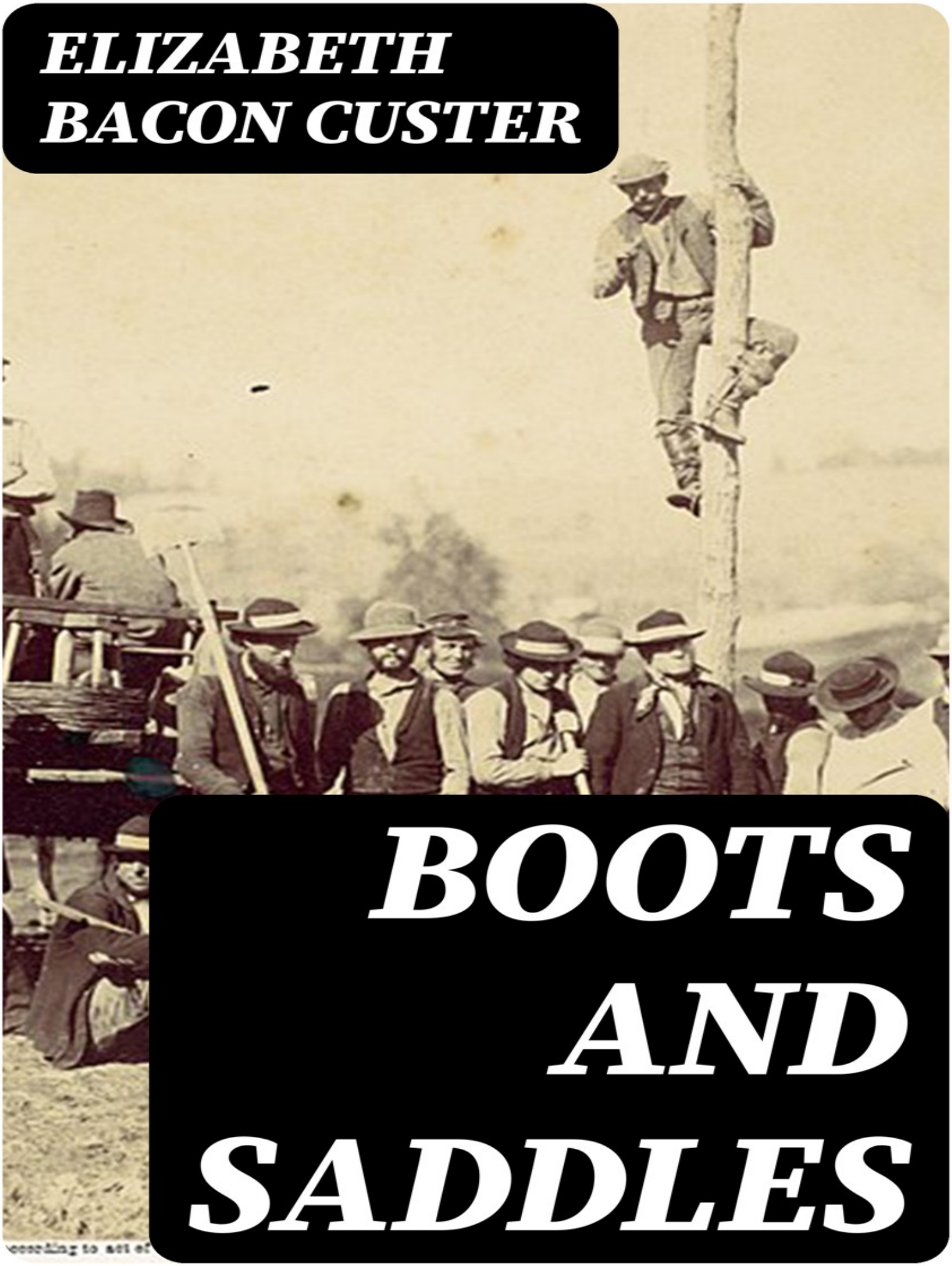
ELIZABETH BACON CUSTER



BOOTS AND SADDLES

Elizabeth Bacon Custer

Boots and Saddles

EAN 8596547388678

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

G. A. Custer.

G. A. Custer.

Dedicated

TO

MY HUSBAND

THE ECHO OF WHOSE VOICE HAS BEEN MY

INSPIRATION

PREFACE

Table of Contents

One of the motives that have actuated me in recalling these simple annals of our daily life, has been to give a glimpse to civilians of garrison and camp life—about which they seem to have such a very imperfect knowledge.

