

FORCES OF NATURE

A play

By

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PROLOGUE IN ITALY: THE RIVIERA, 1910

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

One time Kermit and I went after hippo in a rowboat manned by natives. I wounded one, and it came straight for the boat with open jaws. It took my entire magazine to stop it.

GIFFORD PINCHOT

What an adventure!

TR

You should have seen my son kill a fighting leopard after it mauled one of our men. What memories we have: the lions as they charged; the gray bulk of elephants in the matted jungle; the rhinos, truculent and stupid, standing in bright sunlight on the open plains. And everything I hunted, except for food, was for the National Museum.

GP

You sent the Museum all your trophies?

TR

I preferred this to be a scientific expedition rather than a prolonged holiday. We shipped home the best series of big game specimens that has ever gone out from Africa as the result of a single trip.

GP

Very impressive, Theodore. Adventure seasoned with science is the very best kind.

TR

During all that time, I didn't open a newspaper or so much as think about politics. So when I heard by special runner that you forced the President to fire you for exposing corruption in his administration, I could not believe it. I know you're a man of principle, but still, that so rarely happens. It seemed impossible.

GP

I appreciate this opportunity to explain.

TR

I appreciate your coming all this way. I can't face the press on my return without having heard first from you what happened and how things stand.

GP

I publicly attacked Ballinger.

TR

No wonder Taft fired you! That's quite a breach.

GP

It was no pink tea, but I had to do it. Soon after Ballinger became Secretary of the Interior, he supported a fraudulent coal mining claim on a national forest.

TR

Good Lord, man, you must not take a thing like that too seriously. It happens all the time.

GP

The miner had secret backing from the most powerful combination of capital in America: Guggenheim and J. P. Morgan. That fraudulent claim was only the beginning of an assault on public lands.

TR

Did Taft know?

GP

Taft has abandoned the cause of conservation. He would let big money rule regardless of the public interest. Here's another example: He and Ballinger reversed your decision in the dispute about that dam in the Sierras.

TR

Had you not stood so strongly with San Francisco, I would have helped John Muir in his fight to keep Hetch Hetchy Valley a natural wonder, like its twin: Yosemite.

GP

Opposing John Muir was harder for me than turning against Taft.

TR

I know you admire him no less than I, if not more.

GP

He is one of the truly great men. Still, Muir is wrong to think Hetch Hetchy can be preserved. A corporation will dam that valley if San Francisco fails to and take profits from electric power that should benefit the public.

TR

I should have put Taft on the Supreme Court.

GP

You should have run for a third term.

TR

I promised not to. You know, Gifford, the only man who never makes a mistake is the man who never does anything. I thought Taft would carry on my work, if not in the same spirit, then by the same principles. Yet I wish to give him the benefit of every doubt. It is very ungracious for an ex-President to criticize his successor.

GP

Of course, Theodore. I understand.

TR

Doesn't you getting yourself fired hurt the cause of conservation?

GP

Conservation's a national issue as never before.

TR

I see. Your stand on principle was well calculated. But what will become of the Forest Service? Who is your successor?

GP

Luckily, the man I would have chosen, Harry Graves, is a Bonesman like myself and, more importantly, like Taft. As soon as his name came up—

TR

You Yalies!

GP

"Ever in Bones." Theodore, I was wondering if you would consider becoming a candidate.

TR

For the Republican nomination? Against Taft? That would split the party. It could put a Democrat in the White House!

GP

If you don't run, conservation will be in jeopardy.

TR

I'm sorry, Gifford. We have had a peculiar intimacy between us: we worked for the same causes, dreamed the same dreams, felt a substantial identity of purpose. Still, I shall keep my freedom to act or not to act as I deem wise for the country and for myself. Tell me, is Taft approved by the nation?

GP

He has suffered a decline in public opinion. And many Republicans are dissatisfied with our party's leadership. Many want you to seek the nomination.

TR

That may be so. And it may be that no other President enjoyed the Presidency as much as I did. But I shall not be put in the position of running for the presidency after I have left it. I played my part.

GP

Then I should be going.

TR

Will you stay in Europe for awhile?

GP

After the commotion I caused, that's what I intend. I know some fine places to go fishing; places I explored when studying forestry twenty years ago.

TR

I hope you'll have better luck than you had with me.

GP

I have had great luck with you, Theodore. We have landed quite a few.

They shake hands vigorously.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE: NEW YORK CITY, 1893

In a Gramercy Park mansion Gifford Pinchot awaits a guest who is late. GP glances out a window by the front door, then, turning toward a mirror, he practices the handshake and facial expression he will use upon meeting John Muir. There is a tentative knock followed by strong ones. GP opens the door.

MUIR

Is this the residence of Mr. James Pinchot?

