men ride under the cover of night. The sky begins to lighten with impending dawn...

MILES

Prepare to make camp against that hill over there. Tell the men -- no tents, no fires -- nothing that can be seen from a distance. Everyone *must* sleep against the hillside and keep out of sight.

SOLDIER

Yes, sir.

The soldier rides ahead to dispatch the orders.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - DAWN

The sun begins to rise. The camp awakens and prepares to leave. On the hillside, two scouts look across the plains...

SCOUT #1

Over there!

There are figures, tiny dots, in the far distance...

SCOUT #2

Buffalo...

SCOUT #1

Or people?

Scout #2 shakes his head, unsure.

EXT. NORTHERN MONTANA - AFTERNOON

The Nez Perce march across the landscape. Rain has turned to sleet. It's freezing cold. Joseph rides with Noise of Running Feet in his arms, shielding her as best he can.

Springtime rides beside them, jostling with pain.

Yellow Wolf and Looking Glass brace against the cold.

Oyema keeps her baby bundled close. Ollokot rides beside her, doing what he can to protect her from the cold wind.

SCOUTS appear over the horizon...

Joseph and Looking Glass meet them half way.

SCOUT
No sign of Sitting Bull.

JOSEPH
And the soldiers?

SCOUT
No sign of them either.

Joseph nods. The Scouts ride away. BEAT.

EXT. NORTHERN MONTANA - EVENING

The tribe comes over a small bluff. In the far distance, silhouetted mountains appear. Looking Glass stares with disbelief as his face fills with recognition...

LOOKING GLASS
Canada...

Everyone looks up, exhausted and amazed. *They've made it.*

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - NIGHT

Springtime sleeps, her breathing heavy and labored.

Joseph watches with concern. He lifts her shirt to check her wounds...and discovers they've turned *gangrenous*.

Knowing there is nothing he can do, Joseph lowers her shirt and puts his blanket around her.

Then he gets to his feet and leaves...

He finds Ollokot standing at the edge of camp. Together, the two brothers stare into the darkness. BEAT.

OLLOKOT
How is Springtime?

Joseph shakes his head. This question is beyond him.

JOSEPH
Still here. Still breathing.

OLLOKOT
Good. That's good.

A cold wind blows. The brothers stand in silence.

OLLOKOT (CONT'D)
What do we do in Canada, Joseph?

Joseph stares at his brother, confused.

OLLOKOT (CONT'D)
Can we talk to the American Chief?
Make him understand it was the
young warriors who did the killing?
That we tried to surrender at White
Bird? Do you think he will ever let
us return to Wallowa?

JOSEPH
I don't know. I think...that...

Joseph suddenly stops. Over Ollokot's shoulder comes a *flickering light*...An OLD WOMAN has started a FIRE!

Joseph and Ollokot charge through the camp. Reaching the fire, they begin to frantically stomp it out...

CUT TO:

SUPER WIDE SHOT - The small fire can be seen for miles! It flickers for a brief moment, then disappears into darkness.

CUT TO:

Smoke rises from the extinguished fire...

Joseph and Ollokot look down at the OLD WOMAN. It's Little Bird's mother. She sobs...

LITTLE BIRD'S MOTHER
Please...I'm so cold...

Joseph and Ollokot slowly peer out into the darkness...

OLLOKOT
Do you think anybody saw?

Joseph shakes his head, not sure.

EXT. NORTHERN MONTANA - THAT MOMENT

MILES AWAY - A BANNOCK SCOUT comes out of the darkness and looks down at the Nez Perce camp.

We can tell by the look on his face: He saw the fire.

INT. MILES' TENT - LATER

Colonel Miles looks up at the Bannock Scout. BEAT.

MILES
You're sure?

The Bannock Scout nods. Miles turns to his AIDE.

MILES (CONT'D)
Ready the troops. We leave at once.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - DAWN

The Nez Perce awaken and gather their things.

Ollokot and Oyema exchange a look as they get ready.

Joseph gently nudges Springtime. She doesn't wake. For a moment, he's scared she has died. Then her eyes flicker open.

SPRINGTIME
Still here.

Joseph sighs with relief.

Nearby, Yellow Wolf helps Little Bird's Mother stand up.

YELLOW WOLF
Come on, up we go. Just one more day and it'll all be over...

EXT. BEAR PAW, MONTANA - SAME TIME

The two scouts stare out across the plains. Bad weather makes it difficult to see. A HERD OF BUFFALO roam three miles away.