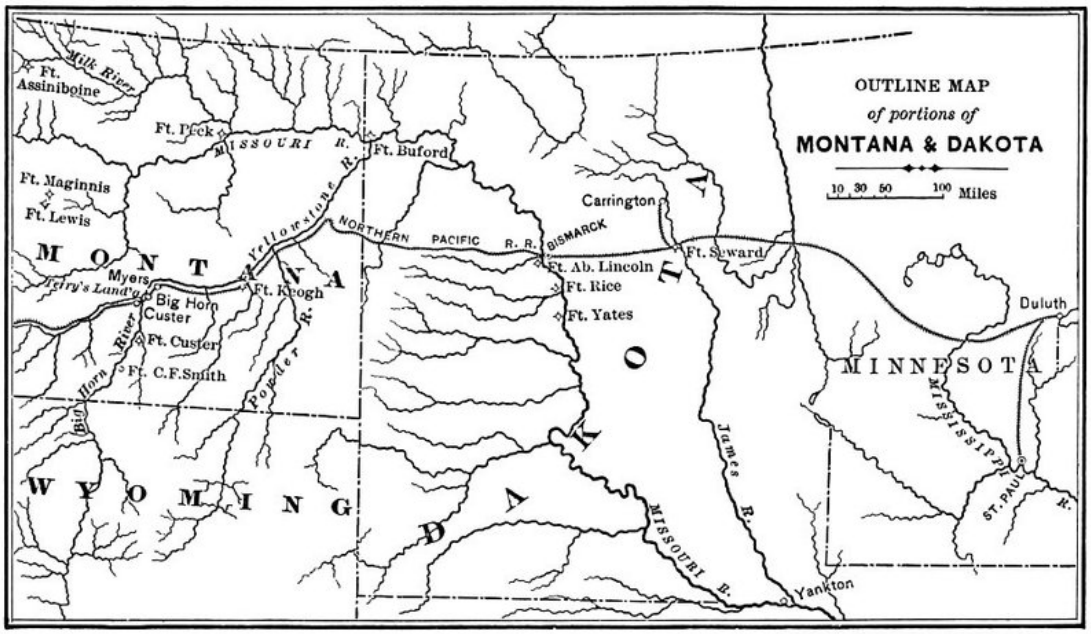
This ignorance exists especially with reference to anything pertaining to the cavalry, which is almost invariably stationed on the extreme frontier.

The isolation of the cavalry posts makes them quite inaccessible to travellers, and the exposure incident to meeting warlike Indians does not tempt the visits of friends or even of the venturesome tourist. Our life, therefore, was often as separate from the rest of the world as if we had been living on an island in the ocean.

Very little has been written regarding the domestic life of an army family, and yet I cannot believe that it is without interest; for the innumerable questions that are asked about our occupations, amusements, and mode of house-keeping, lead me to hope that the actual answers to these queries contained in this little story will be acceptable. This must also be my apology for entering in some instances so minutely into trifling perplexities and events, which went to fill up the sum of our existence.

E. B. C.

148 East 18th Street,
New York City.



OUTLINE MAP
of portions of
MONTANA & DAKOTA

CHAPTER I.
CHANGE OF STATION.

Table of Contents

General Custer graduated at West Point just in time to take part in the battle of Bull Run. He served with his regiment—the 5th Cavalry—for a time, but eventually was appointed aide-de-camp to General McClellan. He came to his sister's home in my native town, Monroe, Michigan, during the winter of 1863, and there I first met him. In the spring he returned to the army in Virginia, and was promoted that summer, at the age of twenty-three, from captain to brigadier-general. During the following autumn he came to Monroe to recover from a flesh-wound, which, though not serious, disabled him somewhat. At that time we became engaged. When his twenty days' leave of absence had expired he went back to duty, and did not return until a few days before our marriage, in February, 1864.

We had no sooner reached Washington on our wedding-journey than telegrams came, following one another in quick succession, asking him to give up the rest of his leave of absence, and hasten without an hour's delay to the front. I begged so hard not to be left behind that I finally prevailed. The result was that I found myself in a few hours on the extreme wing of the Army of the Potomac, in an isolated Virginia farm-house, finishing my honeymoon alone. I had so besought him to allow me to come that I did not dare own to myself the desolation and fright I felt. In the preparation for the hurried raid which my husband had been ordered to make he had sent to cavalry head-quarters to provide for my safety, and troops were in reality near, although I could not see them.