GP

It is. Mr. Muir! Welcome! Please come in.

MUIR

I'm arriving late, I know. There aren't identifying marks on the mansions here. No one walking nearby to ask; only carriages that don't stop. Well, here I am. Will you announce me to Mr. Pinchot?

GP

I'm his son, Gifford. It's an honor to meet you.

MUIR

Oh, so sorry. I thought you were the butler. I met your father at a lecture I gave-

GP

He told me.

MUIR

And he invited me here.

GP

I know.

MUIR

Is he—?

GP

He's upstairs. Papa is getting dressed.

MUIR

Then I'm not so late after all.

GP

Not at all. May I show you around?

MUIR

Please do. What was your name again?

GP

Gifford.

MUIR

Gifford Pinchot. Pleased to meet you.

GP

I must admit, I thought you'd be dressed like a mountaineer.

MUIR

Only when I lecture. And roam the Sierra, of course. I must admit, I find it challenging to don a dinner jacket. But I do it, even though these things were designed for men with manservants. To get cufflinks on with one hand takes all my dexterity. And the tie! Already in the urban air I feel I'm choking, and this just tightens the noose.

GP

You could take it off.

MUIR

Oh no.

GP

It takes getting used to.

MUIR

I've had quite a week. I found glacial scoring on the rocks of Central Park. And last night, I met Mark Twain.

GP

You met Mark Twain!

MUIR

Aye, at a dinner party. I have been overladen with enjoyments lately.

GP

What was Mark Twain like?

MUIR

He talks a lot.

GP

Yes, but what did he say?

MUIR

Twain advised me never to give advice.

GP

He must have put that in a witty way.

MUIR

He said it's better to keep your mouth shut and appear stupid than open it and remove all doubt.

GP

That's very good.

MUIR

He also said it would be best for me to adopt civilization and lift myself down to its level.

GP

New York is so wonderful! You can meet everyone. Every great man, yourself included, eventually comes to the City.

MUIR

That's very kind of you, but I endure it as a diver holds his breath in the depths beneath the sea. Fortunately, my steamer leaves port tomorrow. I can't wait!

GP

Are you going to Europe?

MUIR

To Scotland. Haven't been back since I was a wee bairn.

GP

I wonder what's keeping Papa.

MUIR

What is that?

GP

The dumbwaiter. The kitchen's downstairs.

MUIR

An elevator for food! With a a buzzer to alert the liveried servants. Ingenious. A dumbwaiter. Next thing, you'll have a dumbbutler and a dumbcook.

GP

I don't think we would want a dumb cook.

MUIR

And you'll ride around in a dumbcarriage! Some day little dumb things could be doing everything that people do by hand and foot. And doing things that we can't do for the life of us. And that will be fine as long as the little dumb things serve us and not the other way around.

GP

"Things are in the saddle and ride mankind." Didn't Emerson say that? But if we ride them, the possibilities are endless.

MUIR

Endless possibilities. The dreams of youth. I invented a few things when I was young. This was after we came to Wisconsin. I was an avid reader, and my father permitted me to read books other than the Bible if I did so before dawn when the farm work had to begin. So I devised a clock that was attached to the platform on which I slept, and when the designated hour struck, a lever would flip the bed to the vertical and thrust me onto my feet.

GP

A rude awakening!

MUIR

Reading awoke me in more ways than one. And then I learned to read the scriptures of nature: the patterns of bud and leaf, stem and branch; the truths engraved on meadows and fluted slopes. That I could do all day, and have done ever since.

GP

I studied sciences at Yale. I wanted to study forestry, but there were no courses in it— still aren't, in this country.

MUIR

How old are you, Gifford?

GP

Twenty-eight. I think I know why they haven't come down yet. Papa's giving us time to become acquainted, just the two of us.

MUIR

That's good of him.

GP

I hope you're not too hungry.

MUIR

Why would your father want us to know each other? Are you a mountaineer? An outdoorsman? Do you seek an original relationship with the universe, your own part in the glorious creation?

GP

I'm a forester. I'm going to establish the profession of forestry in the United States.

MUIR

Quite an ambition.

GP

Papa has encouraged me, urged me, to learn how to manage forests so they will last and to restore forests that have been ruined. Surely there is much I can learn from you.

MUIR

I'm not sure I could mentor you, Gifford. You perplex me. Why would a person with your advantages try to establish any profession at all? So many paths are open to you.

GP

I've inherited a responsibility. My family was instrumental in the destruction of thousands of acres of forested lands.

MUIR

Your father?

GP

His father. Grandpa Cyril was a captain in Napoleon's army. After Waterloo, exiled from France in America, Grandpa bought up and leveled one forest after the other.

MUIR

Why did he do that?