SCOUT #2
See? Told you it was buffalo...

Scout #1 nods, relieved.

SCOUT #2 (CONT'D)
Come on. Let's go.

The scouts stand and walk away...Scout #1 realizes he's forgotten something and turns back.

He bends over and picks his telescope off the ground. He looks up...and his face floods with panic.

The herd of buffalo is stampeding!

Scout #1 looks through his telescope. SOLDIERS! Hundreds of them on horses. Full gallop and approaching fast...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

The two scouts come riding into camp...

SCOUTS
SOLDIERS ARE COMING!!!

Order in the camp fragments as warriors prepare for battle.

And then a strange sound rises in the distance, like thunder, growing louder and louder by the second...

Hundreds of blue uniforms pour around the bluff as the BUGLER blows his horn... "CHARGE!"

The Battle of Bear Paw, Montana

Joseph puts Noise of Running Feet on a horse...

JOSEPH
You ride north until you hear
gunfire no longer! Understand?

Noise of Running Feet nods, terrified. Joseph slaps the horse and it takes off, carrying her away...

Joseph races over to Springtime. He picks her up in his arms and flees for safety as guns explode all around them...

Warriors form a protective perimeter around the camp, holding the soldiers at bay. There is no hand-to-hand combat here, but instead a brutal exchange of gunfire as the Nez Perce fortify defenses and get the women and children to safety...

The carnage, though, is unmistakable and unrelenting. On par with Big Hole. Soldiers and Indians die in droves as bullets slam into living bodies and send them falling to the earth...

Joseph reaches the safety of the perimeter. Gasping for breath, he gently lowers Springtime to the ground.

SPRINGTIME
Where is our daughter...?

Joseph shakes his head -- unable to answer...

CUT TO:

Noise of Running Feet gallops through the battlefield as bullets whiz past her head...

Without looking back, she charges forward into the endless rolling plains of northern Montana...

CUT TO:

Yellow Wolf looks across the landscape and sees "the big picture" Soldiers swarm the battlefield in two circling wings, surrounding the Nez Perce Camp...

CUT TO:

The Americans attempt a charge, but the Nez Perce have dug in and are ready for them. They unleash a volley of gunfire.

The soldiers who survive retreat back to their lines...

CUT TO:

Ollokot sees Oyema running with her adopted baby.

She stumbles and falls. He goes to her and helps her up. They run towards the safety of the Nez Perce perimeter...

Ollokot is suddenly shot in the back!

CUT TO:

Joseph watches with horror as his brother drops to his knees.

CUT TO:

Coughing blood, Ollokot nudges Oyema forward...

OLLOKOT
Hurry! Go!

Another bullet slams into his back, killing him.

Horrified, Oyema turns and runs for her life...

Ollokot's body remains where it fell - among a HUNDRED OTHERS littering a stretch of ground soon to be called *No Mans Land*.

CUT TO:

Oyema and her baby reach safety. She collapses, trembling. Nearby, Joseph watches -- devastated.

The smoke starts to clear. The gunfire grows less. And the reality of STALEMATE begins to sink in on both sides...

EXT. NORTHERN MONTANA - LATER

Noise of Running Feet brings her horse to a stop.

All alone in the empty landscape, she can no longer hear the sound of gunfire. The wind blows, cold and lonely...

Not sure what to do, she kicks her horse and keeps riding. Towards what, we can only imagine...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - NIGHT

The Nez Perce have dug in for the night.

Warriors sit in rifle pits, staring across No Man's Land towards the distant American forces. Women and children work to bury the dead. The elderly watch with profound sadness.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - LATER

Joseph kneels and sketches a map in the dirt. Yellow Wolf and five WARRIORS stand nearby, watching...

JOSEPH

There are two places where a rider might be able to slip past the white man's forces...

(Points)

Here. And here.

(Looks up at them)

Sitting Bull is nearby. Find him. Tell him to come here and help us.

Yellow Wolf and the warriors slowly nod. Nearby, Red Grizzly eavesdrops -- sensing another opportunity.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - NIGHT

Looking Glass sits with Springtime, caring for her. Joseph approaches. The two men grab their rifles...

Joseph lays a gentle hand on Springtime's shoulder.

And then, reluctantly, Joseph leaves with Looking Glass.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - NIGHT

Yellow Wolf climbs on his horse. Joseph approaches. BEAT.