The general's old colored servant, Eliza, comforted me, and the Southern family in the house took pity upon my

anxiety. It was a sudden plunge into a life of vicissitude and danger, and I hardly remember the time during the twelve years that followed when I was not in fear of some immediate peril, or in dread of some danger that threatened. After the raid was ended, we spent some delightful weeks together, and when the regular spring campaign began I returned to Washington, where I remained until the surrender and the close of the war.

After that we went to Texas for a year, my husband still acting as major-general in command of Volunteers. In 1866 we returned to Michigan, and the autumn of the same year found us in Kansas, where the general assumed charge of the 7th (Regular) Cavalry, to which he had been assigned, with the rank of lieutenant-colonel in the Regular Army. We remained in Kansas five years, during which time I was the only officer's wife who always followed the regiment. We were then ordered, with the regiment, to Kentucky. After being stationed in Elizabethtown for two years, we went to Dakota in the spring of 1873.

When orders came for the 7th Cavalry to go into the field again, General Custer was delighted. The regiment was stationed in various parts of the South, on the very disagreeable duty of breaking up illicit distilleries and suppressing the Ku-klux. Fortunately for us, being in Kentucky, we knew very little of this service. It seemed an unsoldierly life, and it was certainly uncongenial; for a true cavalryman feels that a life in the saddle on the free open plain is his legitimate existence.

Not an hour elapsed after the official document announcing our change of station had arrived before our house was torn up. In the confusion I managed to retire to a corner with an atlas, and surreptitiously look up the territory to which we were going. I hardly liked to own that I had forgotten its location. When my finger traced our route from Kentucky almost up to the border of the British Possessions, it seemed as if we were going to Lapland.

From the first days of our marriage, General Custer celebrated every order to move with wild demonstrations of joy. His exuberance of spirits always found expression in some boyish pranks, before he could set to work seriously to prepare for duty. As soon as the officer announcing the order to move had disappeared, all sorts of wild hilarity began. I had learned to take up a safe position on top of the table; that is, if I had not already been forcibly placed there as a spectator. The most disastrous result of the proceedings was possibly a broken chair, which the master of ceremonies would crash, and, perhaps, throw into the kitchen by way of informing the cook that good news had come. We had so few household effects that it was something of a loss when we chanced to be in a country where they could not be replaced. I can see Eliza's woolly head now, as she thrust it through the door to reprimand her master, and say, "Chairs don't grow on trees in these yere parts, gen'l." As for me, I was tossed about the room, and all sorts of jokes were played upon me before the frolic was ended. After such participation in the celebration, I was almost too tired with the laughter and fun to begin packing.

I know that it would surprise a well-regulated mover to see what short work it was for us to prepare for our journeys. We began by having a supply of gunny-sacks and hay brought in from the stables. The saddler appeared, and all our old traps that had been taken around with us so many years were once more tied and sewed up. The kitchen utensils were plunged into barrels, generally left uncovered in the hurry; rolls of bedding encased in waterproof cloth or canvas were strapped and roped, and the few pictures and books were crowded into chests and boxes. When these possessions were loaded upon the wagon, at the last moment there always appeared the cook's bedding to surmount the motley pile. Her property was invariably tied up in a flaming quilt representing souvenirs of her friends' dresses. She followed that last instalment with anxious

eyes, and, true to her early training, grasped her red bandanna, containing a few last things, while the satchel she scorned to use hung empty on her arm.

In all this confusion no one was cross. We rushed and gasped through the one day given us for preparation, and I had only time to be glad with my husband that he was going back to the life of activity that he so loved. His enforced idleness made it seem to him that he was cumbering the earth, and he rejoiced to feel that he was again to have the chance to live up to his idea of a soldier. Had I dared to stop in that hurried day and think of myself all the courage would have gone out of me. This removal to Dakota meant to my husband a reunion with his regiment and summer campaigns against Indians; to me it meant months of loneliness, anxiety, and terror. Fortunately there was too much to do to leave leisure for thought.