GP

Business. He had his men cut the trees, tie the logs into rafts, and float them downriver to Trenton or to Philadelphia for sale. Of course, he also sold the newly cleared farmland. With the proceeds, Grandpa bought the next forest; so it went.

MUIR

I suppose this is the fruit of his labors.

GP

My mother's father, Amos Eno, also did rather well.

MUIR

Did his wealth come from the land?

GP

Grandpa Amos made his fortune in banking and real estate. He built the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

MUIR

I've not been there.

GP

It's *the* hotel. It set the style, especially after the Prince of Wales stayed there. Now Grandpa wants me to manage the Eno enterprises.

MUIR

But you're determined to work with trees. To redeem the Pinchot branch of your family, I suppose.

GP

To meet the challenge of our times. To save America's forests. To change the balance between man and nature.

MUIR

You propose to do that as a forester?

GP

I'm already doing it. I studied forestry in Europe, and I'm applying what I learned to conditions on this continent.

MUIR

Where?

GP

At the Biltmore estate.

MUIR

George Vanderbilt's estate is surely not typical of conditions on this continent.

GP

Much of it is. George bought seven thousand acres of yellow poplar, oak, and chestnut forests that have been slashed and overgrazed. But they can be restored.

MUIR

It is encouraging to meet a young man who is devoted to restoring forests amid the whirl of commerce.

GP

Commerce plays a part in it, Mr. Muir. What I learned in Europe is how to develop a forest that will bring in profits over the long run. The first principle of forestry is to manage a forest and make it pay.

MUIR

Have you made it pay to restore the Biltmore forests?

GP

We balanced income and expenses this year. And that's just a start.

MUIR

Did that include your fee?

GP

Well, no.

MUIR

You carry quite an overhead.

GP

I figure I already have sufficient wages for my entire life. What I have to do now is earn them.

MUIR

How will you establish a profession if the professionals need to be born into wealth? Does George intend to take up forestry too?

GP

I doubt it.

MUIR

But he is willing to buy up ruined forests and let you try to restore them.

GP

George has none of the invincible stupidity of those young men who believe they can have a good time in this world just by trying to have a good time. He's no gilded idler. And he's given me free reign to experiment. The result will be a new kind of farming, new at least to this country.

MUIR

Farming trees.

GP

Exactly.

MUIR

I do know something about that. I grew up on a farm, and I manage the orchards my father-in-law left my wife and me.

GP

No wonder Papa wanted us to meet.

MUIR

Unlikely. I don't talk about husbandry in public. It doesn't match my appeal as a prophet who would have this world behold the grand show: sunrise and sunset, dawn and gloaming, on sea and continents and islands, each in its turn, as the round earth rolls. Besides, I don't like to think about business. Being a fruit merchant bores me to tears. But my wife and I do prosper from it.

GP

As one can from trees in a forest.

MUIR

Yet unlike a farmer, the forester won't get his crop for thirty or fifty or a hundred years. Americans like to get rich quick. Isn't that a problem for this new profession of yours?

GP

Not if the government takes up forestry.

MUIR

Our government? It can guard a forest with an army, the way it does Yellowstone. But everywhere else it sells off forests at ridiculous prices, when not giving them away.

GP

But America needs the wood. We're facing a timber famine. And the government has begun to act.

MUIR

Young man, you love the outdoors. I think you should turn your mind to getting rich.

GP

But I am—we are—

MUIR

I am richer than all of ye. Much richer!

GP

From your orchards?

MUIR

No! Richer in experience! I might have been a millionaire, but I chose to be a tramp. If you want my advice; well, here it is: What you can do to get rich the way I did is spend weeks, a month in the Range of Light, as I call the Sierra Nevada. Go to one of the mountain temples there and look at nature's loveliness.

GP

I did go there.

MUIR

You did?

GP

Yosemite Fall was worth crossing the continent to see.

MUIR

Upper Yosemite Fall is the greatest of all, with its terrible energy, roar and surge, flapping, dashing storm-sustained exultant power!

GP

My great mistake was that I saw Yosemite Valley after the Grand Canyon had dulled my sense of wonder. Everything after that was tame.

MUIR

You found Yosemite—tame?

GP

You should have a seat. Are you all right?

MUIR

I'm flabbergasted.

GP

I'll call my parents down.

MUIR

And that dumbwaiter up.

GP

We shall have dinner right away.

SCENE TWO: ON THE RIM OF THE GRAND CANYON, 1896.

MUIR

Sightseers often ask me which is the best, the Grand Canyon of Arizona or Yosemite.

GP

What do you say?

MUIR

I say that I know a show better than either of them—both of them.