JOSEPH

My daughter is out there.

Yellow Wolf stares at his Chief, then slowly nods.

YELLOW WOLF

I'll look for her.

Joseph nods, "Thank you," then turns and walks away.

The other five warriors sit on their horses, waiting.

Red Grizzly climbs on his horse, as well...

Joseph, Looking Glass, and the remaining warriors fire their guns at the Americans.

Yellow Wolf and the warriors kick their horses, charging into the darkness. Red Grizzly rides into the fray, as well...

The Americans see the escaping warriors and fire!

Three Nez Perce Warriors fall victim to gunfire. Yellow Wolf and one other WARRIOR make it through safely...

Red Grizzly escapes, too. He rides into the darkness, leaving the misery of his people behind him...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Joseph slowly lowers his smoking rifle. He nods to Looking Glass, then stands and walks away...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Joseph walks over to Springtime and kneels beside her. She glances up with weary eyes. BEAT.

JOSEPH
There is still hope.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. BEAR PAW, MONTANA - EARLY MORNING

Morning mist lingers in the air as GUNFIRE erupts.

Surrounded by so much beauty, it is almost surreal to see puffs of smoke coming from distant rifles...

The Americans trade shots with the Nez Perce. A virtual stalemate. And everyone knows it...

INT. MILES' TENT - SAME TIME

Frustrated, Miles looks at his ADVISORS.

MILES
We're the third army to go up against these people. We should *not* be in a stalemate with more than seventy of our men dead on the ground before us!

ADVISOR

Sir, we have them surrounded. All we have to do is wait them out.

MILES

With Sitting Bull in the area? I'm told two warriors on horses broke through our lines last night, they'll lead the Sioux right to us. We don't have time to wait them out. We need to win and get the hell out of here. Now.

Miles stands and leaves.

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - SAME TIME

Miles comes outside, deep in thought. The wind blows cold, ominous. Miles looks to the sky, as do other soldiers...

And then it begins to snow...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - SAME TIME

Peaceful snow flakes that spell doom for the already freezing Nez Perce quietly fall to the ground.

Members of the tribe huddle together, desperate for warmth.

Looking Glass glances up at the sky...Oyema shields her baby...Joseph wraps his arms around Springtime...

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - SAME TIME

The snow covers the dead with a soft layer of white. Blood soaks the snow red. Ollokot's body is slowly buried...

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - SAME TIME

Miles turns to a nearby SOLDIER.

MILES

Has the howitzer been set up?

SOLDIER

Yes, sir.

MILES

(a moment, then)

Wheel it into position.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - LATER

Through pouring snow comes the sound of SQUEEKING WHEELS...

Joseph and Looking Glass glance up. Across the battlefield, they see the HOWITZER CANON being wheeled into position...

Remembering Big Hole, their faces drop...

JOSEPH / LOOKING GLASS
Get down!

CUT TO:

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - THAT MOMENT

Miles stares out at the Nez Perce camp...

MILES
Fire!

BOOM! The HOWITZER CANNON fires through the falling snow...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Oyema clutches her baby...Looking Glass shields a YOUNG GIRL...Joseph throws his body over Springtime...

BOOM! The canon shell explodes in the middle of camp...

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Miles is unrelenting.

MILES
Fire!
(BOOM!)
Fire!
(BOOM!)
Fire!
(BOOM!)
Fire!

Soldiers watch the distant explosions as the snow continues to fall thick and heavy...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

An explosion consumes a GRANDMOTHER and her small CHILD.

Everyone stays down, knowing the next instant could be their last. Screams and cries fill the camp...

BOOM! Another explosion. BOOM! And another. Each one more terrible than the last. Finally, we:

CUT TO BLACK:

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - NIGHT

The bombardment has stopped.

But the crying continues. And the snow keeps falling, covering the dead and wounded laying on the ground...

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - NIGHT

A few brave WARRIORS strip dead bodies of ammunition. One slices open the belly of a horse for food.

RIFLES SUDDENLY CRACK! One warrior falls dead...

The others hurry back to the safety of the perimeter...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Oyema sits with her baby, staring out at No Man's Land. She suddenly sees something strange...

One of the soldiers lying on the ground is *moving*...

Oyema hesitates, then hands her baby to a nearby WOMAN.

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - MOMENTS LATER

Oyema steps lightly through the bodies. She approaches the wounded SOLDIER and kneels beside him.