Steamers were ready for us at Memphis, and we went thither by rail to embark. When the regiment was gathered together, after a separation of two years, there were hearty greetings, and exchanges of troublous or droll experiences; and thankful once more to be reunited, we entered again, heart and soul, into the minutest detail of one another’s lives. We went into camp for a few days on the outskirts of Memphis, and exchanged hospitalities with the citizens. The bachelors found an elysium in the society of many very pretty girls, and love-making went on either in luxurious parlors or in the open air as they rode in the warm spring weather to and from our camp. Three steamers were at last loaded and we went on to Cairo, where we found the trains prepared to take us into Dakota.

The regiment was never up to its maximum of twelve hundred men, but there may have been eight or nine hundred soldiers and as many horses. The property of the companies—saddles, equipments, arms, ammunition, and forage—together with the personal luggage of the officers, made the trains very heavy, and we travelled slowly. We

were a week or more on the route. Our days were varied by the long stops necessary to water the horses, and occasionally to take them out of the cars for exercise. My husband and I always went on these occasions to loose the dogs and have a frolic and a little visit with our own horses. The youth and gamins of the village gathered about us as if we had been some travelling show. While on the journey one of our family had a birthday. This was always a day of frolic and fun, and even when we were on the extreme frontier, presents were sent for into the States, and we had a little dinner and a birthday cake. This birthday that came during the journey, though so inopportune, did not leave utterly without resources the minds of those whose ingenuity was quickened by affection. The train was delayed that day for an unusually long time; our colored cook, Mary, in despair because we ate so little in the “twenty-minutes-for-refreshments” places, determined on an impromptu feast. She slyly took a basket and filled it at the shops in the village street. She had already made friends with a woman who had a little cabin tucked in between the rails and the embankment, and there the never absent “eureka” coffee-pot was produced and most delicious coffee dripped. Returning to the car stove, which she had discovered was filled with a deep bed of coals, she broiled us a steak and baked some potatoes. The general and I were made to sit down opposite each other in one of the compartments. A board was brought, covered with a clean towel, and we did table-legs to this impromptu table. We did not dare move, and scarcely ventured to giggle, for fear we should overturn the laden board in our laps. For dessert, a large plate of macaroons, which were an especial weakness of mine, was brought out as a surprise. Mary told me, with great glee, how she had seen the general prowling in the bakers’ shops to buy them, and described the train of small boys who followed him when he came back with his brown paper parcel. “Miss Libbie,” she said, “they thought a sure enough

gen’l always went on horseback and carried his sword in his hand.”

We were so hungry we scarcely realized that we were anything but the embodiment of picturesque grace. No one could be otherwise than awkward in trying to cut food on such an uncertain base, while Mary had taken the last scrap of dignity away from the general’s appearance by enveloping him in a kitchen towel as a substitute for a napkin. With their usual independence and indifference to ceremony, troops of curious citizens stalked through the car to stare at my husband. We went on eating calmly, unconscious that they thought the picture hardly in keeping with their preconceived ideas of a commanding officer. When we thanked Mary for our feast, her face beamed and shone with a combination of joy at our delight and heat from the stove. When she lifted up our frugal board and set us free, we had a long stroll, talking over other birthdays and those yet to come, until the train was ready to start.

CHAPTER II.
A BLIZZARD.

Table of Contents

After so many days in the car, we were glad to stop on an open plain about a mile from the town of Yankton, where the road ended.

The three chief considerations for a camp are wood, water, and good ground. The latter we had, but we were at some distance from the water, and neither trees nor brushwood were in sight.

The long trains were unloaded of their freight, and the plains about us seemed to swarm with men and horses. I was helped down from the Pullman car, where inlaid woods, mirrors, and plush surrounded us, to the ground, perfectly bare of every earthly comfort. The other ladies of the regiment went on to the hotel in the town. The general suggested that I should go with them, but I had been in camp so many summers it was not a formidable matter for me to remain, and fortunately for what followed I did so. The household belongings were gathered together. A family of little new puppies, some half-grown dogs, the cages of mocking-birds and canaries, were all corralled safely in a little stockade made of chests and trunks, and we set ourselves about making a temporary home. The general and a number of soldiers, composing the head-quarters detail, were obliged to go at once to lay out the main camp and assign the companies to their places. Later on, when the most important work was done, our tents were to be pitched. While I sat on a chest waiting, the air grew suddenly chilly, the bright sun of the morning disappeared, and the rain began to fall. Had we been accustomed to the climate we would have known that these changes were the precursors of a snow-storm.