GP

The first time I was here, I walked all the way down to the river to see it rushing through its chasm of black rock. That night, I lay on a boulder near the bank looking up at a narrow band of brilliant stars. The next morning when I awoke, it was fiercely hot, like desert summer. I started up the trail right away, to make it to the rim before sunset. But a rattler, coiled atop a rock, stopped me in my tracks.

MUIR

Poised to strike at the intruder. That must have awakened you completely.

GP

I made my way around the snake and hurried on to continue the ascent. I'll never forget, on that winding trail halfway to the top, flowers of many colors were in bloom. It felt like spring. And then at dusk, as I reached the rim, a snowstorm raged, blanketing the plateau. Half a year in a day's climb!

MUIR

Alas, we don't have time on this visit to saunter on down the vast canyon and renew ourselves in the Colorado. The commissioners must move on, and I, wae is me, promised to accompany ye!

GP

We don't need to dine with the others at that tent hotel. We've got water in our canteens. A hard boiled egg and a sandwich are left from lunch.

MUIR

A crust will do for me. Oh, look, look, look who's here.

GP

A tarantula!

MUIR

That must be a full five inches. The largest I've seen.

GP

God, it's ugly.

GP moves to stomp on the tarantula. Muir grabs him, holding him back.

MUIR

Don't kill it!

GP

They sting badly.

MUIR

Its sting isn't fatal. Yours is.

GP

It can be fatal if you have an allergy.

MUIR

I don't need your protection, Gifford. Where did you get the right to kill one of God's own creatures? Are you one of those men who are astonished to find anything, living or dead, in all God's universe, which they cannot eat or render in some way that they call useful to themselves?

GP

On the contrary. We have to consider the needs of people in the future. I'm committed to that.

MUIR

Do only people have needs? Don't tarantulas have a role in the great scheme of things?

GP

I suppose—

MUIR

There's a hidden kinship between all God's creatures, a oneness that is violated every day by those who grant themselves the right to destroy what they can't consume.

GP

Point taken. You yourself have quite a sting.

MUIR

I must admit I'm furious, but not at you. Did you see those mines within the canyon? Men mining here!

GP

No, I didn't.

MUIR

It's outrageous. Did you see those ugly wide slashes through the surrounding forest? This must be protected, Gifford. It must be added to the forest reserves. Call it what you will—a park, a monument. This poem that nature carved on tablets of stone must belong to everyone, forever.

GP

I agree. It's the greatest sight this world has to offer. It is so deep it masks the width, and the width obscures the depth, and a man can only wonder.

MUIR

A man can do more than wonder, Gifford. Nature's school is the one true university. Religion is in all the rocks. Every rock a rock of ages. Reading the scripture nature wrote upon stone, we learn the language of storm and flood, earthquake and avalanche, glacier and lavaflow. Especially in places like this great rift within the Earth.

GP

I don't know if I can read that language. It's overwhelming.

MUIR

Then look at it differently. Stand on your head!

GP

What?

MUIR

I said, stand on your head. Do it, mon!

GP

I really don't—

MUIR

Forget dignity! What is the good of that? Are you afraid to make such a fool of yourself, you'll never look a pine tree in the face again?

GP

I don't think I can do a headstand, Muir.

Muir lifts his legs.

MUIR

Look! Look as if you've never seen this before. Forget the grandeur, the awesome scale that goes beyond what you can perceive. Look closely at what your eyes actually record. What do you see?

GP

Reds, grays, ashy greens of varied limestones, shales, sandstones.

MUIR

Colors. And they are in—?

GP

Layers

MUIR

Of—?

GP

Time.

MUIR

Pages from the great testament of the ages, one laid upon the other. And what can you tell from that? What do you have to say?

GP

It's hard to talk upside down.

Muir releases his legs, and GP stands up.

GP

A geologist once told me that black rock by the river is two billion years old. Imagine!

MUIR

Look at those layers. Each strip was laid down slowly, every single day over hundreds and thousands and millions and hundreds of millions of years as seas covered the land and receded, as mountains rose and eroded, as drought dried up rivers, shrank forests, made meadows vanish and deserts expand. Every snowflake, every rock and shell, every grain of sand played a part in this grand pageant.

GP

And do today.

MUIR

As ever. The span of your life is but an instant in geological time. As is this moment an instant in your life. A moment no less important than every other moment.

GP

More so, I think.

MUIR

Because we're at the Grand Canyon?

GP

I mean historically, given mankind's growing power to alter landscapes.

MUIR

Mankind: the most arrogant biped that ever walked the earth!

GP

Millions of people are moving into millions of arid acres here in the West with no provision to protect the sources of their water. A disaster in the making. But one that our Forest Commission can forestall.

MUIR

That, Gifford, is why the Commission must protect all of those lands the President placed in the so-called "forest reserves." Miners and herders and axemen of all kinds cannot be allowed there.