He's young, freezing, and scared to die. Oyema looks down at him with compassion...

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - SAME TIME

C.S. WOOD (35) sits near the front line, staring out at No Mans Land, trying to keep warm. MILAN TRIPP (18) approaches...

WOOD

How's it going, kid?

TRIPP

I could be better.

WOOD

Yeah? Well, you're alive. Which means you could also be worse.

Tripp grunts, then suddenly raises his rifle...

WOOD (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

TRIPP
I see one of 'em out there!

WOOD
Where?

TRIPP
There!

Wood looks out at the battlefield and sees Oyema...

TRIPP (CONT'D)
I think she's gonna scalp him!

WOOD
Nez Perce don't take scalps. You
fire that thing, you might hit our
guy, too. You think about that?

Tripp's rifle trembles in his hands. He's nervous and cold.

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - SAME TIME

Oyema takes the BLANKET she has wrapped around herself and
lays it over the dying soldier.

With snow falling softly around them, surrounded by scores of
bodies frozen to the earth, Oyema gently touches the boy's
face with her hand. He looks up at her with terrified eyes...

OYEMA
Poor boy...
(Beat)
You are too young to die.

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - SAME TIME

Wood slowly turns to Tripp.

WOOD
You gonna shoot her for giving him
a blanket?

Slowly, Tripp lowers his rifle.

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - SAME TIME

The young soldier is dead, the blanket already wet from snow
and red with blood. Oyema stares at his peaceful face, then
she slowly stands and walks back to the Nez Perce camp.

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - SAME TIME

Wood and Tripp watch Oyema leave...

WOOD

Relax, kid. They'll be plenty of Indians to kill tomorrow.

The snow keeps falling. BEAT.

WOOD (CONT'D)

God, it's cold. I don't know about you, but I didn't sign up to freeze my ass off in the middle of northern Montana.

TRIPP

Somebody's gotta do it.

WOOD

(a moment, then)

If you say so, kid.

Wood turns back and stares out at No Man's Land. Tripp looks down, terrible thoughts racing through his head...

TRIPP

What if Sitting Bull comes? What if his five thousand warriors show up in the morning?

WOOD

You shouldn't worry about things you can't control.

TRIPP

I don't want to die.

WOOD

Calm down. General Howard's due to arrive here any minute.

TRIPP

Yeah...but who will get here first?

And on this lingering question, we:

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. BEAR PAW, MONTANA - EARLY MORNING

The sun creeps over the horizon, revealing a battlefield blanketed in white. And it's still snowing...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - MORNING

A WHITE FLAG is raised in the distance.

Joseph, Looking Glass, and members of the tribe take notice. Difficult to see through the snow, it's meaning unmistakable.

Several SOLDIERS approach and get within earshot...

SOLDIER
(Shouting)
COLONEL MILES WISHES TO SPEAK WITH
CHIEF JOSEPH!

Joseph glances at Looking Glass. BEAT.

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - SAME TIME

C.S. Wood, fast asleep, suddenly bolts awake. He looks around, relieved by the silence.

WOOD
See, kid, what did I tell you?
Morning's here and Sitting Bull is
nowhere to be found...
(Realizes he is alone)
Kid?

EXT. NEARBY THE NEZ PERCE CAMP - SAME TIME

Milan Tripp crawls on his belly, attempting to get a closer look at the Nez Perce camp. He sticks his head up and stares down at the fortifications.

But then the *click* of a rifle hammer makes him turn around. He's surrounded by WARRIORS. Caught, red-handed.

INT. MILES' TENT - LATER

Miles looks up as Joseph enters.

MILES
I didn't think you'd come.

Miles motions to a chair. Joseph hesitates, then sits. BEAT.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - SAME TIME

Milan Tripp, now a prisoner, stares at the suffering camp. The Nez Perce offer him what little food they have left. Milan Tripp eats, glancing again at the layout of the camp.

He has a much better view from here...

INT. MILES' TENT - SAME TIME

Joseph and Miles sit in silence, each waiting for the other to speak. Finally, Miles leans forward...

MILES
 You speak English?
 (Joseph nods)
 Can I get you anything? Some food
 or...water, perhaps?

Joseph shakes his head, then nods at Miles' uniform...

JOSEH
 Your coat...is not like Howard's.
 He has stars on his shoulder...

MILES
 I know. And double brass buttons.
 It's because he's a general.