When we left Memphis, not a fortnight before, we wore muslin gowns and were then uncomfortably warm; it seemed impossible that even so far north there could be a returned winter in the middle of April. We were yet to realize what had been told us of the climate—that there were “eight months of winter and four of very late in the fall.” On the bluffs beyond us was a signal-station, but they sent us no warning. Many years of campaigning in the Indian Territory, Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska, give one an idea of what the weather can do; but each new country has its peculiarities, and it seemed we had reached one where all the others were outdone. As the afternoon of that first day advanced the wind blew colder, and I found myself eying with envy a little half-finished cabin without an enclosure, standing by itself. Years of encountering the winds of Kansas, when our tents were torn and blown down so often, had taught me to appreciate any kind of a house, even though it were built upon the sand as this one was. A dug-out, which the tornado swept over, but could not harm, was even more of a treasure. The change of climate from the extreme south to the far north had made a number of the men ill, and even the superb health of the general had suffered. He continued to superintend the camp, however, though I begged him from time to time as I saw him to give up. I felt sure he needed a shelter and some comfort at once, so I took courage to plan for myself. Before this I had always waited, as the general preferred to prepare everything for me. After he had consented that we should try for the little house, some of the kind-hearted soldiers found the owner in a distant cabin, and he rented it to us for a few days. The place was equal to a palace to me. There was no plastering, and the house seemed hardly weatherproof. It had a floor, however, and an upper story divided off by beams; over these Mary and I stretched blankets and shawls and so made two rooms. It did not take long to settle our few things, and when wood and water

were brought from a distance we were quite ready for house-keeping, except that we lacked a stove and some supplies. Mary walked into the town to hire or buy a small cooking-stove, but she could not induce the merchant to bring it out that night. She was thoughtful enough to take along a basket and brought with her a little marketing. Before she had come within sight of our cabin on her return, the snow was falling so fast it was with difficulty that she found her way.

Meanwhile the general had returned completely exhausted and very ill. Without his knowledge I sent for the surgeon, who, like all of his profession in the army, came promptly. He gave me some powerful medicine to administer every hour, and forbade the general to leave his bed. It was growing dark, and we were in the midst of a Dakota blizzard. The snow was so fine that it penetrated the smallest cracks, and soon we found white lines appearing all around us, where the roof joined the walls, on the windows and under the doors. Outside the air was so thick with the whirling, tiny particles that it was almost impossible to see one’s hand held out before one. The snow was fluffy and thick, like wool, and fell so rapidly, and seemingly from all directions, that it gave me a feeling of suffocation as I stood outside. Mary was not easily discouraged, and piling a few light fagots outside the door, she tried to light a fire. The wind and the muffling snow put out every little blaze that started, however, and so, giving it up, she went into the house and found the luncheon-basket we had brought from the car, in which remained some sandwiches, and these composed our supper.

The night had almost settled down upon us when the adjutant came for orders. Knowing the scarcity of fuel and the danger to the horses from exposure to the rigor of such weather after their removal from a warm climate, the general ordered the breaking of camp. All the soldiers were directed to take their horses and go into Yankton, and ask

the citizens to give them shelter in their homes, cow-sheds, and stables. In a short time the camp was nearly deserted, only the laundresses, two or three officers, and a few dismounted soldiers remaining. The towns-people, true to the unvarying western hospitality, gave everything they could to the use of the regiment; the officers found places in the hotels. The sounds of the hoofs of the hurrying horses flying by our cabin on their way to the town had hardly died out before the black night closed in and left us alone on that wide, deserted plain. The servants, Mary and Ham, did what they could to make the room below-stairs comfortable by stopping the cracks and barricading the frail door. The thirty-six hours of our imprisonment there seems now a frightful nightmare. The wind grew higher and higher, and shrieked about the little house dismally. It was built without a foundation, and was so rickety it seemed as it rocked in a great gust of wind that it surely would be unroofed or overturned. The general was too ill for me to venture to find my usual comfort from his re-assuring voice. I dressed in my heaviest gown and jacket, and remained under the blankets as much as I could to keep warm. Occasionally I crept out to shake off the snow from the counterpane, for it sifted in between the roof and clapboards very rapidly. I hardly dared take the little phial in my benumbed fingers to drop the precious medicine for fear it would fall. I realized, as the night advanced, that we were as isolated from the town, and even the camp, not a mile distant, as if we had been on an island in the river. The doctor had intended to return to us, but his serious face and impressive injunctions made me certain that he considered the life of the general dependent on the medicine being regularly given.