GP

Do you mean, you would protect the forest reserves from forestry?

MUIR

Under armed guard. You can be sure of that.

GP

If we don't allow forestry in those forests, we will fail to maintain any public lands at all. We must let people use those resources to build their cities, power their engines, graze their stock—

MUIR

What good are public lands if they're stripped bare? We might as well let the great giveaway continue without pretending that anything's in reserve.

GP

Do you know how the forest reserves were set aside?

MUIR

Through the work of many men, and decades of my own hard efforts, Gifford. We have stimulated a natural beauty hunger in the public mind.

GP

The forests reserves were established without public support. One sentence was tacked onto a bill on an entirely different matter. If the Western politicians had caught on, they would have removed that line from the law. And if our Commission doesn't make it clear to the people of the West that they can harvest timber, use the forage, draw from the water—in ways that are regulated and don't destroy the land—we will lose those forests forever.

MUIR

I expect that the Forest Commission will recommend protection, not use.

GP

No Army will hold the people back, Muir. You know Westerners: Still grabbing for the gold. We have to do this right, with effective organization, in ways that advance the public interest and secure political support.

MUIR

The other Commissioners will not agree with you.

GP

Then I will have to dissent.

MUIR

That would not be wise, Gifford. You are a young man without any official capacity who nonetheless received the honor of being appointed secretary to this Commission. If you were to oppose its report in public, you could undermine a fine career before it begins.

GP

I have to fight for what I believe in.

MUIR

You are ambitious.

GP

Much needs to be done.

MUIR

Do you ken how to differ without making a quarrel and souring peoples' feelings?

GP

Private talk will not sway men whose minds are set. It has to be in full view.

MUIR

Once I was an unknown nobody in the woods, and I achieved a great deal. Nor am I done yet enticing people to look at nature's loveliness. But now that I am almost sixty, I must warn you: don't waste your energies in a battle you cannot win. Playing at politics saps the very foundations of righteousness.

GP

I don't intend to play at politics, Muir. And I do intend to win.

SCENE THREE: THE LOBBY OF A SEATTLE HOTEL, 1897

GP

Muir! I had hoped I'd find you.

MUIR

What a surprise! How did you—?

GP

I checked the schedule of your ship.

MUIR

I'm eager to get home. I've been gone too long for the comfort of my lassie and our wee ones.

GP

How was Alaska? Were you caught up in the Yukon fever?

MUIR

Caught up in it, but I didn't catch it. I got off the boat at Skagway and walked along the roaring river amid a splattering, jostling, floundering onrush of men and pack animals, each one of them struggling to be first over the White Pass. Not a cool head in the lot. A wild, discouraging mess. And what did they find when they finally got to the Yukon?

All the best ground taken up, every auriferous inch. But tell me about the land rush here in the States. What of the recommendations your Forest Commission made? How were they—

GP

President Cleveland added twenty-one million acres to the forest reserve—

MUIR

Wonderful!

GP

But without a plan to manage them, as I advocated—

MUIR

Yes, I recall.

GP

The result was the political firestorm I feared.

MUIR

While I anticipated no such thing. Live and learn.

GP

Cleveland signed the order in the last week of his term. He too expected an adverse reaction.

MUIR

So there was an uproar.

GP

Western senators were up in arms.

MUIR

But what could they do? The President's bags were packed.

GP

Congress passed a bill that put those lands under the control of the Interior Department, whose land giveaway is such a scandal.

MUIR

But those lands are all reserved.

GP

The bill authorizes President McKinley to nullify every proclamation establishing forest reserves.

MUIR

Oh no! Did the new President sign it into law?

GP

He did.

MUIR

It's all in jeopardy then!

GP

Fortunately, one provision appropriated some money to survey the reserves. That was an opening. So I saw the President. We met in the Cabinet Room. I explained the situation.

MUIR

How did McKinley respond?

GP

His expression was stern and somewhat annoyed. He said, "Everyone who comes here brings a crisis along."

MUIR

Not encouraging at all.

GP

But the meeting ended well. And soon, I had the job of surveying those reserves, expenses paid. I've gone through the Black Hills and the Big Horn Mountains, up through Montana and Idaho, into eastern Washington and across the Cascades.

MUIR

To Puget Sound and Seattle just in time to encounter me. A fine coincidence.

GP

I need to talk with you.

MUIR

Do you want to come upstairs?

GP

This lobby's quite comfortable. And that view of the Olympic Peninsula is stunning.

MUIR

That it is!

As Muir admires the view, Pinchot looks around the hotel lobby to make sure they are being observed.

MUIR

What I don't understand is what difference your survey can make. Will the President protect the forest reserves or open them up to development? God saves trees from drought, disease, avalanche, fire, leveling tempests and floods; but He cannot save them from fools.