JOSEH
 And what are you?

MILES
 I'm the man who caught you.
 (Beat)
 Don't you think this whole thing
 has gone on long enough? Do you
 think I enjoy launching canon fire
 into your camp?

JOSEPH
 Then stop doing it.

MILES
 Alright. Sure. And what exactly do
 you propose I do instead?

JOSEPH
 Go home to your families. We are
 not at war and we are not your
 enemy. You should let us go.

MILES
 You know I can't do that. I have my
 orders. You are fugitives and must
 surrender, unconditionally.
 Otherwise, I'll be forced to
 continue what I'm doing. And let me
 be clear. I will pound you into
 oblivion. Your women and children
 will die, screaming in agony. It'll
 be awful. But I won't stop. I'll
 hit you as hard as I can for as
 long as it takes...

JOSEPH
 Until Sitting Bull arrives.

Miles flinches, then slowly sits back. BEAT.

MILES

You're willing to risk everything
on that murderer? What makes you so
sure he'll come?

JOSEPH

He enjoys killing white men.

Miles stares at Joseph for a long, terrible moment. Then:

MILES

Maybe you're right. Maybe he's on
his way this very minute. But it's
still snowing. Your people are
freezing. And starving. And *dying*.
You're all alone. And soon General
Howard will be here and we'll be
twice the number we currently are.
You might want to think about that
before betting the lives of your
people on a long shot.

(To nearby GUARD)

Get him out of here.

Joseph slowly gets to his feet. The guard takes him by the
arm and leads him outside. Hold on Miles -- frustrated.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - LATER

Looking Glass walks over to Milan Tripp...

LOOKING GLASS

Stand him up.

Two WARRIORS lift Tripp to his feet.

LOOKING GLASS (CONT'D)

They won't release Joseph until
their man is free.

(Takes Tripp's arm)

Let's go.

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - LATER

Joseph and Milan Tripp walk towards each other as they make
their way back to their respective camps.

They exchange a subtle glance as they pass each other...

Joseph sees Ollokot's body on the ground. He keeps walking...

Each side anxiously waits for their man to reach safety.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

The Nez Perce surround Joseph, eager for news. Joseph glances over at Looking Glass. BEAT.

JOSEPH

Our only hope is that Sitting Bull gets to us in time.

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - LATER

Miles stands beside Milan Tripp. Two TWELVE POUND CANONS are placed next to the HOWITZER.

SOLDIER

(To Miles)

Where are we aiming these, sir?

MILES

(To Tripp)

Tell them.

Milan Tripp nods and walks over...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - SAME TIME

Joseph stands in the middle of the camp, looking around. Terrible thoughts fill his head...

JOSEPH

(To Nearby Warrior)

The soldier we captured...did he see the entire camp?

The warrior nods. Joseph turns and stares out at the Americans...He sees THREE CANNONS pointed their way...

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

No...

CUT TO:

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - SAME TIME

Miles stares down at the Nez Perce camp. And then:

MILES

Fire!

ALL THREE CANONS FIRE AT ONCE!

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Joseph runs through the camp...

JOSEPH
Get down! Get down! Get...

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! A nightmare bombardment, killing men, women, and children with every single volley...

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Soldiers watch the Nez Perce camp light up in the distance. They can hear screams of dying women and children over the canon's roar. It's an orgy of non-stop, unrelenting terror.

And as we pan across the somber faces of American soldiers, we end on Miles. Even his eyes betray a hint of regret...

MILES
Cease fire!

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Joseph holds on to Springtime for dear life. The smoke begins to clear. Joseph opens his eyes...body parts lie all over the ground. The camp is in ruin.

Joseph takes a deep breath, anticipating another volley of hell to soon begin. But then...a strange, distant sound.

Galloping horse hooves! Far away, but approaching fast...

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - CONTINUOUS

The Americans hear it, too. Everyone stops and turns...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

The thundering horses come closer. The ground begins to shake. Any second, they'll come pouring around the bluff...

But whose horses are they? Sitting Bull's or Howard's?

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Warriors in rifle pits steady themselves...Looking Glass stands, trying to get a better view...

Behind him comes a distant FLASH followed by the crack of a rifle...and then a bullet explodes into his head, ripping his body out of FRAME...!

CUT TO:

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Milan Tripp slowly lowers a smoking rifle. BEAT.

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

The galloping horses have built to a furious roar...