During the night I was startled by hearing a dull sound, as of something falling heavily. Flying down the stairs I found the servants prying open the frozen and snow-packed door, to admit a half dozen soldiers who, becoming bewildered by the snow, had been saved by the faint light

we had placed in the window. After that several came, and two were badly frozen. We were in despair of finding any way of warming them, as there was no bedding, and, of course, no fire, until I remembered the carpets which were sewed up in bundles and heaped in one corner, where the boxes were, and which we were not to use until the garrison was reached. Spreading them out, we had enough to roll up each wanderer as he came. The frozen men were in so exhausted a condition that they required immediate attention. Their sufferings were intense, and I could not forgive myself for not having something with which to revive them. The general never tasted liquor, and we were both so well always we did not even keep it for use in case of sickness.

I saw symptoms of that deadly stupor which is the sure precursor of freezing, when I fortunately remembered a bottle of alcohol which had been brought for the spirit-lamps. Mary objected to using the only means by which we could make coffee for ourselves, but the groans and exhausted and haggard faces of the men won her over, and we saw them revive under the influence of the fiery liquid. Poor fellows! They afterwards lost their feet, and some of their fingers had also to be amputated. The first soldier who had reached us unharmed, except from exhaustion, explained that they had all attempted to find their way to town, and the storm had completely overcome them. Fortunately one had clung to a bag of hard-tack, which was all they had had to eat. At last the day came, but so darkened by the snow it seemed rather a twilight. The drifts were on three sides of us like a wall. The long hours dragged themselves away, leaving the general too weak to rise, and in great need of hot, nourishing food. I grew more and more terrified at our utterly desolate condition and his continued illness, though fortunately he did not suffer. He was too ill, and I too anxious, to eat the fragments that remained in the luncheon-basket. The snow continued to come down in

great swirling sheets, while the wind shook the loose window-casings and sometimes broke in the door. When night came again and the cold increased, I believed that our hours were numbered. I missed the voice of the courageous Mary, for she had sunk down in a corner exhausted for want of sleep, while Ham had been completely demoralized from the first. Occasionally I melted a little place on the frozen window-pane, and saw that the drifts were almost level with the upper windows on either side, but that the wind had swept a clear space before the door. During the night the sound of the tramping of many feet rose above the roar of the storm. A great drove of mules rushed up to the sheltered side of the house. Their brays had a sound of terror as they pushed, kicked, and crowded themselves against our little cabin. For a time they huddled together, hoping for warmth, and then despairing, they made a mad rush away, and were soon lost in the white wall of snow beyond. All night long the neigh of a distressed horse, almost human in its appeal, came to us at intervals. The door was pried open once, thinking it might be some suffering fellow-creature in distress. The strange, wild eyes of the horse peering in for help, haunted me long afterwards. Occasionally a lost dog lifted up a howl of distress under our window, but before the door could be opened to admit him he had disappeared in the darkness. When the night was nearly spent I sprang again to the window with a new horror, for no one, until he hears it for himself, can realize what varied sounds animals make in the excitement of peril. A drove of hogs, squealing and grunting, were pushing against the house, and the door which had withstood so much had to be held to keep it from being broken in.

It was almost unbearable to hear the groans of the soldiers over their swollen and painful feet, and know that we could do nothing to ease them. To be in the midst of such suffering, and yet have no way of ameliorating it; to

have shelter, and yet to be surrounded by dumb beasts appealing to us for help, was simply terrible. Every minute seemed a day; every hour a year. When daylight came I dropped into an exhausted slumber, and was awakened by Mary standing over our bed with a tray of hot breakfast. I asked if help had come, and finding it had not, of course, I could not understand the smoking food. She told me that feeling the necessity of the general's eating, it had come to her in the night-watches that she would cut up the large candles she had pilfered from the cars, and try if she could cook over the many short pieces placed close together, so as to make a large flame. The result was hot coffee and some bits of the steak she had brought from town, fried with a few slices of potatoes. She could not resist telling me how much better she could have done had I not given away the alcohol to the frozen men!