GP

Along the way I talked to everyone I could—mayors, axemen, cattlemen—assessing the public mood. Soon I'll tell the newspapers what I found out. Those senators are in for a surprise. I can get people here in the West to support public lands. And that's what is needed, local support, or we will lose the reserved land.

MUIR

Good work, Gifford!

GP

That support comes at a price.

MUIR

You'll have your beloved forestry, farming the forests, though how you would do so without harm is beyond my ken.

GP

It will be more than forestry. What we call forest reserves have a lot of open range.

MUIR

You would let cattle graze there?

GP

Sheep as well.

MUIR

Sheep!

GP

Sheep will eat forage that cattle will not. We can't let one in and not the other.

MUIR

You know what sheep do. When hungry, they're like an invasion of locusts, hooved locusts trampling the seedlings, stripping the shrubs of leaves.

GP

Sheep grazing can be regulated.

MUIR

You won't have anything to regulate if you let sheep in! A sheep can hardly be called an animal. An entire flock is required to make one foolish individual. As sheep advance, flowers, vegetation, grass, soil, plenty, and poetry vanish!

GP

If we restrict the numbers of sheep and rotate the lands where they're allowed to graze; if we don't allow sheep within five hundred yards of any spring or running stream; and if—

MUIR

How on this good Earth would you enforce that?

GP

By creating a Forest Service: professional foresters who patrol and manage the forests, who charge fees for the use of public lands, who impose fines for violations. That's what I'm going to recommend to the President. And I'll have backing from farmers and from ranchers—cattle- and sheepmen alike. They now understand that if the forest is destroyed, they won't have forage for long, or water, or any of the resources they depend on. It's in their interest.

MUIR

It's a plague you're unleashing.

GP

The sheep are already there.

MUIR

Use the government to drive them out and keep them out.

GP

Didn't you yourself run sheep through Yosemite Valley?

MUIR

That was how I managed to live there at first, in my youth. But I hated it. And sheep are not allowed there any longer, thanks to my efforts, only flocks of tourists. They come in the Spring when the sheep once did. Fortunately there is still a forest there for people to enjoy.

GP

If the forest reserves are governed as I propose, the land will be conserved and the economy of the West will thrive.

MUIR

I don't believe it for the life of me.

GP

I guarantee you, the alternative is not the preservation of public lands. There'll be nothing to protect. President McKinley will nullify the proclamations creating the forest reserves, and Interior will give away, willy nilly, all those millions of acres.

MUIR

I cannot support what you are doing.

GP

I don't want you to.

MUIR

You don't want my support?

GP

I want your opposition. The way I get axemen and sheepmen and cattlemen to agree to regulated use of the forest reserves is by telling them that if they don't agree, there's this madman from California who's going to keep them out of the reserves altogether—

MUIR

What?

GP

— who's going to guard every lovely leaf on every shrub and sapling from their hungry sheep. That's what drives them into my camp: that Sierra Club of yours. And it's in your interest too. My proposal to allow forage in the forests will drive nature lovers into the Sierra Club.

MUIR

I thought you said you weren't going to play at politics.

GP

This isn't playing. This is politics.

MUIR

So you would have us act a melodrama in front of the mobs. Tell me, what color hat would I be wearing?

GP

The black hat, of course. The lawman always wears the white hat.

MUIR

Not when he has a mustache like yours. I guess the rascals will take over in the end after all. It's just like the temple in Jerusalem. They looked at the beauty there and said, "Here's a fine place for our money changers."

GP

Just the opposite, Muir. We will control the money changers, not give in to them. But if we try to keep them out altogether, we will lose all that we have worked for.

MUIR

Either way, no place will remain intact; no place for human beings to satisfy the hunger of our souls.

As Muir looks out the window at the Olympic Peninsula, Pinchot catches the eye of an offstage observer.

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE: THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION IN ALBANY, NEW YORK. 1899.

Theodore Roosevelt plays with his sons, who are offstage. GP enters.

TR

Hurry, Quentin, they're after you. You've got to run! Go down the drainpipe, Kermit. They're shooting arrows. You're under attack! That's the way. Those children! I'll put ginger into those boys.

GP

You're making Rough Riders out of them, Governor.

TR

There's nothing like a stout fight to get the blood running. Having been rather sickly and awkward as a boy, I had to train myself painfully and laboriously.

GP

To fight for what is right.

TR

Exactly. Always I have admired fearless men who can hold their own in the world, and I have worked hard to become one.

GP

So have I.

TR

What brings you upstate?

GP

The Adirondack League Club asked me to examine a forested area so I can develop a plan for its management.

TR

Don't you work for the federal government?