Joseph kneels beside Looking Glass's corpse, in shock and disbelief. And then, as if sensing the inevitable, he looks out towards the distant bluffs just in time to see...

General Howard's cavalry charging around the bend.

Six hundred riders surround the camp, joining Miles' Army. Joseph watches, stoically. He knows...it's over.

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - LATER

Howard dismounts. He stares at the distant Nez Perce camp, then he sees the smoking canons. His eyes narrow. BEAT.

INT. MILES' TENT

Miles pours himself a shot of WHISKEY. Howard sits at the table with a cup of COFFEE. Just like before.

Miles comes over and sits down. BEAT.

MILES

Boy, am I glad to see you.

HOWARD

Got here quick as we could.

MILES

And not a moment too soon.

Howard nods. BEAT.

HOWARD

How long have you been pounding 'em with those canons?

MILES

(Hesitates)

Three days.

HOWARD

Gonna keep it up much longer?

MILES

As long as it takes.

HOWARD

It's mostly women and children in that camp, you know that?

MILES

It's war, Oliver. You know the costs better than anyone. And I don't enjoy it anymore than you do. You fight to win. It's that simple. There's no middle ground in this sort of thing. It's ugly. Always has been. And it brings out the worst...in everybody. Besides... I've got my men to think about. They're freezing and Sitting Bull's in the area.

HOWARD

Is that the reason or the excuse?

MILES

You're out of line.

Howard throws a letter on the table. BEAT.

MILES (CONT'D)

What's that?

HOWARD

A wire from Agent Reynolds. Sitting Bull's still in Canada. He doesn't know what's happening here.

MILES

Good. That's a relief.

Howard stands and goes to leave.

MILES (CONT'D)

One thing, Oliver. My men have been through a lot this past week. If it's alright with you, we'd like to see it through to the end.

Howard looks at Miles for a moment and "gets it." BEAT.

HOWARD

They can surrender to you, Nelson. I won't get in the way. If this doesn't get you a general's star, nothing will. I want to talk to him, though.

MILES

Talk to who? Joseph?

HOWARD

That's right. Alone.

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

The American Army is now more than a THOUSAND SOLDIERS strong. They stare down at the Nez Perce camp, waiting.

Howard makes his way to the front lines...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - SAME TIME

Joseph holds Springtime close. She's mumbling, hallucinating. Distant shouts cause Joseph to look up...

General Howard is making his way through No Man's Land. Alone. With his single arm raised. Joseph gets to his feet...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Joseph steps past the rifle pits and approaches Howard. The two men stare at each other for a long time. Snow falls down all around them in the open battlefield.

HOWARD

Hello, Joseph.

JOSEPH

(In English)

General Howard.

Howard steps forward and observes the gray woolen shawl Joseph is wearing, five bullet holes in the cloth.

HOWARD

You've had some close calls.

(Beat)

You have any idea how close to Canada you are?

Joseph manages a faint smile. BEAT.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You wouldn't have liked it, anyway.
The winters are terrible.

(Beat)

It's over. You know that, right?

JOSEPH

Sitting Bull...

HOWARD

He's not coming, Joseph. He's still in Canada. I'm sorry. You're alone.

Joseph says nothing. Howard's words ring true.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
How's your family? Are they alive?

Joseph looks up, tears in his eyes...

JOSEPH
My little girl...is out there
somewhere. I don't know where. My
wife...does not have long.

HOWARD
How many of your people are left?
More than half?

Joseph hesitates, then shakes his head.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Less?

Joseph nods. Howard steps closer.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Joseph, listen to me. I know you
must be thinking about a final
stand. You are the Chief of the Nez
Perce people. Your responsibility
is to those who are alive. You
think about that...and then you
think about them. We can give you
food and medicine. We can even
search for your daughter. But you
must surrender.

JOSEPH
Can you help us go home?

Howard looks at Joseph, knowing that's a tall order.

HOWARD
I'll do what I can.

Joseph stares at Howard through the falling snow, then turns
around and heads back towards the Nez Perce camp...

EXT. NEZ PERCE CAMP - SAME TIME

Joseph comes back into the camp. The remaining Nez Perce
surround him, anxious and afraid...

NEZ PERCE WOMAN
Don't let them take us away!

NEZ PERCE MAN
Sitting Bull could still come!

Joseph doesn't seem to hear them. Up ahead, Springtime lies still and peaceful. Joseph approaches and kneels beside her.