The breakfast revived the general so much that he began to make light of danger in order to quiet me. The snow had ceased to fall, but for all that it still seemed that we were castaways and forgotten, hidden under the drifts that nearly surrounded us. Help was really near at hand, however, at even this darkest hour. A knock at the door, and the cheery voices of men came up to our ears. Some citizens of Yankton had at last found their way to our relief, and the officers, who neither knew the way nor how to travel over such a country, had gladly followed. They told us that they had made several attempts to get out to us, but the snow was so soft and light that they could make no headway. They floundered and sank down almost out of sight, even in the streets of the town. Of course no horse could travel, but they told me of their intense anxiety, and said that fearing I might be in need of immediate help they had dragged a cutter over the drifts, which now had a crust of ice formed from the sleet and the moisture of the damp night air. Of course I declined to go without the general, but I was more touched than I could express by their thought of me. I made

some excuse to go up-stairs, where, with my head buried in the shawl partition, I tried to smother the sobs that had been suppressed during the terrors of our desolation. Here the general found me, and though comforting me by tender words, he still reminded me that he would not like any one to know that I had lost my pluck when all the danger I had passed through was really ended.

The officers made their way over to camp, for they were anxious and uncertain as to what might have happened to the few persons remaining there. I had been extremely troubled, for each of the soldiers for whom we had been caring had, with a trooper's usual love of the sensational, told us of frozen men and of the birth of babies to the laundresses. These stories had reached town through stragglers, until we imagined from the exaggeration that enough newly-born children might be found to start a small orphan asylum. The officers soon returned with the story reduced to one little stranger who had come safely into this world in the stormy night, sheltered by a tent only. No men were frozen, fortunately, though all had suffered. The soldier detailed to take care of the general's horses found his way back with them, and in his solemn voice told us that in spite of every effort, sharing his blankets and holding the little things through the storm, the thorough-bred puppies had frozen one by one. There was one little box-stove in camp which the officers brought back, accompanied by its owner, an old and somewhat infirm officer.

In the midst of all this excitement, and the reaction from the danger, I could not suppress my sense of the ludicrous when I saw the daintiest and most exquisite officer of "ours," whom last I remembered careering on his perfectly equipped and prancing steed before the admiring eyes of the Memphis belles, now wound up with scarfs and impromptu leggings of flannel; his hat tied down with a woollen comforter; buffalo gloves on his hands; and clasping a stove-pipe, necessary for the precious stove.

Some of the officers had brought out parcels containing food, while our brother, Colonel Tom Custer, had struggled with a large basket of supplies. In a short time another officer appeared at our door with a face full of anxiety about our welfare. He did not tell us what we afterwards learned from others, that, fearing the citizens would give up going to us, and knowing that he could not find the way alone over a country from which the snow had obliterated every landmark, he had started to go the whole distance on the railroad. Coming to a long bridge he found the track so covered with ice that it was a dangerous footing; the wind blew the sleet and snow in his face, almost blinding him, but nothing daunted, he crawled over on his hands and knees, and continuing to use the track as his guide, stopped when he thought he might be opposite our cabin, and ploughed his way with difficulty through the drifts.

When the officers had returned to town, we made a fire in the little stove which had been put up-stairs, as the pipe was so short. We ensconced our visitor, to whom the stove belonged, near by. He was a capital fireman; we divided our bedding with him, and put it on the floor, as close as possible to the fire. The shawl and blanket partition separated our rooms, but did not seem to deaden sound, and at night I only lost consciousness of the audible sleeping of our guest after I had dropped the point of a finger in my ear. He was the one among us who, being the oldest of our circle, and having had a varied experience, was an authority on many subjects. He had peculiar and extreme ideas on some questions. We listened out of respect, but we all drew the line at following some of his advice, and over one topic there was general revolt. He disbelieved entirely in the external or internal use of water, and living as we did in countries where the rivers were flowing mud, and the smaller streams dried up under the blazing sun, his would have been a convenient system, to say the least. Unfortunately, our prejudices in favor of