GP

This is part of my job: a land consultant at large for the DOA. It's absurd, but the government's only forester works in a department that has no forests. The forest reserves are under the Interior Department, but my Division of Forestry is in Agriculture.

TR

Expect absurdity in politics, Pinchot. Until you gain power to change things, you'll be hamstrung. But I'm of the impression that you have no more political cunning than an astronomer.

GP

Like an astronomer, I see farther than any politician.

TR

You think so?

GP

A forester reckons in centuries. And you? Do you know what you'll be doing next year?

TR

Touché, Pinchot. Touché!

GP

Some people say you're presidential timber.

TR

That's why some people want to chop me down.

GP

But do you want to be President?

TR

I am thoroughly enjoying my experience as Governor and seek no other office.

GP

I appreciate your support for public lands.

TR

Before I'm done here, I expect to set aside a vast acreage in the Adirondacks and the Catskills as a gift to future generations: lands where there will always be an abundance of game in the woods and good fishing in the streams.

GP

You will be helping everyone, Governor, not only sportsmen. Each forest in those mountains is a great sponge which absorbs and distills rain water. If those forests are not set aside and are destroyed, the result will be an alternation of flood and drought. You might consider having foresters manage those parklands, to make sure—

TR

First, we have to stop unrestrained greed which ruins the life within the woods.

GP

I agree. But how will you do that?

TR

First, by recognizing why there is no restraint. The State's game wardens do nothing to halt the abuses.

GP

Why not?

TR

They got their positions not for any professional abilities but through patronage. Do you know who's on my Fisheries, Game, and Forest Commission?

GP

Not personally.

TR

Political hacks. They have the same idea of civil service that a vulture has of a dead lamb.

GP

Can't you—?

TR

Getting rid of those men won't be easy. The legislature put them there for a reason. Men who make their living telling lies can be controlled. I simply have to replace the lot of them with one professionally trained commissioner, and he will hire woodsmen who can handle the rifle, ax, and paddle; who will camp out summer or winter, going on snow shoes if necessary; men who can traverse the woods by night without regard to tracks—men of courage, resolution, and hardihood.

GP

You have a fight ahead.

TR

If you want to be principled and effective, you have to face the rather intimate association which is implied in a fight.

GP

That's the frozen truth.

TR

Then what say you, Pinchot, to a round of boxing?

GP

Boxing? I can't. My steam pressure is a little low today.

TR

Then fire up!

GP

I don't know—

TR

This is your chance to avenge Yale's loss to Harvard on the gridiron.

GP

What loss?

TR

Have you forgotten already? Too painful for you?

GP

Last year? That's nothing. We annihilated Harvard every year I was at Yale. Every year we were the national champions.

TR

Try these gloves on.

GP

Did you box at Harvard?

TR

I fought for the championship junior year. Boxing develops daring, endurance, and self-command. It teaches you never to shrink from what is rough in life. Let's have a go at it.

GP

All right.

TR and GP spar. After an exchange of jabs, TR swings and GP ducks out of the way.

GP

You telegraphed that punch.

TR

If all you do is defend yourself, there's no penalty were I to send it Pony Express.

TR hits GP.

GP

Good one, Governor!

TR

You're not hitting me. I want you to hit out: put your weight behind it and follow through.

GP lands a punch.

TR

That's better. In politics, the unforgivable crime is soft hitting. Do not hit at all in the public arena if it can be avoided, but when you do fight, never hit softly.

GP decks TR.

GP

Sorry! I didn't mean to knock you off your pins.

TR

Bully for you! You're taller of course. And my feet were too close together. But that was bully! I don't give a snap of the finger for a good man who can't fight.

SCENE TWO: ALONG THE POTOMAC, 1901.

TR

What do you say we walk along the river; get some exercise?

GP

I'd love to, Mr. President. Shouldn't we wait for your bodyguards?

TR

I don't want bodyguards. They walk behind me, Pinchot. You walk beside me, which is preferable by far.

An explosion.

GP

What was that?

TR

Blasts in the quarry across the river.

GP

After what happened to McKinley, aren't you a tad nervous?

Another explosion.

TR

A man needs nerve control. We do not know the future. We cannot tell how great any given danger is. So I practice cool-headedness, Pinchot, no matter what the circumstance, whether a bear is charging me or I'm simply out for a walk. Which I do whenever I can.

GP

We'll be toned up for work when we get back.

TR

I keep in as good physical trim as a man who does manual labor, even though I have so much sedentary business to attend to.

GP

You seem fit as a bull moose, Mr. President.