Her eyes are open, but vacant. She's dead. Joseph stares at her for an agonizing moment.

He stands and turns to face the remnants of his people...

JOSEPH

You all have thoughts of Sitting Bull. But I can only think of my daughter. I don't even know if she's alive. I want to find her...maybe she is dead already.

Joseph turns to face a YOUNG WARRIOR, standing nearby...

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

Tell General Howard that I know his heart. And what he has said before, I have in my heart, also...

Joseph looks around the camp, perhaps thinking of all the people who are no longer there...

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed. Looking Glass is dead. Toohoolhoolzote is dead. The old men are all dead...My brother, Ollokot, is dead.

Joseph glances down at Springtime's body...he can't bring himself to say the words. Instead, he continues:

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

It is cold and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death...

(To the heavens)

Hear me, my Chiefs! I am tired! My heart is sick and sad...

(Dramatic Beat)

From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever.

Everyone absorbs Joseph's speech. Nobody says a word.

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - LATER

Howard and Miles pace back and forth near the front lines.

SOLDIER (O.S.)

Chief Joseph's approaching!

Howard and Miles rush out to meet him...

EXT. BEAR PAW, MONTANA - MOMENTS LATER

Joseph slowly rides up the hill and dismounts. With his head bowed, Joseph offers his rifle to Howard.

Howard hesitates, then steps aside.

Miles comes forward and accepts the rifle.

Soldiers surround Joseph, guns raised, and take him away...
Howard and Miles watch Joseph disappear over the hill.

They turn back and freeze. The surviving Nez Perce are now approaching. Nearby soldiers watch -- horrified.

Women. Children. Elderly. Wounded and dying. *These are the people who have eluded the most powerful army on Earth?*

EXT. AMERICAN CAMP - LATER

The Nez Perce are given food and medicine.

Soldiers watch the survivors with deep sympathy and sadness. Some even play with the Nez Perce children.

Joseph sits all alone, watching.

INT. HOWARD'S TENT - LATER

Howard sits quietly at his desk. Perry enters.

PERRY
You asked to see me, sir?

HOWARD
I need to send a wire. Would you
mind taking this down?

Perry takes out his note pad and stands ready.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
To General Sherman. Fugitive Nez
Perce tribe apprehended. Chief
Joseph surrendered...
(Dramatic Beat)
Norton Ranch murderers all dead. No
need for further retribution.

Perry finishes writing and looks up.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
How does that read?

PERRY
(Shrugs)
Short. To the point.

HOWARD
(a moment, then)
It does not take many words to
speak the truth.

Perry nods, then leaves. Howard remains -- deep in thought.

INT. SHERMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

General Sherman enters and receives a THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE from the crowded room.

Smiling ear to ear, he shakes hands and receives pats on the back as he makes his way through the celebration...

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

The Nez Perce are escorted towards a waiting train -- *the Iron Monster* -- puffs of smoke billowing into the sky...

Nearby, Howard and Miles supervise on horseback.

The tribe nears the station...HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE, mostly REPORTERS, are waiting for them...

REPORTER
THERE THEY ARE!

Everyone suddenly rushes forward and swarms the tribe.

Fathers lift children onto their shoulders so they can see the most famous Indians in America. An absolute circus.

The soldiers fight their way through the crowd, inching the Indians closer to the train...

As Joseph is about to board, he glances back at Howard.

The two men stare at each other for moment, much like they did in the courtroom back in Wallowa. A lifetime ago.

Joseph climbs on the train and disappears from view...

INT. TRAIN - MOMENTS LATER

Joseph finds an empty row and sits by himself.

Oyema comes down the isle with her baby and sits nearby.

Joseph turns and sees her. BEAT.

This subtle glance should say so much. Of all the Nez Perce we have come to know, these are the only two who remain.

The rest are gone.

Joseph turns and stares out the window, first at the massive crowds, then north towards the distant mountains of Canada.

The train suddenly lurches forward and picks up speed...

EXT. MONTANA - THAT MOMENT

The train glides down the endless track, carrying the Nez Perce away into the fading beauty of the ruddy sunset.

The final car grows small in the distance, disappearing like the Indian's vanishing destiny...

SLOW FADE TO:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - 1897

Twenty years have passed and the world has changed.

America has industrialized and the frontier has been replaced with cobblestone streets and bowler hats.