cleanliness increased with the scarcity of water. Bathing became one of the luxuries as well as one of the absolute necessities of life. From being compelled to do with very little water, we had learned almost to take a bath in a thimble, and to this day I find myself pouring the water out of a pitcher in a most gingerly manner, so strong is the power of habit—even now with the generous rush of the unstinted Croton at my disposal. The theory of our venerable friend on the danger of bathing was fortified with many an earnest argument, and the advantages of his improved system of dry rubbing set out elaborately in his best rhetoric. Nevertheless, taking a bath with the palm of the hand was combated to the last by his hearers. When I had heard him arguing previously I had rather believed it to be the vagary of the hour. I had proof to the contrary the next morning after the storm, for I was awakened by a noise of vigorous friction and violent breathing, as of some one laboring diligently. I suddenly remembered the doctrine of our guest, and realized that he was putting theory into practice. As softly as I awakened my husband, and tried to whisper to him, he was on nettles instantly, hearing the quiver of laughter in my voice. He feared I might be heard, and that the feelings of the man for whom he had such regard might be wounded. He promptly requested me to smother my laughter in the blankets, and there I shook with merriment, perhaps even greater because of the relief I experienced in finding something to counteract the gloom of the preceding hours. And if I owned to telling afterwards that the old officer’s theory and practice were one, it could not be called a great breach of hospitality, for he gloried in what he called advanced ideas, and strove to wear the martyr’s crown that all pioneers in new and extreme beliefs crowd on their heads.

Our friend remained with us until the camp was inhabitable and the regular order of military duties was resumed. Paths and roads were made through the snow,

and it was a great relief to be again in the scenes of busy life. We did not soon forget our introduction to Dakota. After that we understood why the frontiersman builds his stable near the house; we also comprehended then when they told us that they did not dare to cross in a blizzard from the house to the stable-door without keeping hold of a rope tied fast to the latch as a guide for their safe return when the stock was fed. Afterwards, when even our cool-headed soldiers lost their way and wandered aimlessly near their quarters, and when found were dazed in speech and look, the remembrance of that first storm, with the density of the down-coming snow, was a solution to us of their bewilderment.

CHAPTER III.
WESTERN HOSPITALITY.

Table of Contents

The citizens of Yankton, endeavoring to make up for the inhospitable reception the weather had given us, vied with one another in trying to make the regiment welcome. The hotel was filled with the families of the officers, and after the duties of the day were over in camp, the married men went into town. We were called upon, asked to dine, and finally tendered a ball. It was given in the public hall of the town, which, being decorated with flags and ornamented with all the military paraphernalia that could be used effectively, was really very attractive. We had left gas far behind us, and we had not the mellow, becoming light of wax-candles, but those Western people were generous about lamps, as they are about everything else, and the hall was very bright.

The ladies had many trials in endeavoring to make themselves presentable. We burrowed in the depths of trunks for those bits of finery that we had supposed would not be needed again for years. We knew the officers would do us credit. Through all the sudden changes of fashion, which leave an army lady when she goes into the territories quite an antediluvian in toilet after a few months, the officer can be entirely serene. He can be conscious that he looks his best in a perfectly fitting uniform, and that he is never out of date.

The general and I went into the hotel and took a room for the night of the ball. Such good-humor, confusion, and jolly preparations as we had, for the young officers came to borrow the corner of our glass to put on the finishing touches, carrying their neckties, studs, sleeve-buttons, and gloves in their hands. The aigret had been taken from the

helmet and placed across their broad chests, brightening still more their shining new uniforms. I remember with what pride the “plebs” called our attention to the double row of buttons which the change in the uniform now gave to all, without regard to rank. The lieutenants had heretofore only been allowed one row of buttons, and they declared that an Apollo even could not do justice to his figure with a coat fastened in so monotonous and straight up-and-down a manner.

Yankton, like all new towns, was chiefly settled with newly-married people, who ornamented their bits of front yards with shining new perambulators. The mothers had little afternoon parades, proud enough to trundle their own babies. If any one’s father ever came from the States to a Western town, we all felt at liberty to welcome his gray hairs. There were but few young girls, but that night must have been a memorable one for them. All the town, and even the country people, came to the ball. The mayor and common council received us, and the governor opened the festivities. We crossed to the hotel to our supper. We were asked to sit down to the table, and the abundance of substantials proved that our hosts did not expect us to nibble. The general was, of course, taken possession of by the city fathers and mothers. Finding among them a woman he knew I would appreciate, he placed me beside her at supper. I had but little time to eat, for she was not only clever and brave, but very interesting in her description of the dangers and hardships she had endured during the ten years of her pioneering. The railroad had been completed but a short time, and before that the life was wild enough. She sat quietly among these people in her simple stuff gown, honored and looked up to. Though not even elderly, she was still almost the oldest citizen and an authority in the history of the country. All classes and conditions came to the ball, for Yankton was not yet large enough to be divided