EXT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - EVENING

Thousands of people pour in to watch *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show*, advertized prominently on the side of the building.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - SAME TIME

BUFFALO BILL (51) addresses the audience with a BULL HORN.

BUFFALO BILL

Ladies and Gentlemen! For your entertainment this evening...it is my great pleasure to present to you a dramatization of one of the most exciting and thrilling chases in the history of the frontier...

An OLD MAN sits in the audience. He has a thick grey beard and sad, sunken eyes. And his right arm is missing.

BUFFALO BILL (CONT'D)

...they fought with the courage of ten thousand warriors and held our army at bay for several months.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you the historic flight of Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce!!!

The crowd APPLAUDS as the show begins...

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - LATER

An ACTOR playing Chief Joseph delivers the immortal speech, playing to the back row.

CHIEF JOSEPH ACTOR
...OUR CHIEFS ARE KILLED! LOOKING
GLASS IS DEAD. TOOHOOLHOOZOTE IS
DEAD! MY BROTHER, OLLOKOT, HE IS
DEAD! IT IS COLD AND THE LITTLE
CHILDREN ARE FREEZING TO DEATH!

He raises his arms towards an imaginary sun...

CHIEF JOSEPH ACTOR (CONT'D)
FROM WHERE THE SUN NOW STANDS, I
WILL FIGHT NO MORE FOREVER!

The audience applauds. Howard watches sadly as the actors all take a bow. And then, Buffalo Bill takes the stage.

BUFFALO BILL
Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!
(Applause ends)
Thank you. And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, a very rare and special treat. With us tonight is a very honored guest. He was in town for President Grant's funeral and he graciously accepted our invitation to be here, tonight. It's my great pleasure to introduce you...to Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce!

Howard's face drops as a SPOTLIGHT finds Joseph in the audience. Old and sad, Joseph stands and reluctantly waves.

Howard gets up and leaves...

EXT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - LATER

Joseph makes his way, unnoticed, through the giant crowds as they pour out of the stadium and into the city...

Howard comes outside. He sees Joseph walking away...

HOWARD
Joseph! Joseph! Joseph...!

Joseph keeps walking. He doesn't seem to hear.

Howard fights to get closer...

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Joseph! Joseph...!
(Beat)
HINMUUTU-YALATLAT!

Joseph abruptly stops. He turns around. Howard approaches...

JOSEPH
(In English)
General Howard.

HOWARD
Joseph.

JOSEPH
(Re: His name)
You pronounced it well.

HOWARD
Thank you.

Joseph hesitates, then nods towards Madison Square Garden.

JOSEPH
Quite a show.

HOWARD
Yes. It was...quite a show.

The two men stand in deference to each other as the masses shuffle past them without regard. BEAT.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
I was wondering...if...
(Beat)
How's your family? Did you ever
find your daughter?

Something stirs deep in Joseph's eyes. He looks at Howard for a long time...and then slowly shakes his head.

JOSEPH
No...they're all gone.

Howard is speechless. What can he say? Nothing.

These two old men stand on the busy city street, their bodies weary, their spirits broken. Once enemies, now remnants of a distant era, forgotten and haunted.

Knowing that the silence has somehow said all there is to say, Joseph slowly turns and walks away. His sad, tired figure grows small, absorbed by the modern world...

The following words appear:

Of the 800 Nez Perce who began the flight towards Canada, fewer than 370 remained alive at Bear Paw. They had traveled more than 1,300 miles and were less than 40 miles from the Canadian border at the time of Joseph's surrender.

They had eluded the army for 113 days, an accomplishment that is still studied by generals at West Point, today.

These words fade. Replaced by:

The surviving Nez Perce spent the next eight years in captivity on reservations in Kansas and Oklahoma, where more than 100 perished from disease and starvation.

These words fade. Replaced by:

In 1885, under intense pressure from the public, including the written support of General Howard and Colonel Miles, the American Government granted the remaining Nez Perce permission to settle in Washington state.

These words fade. Replaced by:

Despite soaring fame and widespread popularity, Joseph was never allowed to return home to the Wallowa Valley. He continued to lobby the American government unsuccessfully for the remainder of his life.

These words fade. Replaced by:

Chief Joseph passed away in 1904 at the age of 64. Survived by no one, it is said that he died of a broken heart.

And as these words fade, we find Howard staring into the crowd. Thousands of people pour down the street...

But Joseph is gone.

THE END