TR

Recently, when I was walking along the Potomac with the French Ambassador, Jusserand, I suggested we take off our clothes and jump in. He was dressed in formal wear. He had come to see the President, after all. When he disrobed and was about to get in to swim, I noticed he hadn't removed everything. So I said to him, "Monsieur Ambassador, you haven't taken off your gloves." To which he replied, "I think I will leave them on. We might meet ladies!"

TR laughs uproariously. GP joins in. Then there's another explosion. GP begins to shield TR before smiling as if he remembered about the quarry all along.

GP

Mr. President, tell me, do you think the forest reserves should remain in the Interior Department?

TR

Interior has always handled public lands.

GP

Mishandled them. The Land Office has always served swindlers and land grabbers regardless of the public interest.

TR

My man Hitchcock won't allow that. You should talk to him.

GP

But I'm in the Department of Agriculture.

TR

Just tell Hitchcock I told you to drop by.

GP

Shouldn't I clear it with the Secretary of Agriculture? He is my boss, after all.

TR

I'm his boss.

GP

It's getting swampy.

TR

Over here there's some high ground.

GP

Why have the nation's forester in one department and all the forests in another?

TR

Ask Congress. They're a rare set of scoundrels.

GP

But you're extremely popular. Surely the power of your office—

TR

Stepping into presidential shoes from the vice presidency doesn't give me much kick politically. I have to build that up: first through footwork, and then by taking on a large, well-exposed derrière.

GP

Which derrière is that, Mr. President?

TR

Monopoly. Government must subordinate the big corporation to the public welfare.

GP

That's a tall order!

TR

Monopoly's a popular target. The public sees flagrant excesses all around the country. People realize that ultimately, government has to shackle corporate irresponsibility.

GP

How can you stop a monopoly that's going like a runaway locomotive when government has all the speed of a man-powered handcar?

TR

I won't pass reform legislation right away. Even should it pass, enforcement will be a challenge. But I can start by using the Presidency as a bully pulpit.

GP

You can show that you're protecting the public interest by preventing monopoly control of timber and forage and water resources. It's in your power right now to expand public lands across this country.

TR

I can do that. I shall do that with your assistance.

GP

However I can help—

TR

You and I, who see what goes on behind the scenes, are aware of the arrogance of men who possess far more than they have earned. And of their contempt for men who deserve far more than they will ever possess.

GP

Money rules because the government is divided. There are twenty-odd agencies that have to do with natural resources, all in distinct watertight compartments. Three deal with minerals, four or five with streams, a dozen or so with wildlife, soils, soil erosion. The separation of forests and foresters is just one example of a labyrinth that leads nowhere.

TR

A labyrinth. Good metaphor!

GP

Speaking of which, there's no path here. Maybe we should turn around.

TR

Maybe we should forge a path. Another good metaphor. A path through the muck. We will need the right metaphor if we're going to achieve the desired metamorphosis.

GP

You could say the bureaucracy is an island where little men tie down the Gulliver of government at every turn, making him helpless against robber barons. But if the forest reserves were managed by foresters on the basis of scientific principles and for the sake of the common good—

TR

The agencies are loose horses in a field— each following his own nose, instead of a squadron of calvary, all acting together for a single purpose.

GP

That's a good one.

TR

Hah!

GP

It is rather muddy, Mr. President. Do you think we should continue across?

TR

This swamp isn't too deep. We'll make it through. And afterwards I shall certainly want a swim. Won't you?

GP

That would be bully.

SCENE THREE: YOSEMITE VALLEY, 1903

MUIR

What would you care to do, Mr. President, on this glorious evening?

TR

I want just to be out in the open with you and to drop politics absolutely. More than a certain amount of association with men who are nothing but politicians, contractors, and financiers drives me crazy.

MUIR

In alpenglow like this, we take no more heed of politics than do the trees and the stars.

TR

Do you know what I escaped, what those dignitaries had prepared for me?

MUIR

No, but they seemed angry at me for taking you away from them.

TR

There was going to be an indoor banquet followed by an outdoor entertainment: a special display of fireworks and searchlights that were going to play upon Half Dome and on that great waterfall. Those nature fakers! All that was lacking was the brilliant novelty of a brass band playing "Hail to the Chief."

MUIR

Don't you love these woods, where giant pines and firs and sequoias hold their arms open to the air?

TR

I never felt better. I feel I am in a great solemn cathedral, far vaster and more beautiful than any built by the hands of man.

MUIR

I brought Emerson to this grove. He wouldn't camp with me, though.

TR

You would have made him comfortable.

MUIR

His companions feared for his health. The Sage of Concord was no longer in his prime.

TR

He ought to have had the experience. You were living what he espoused. Where better to adjust the inward to the outward senses, to see the miraculous in the common, to find harmony with what is unchanged by man?

MUIR

This valley is not unchanged. But the tide of visitors floats about the bottom of the valley, collecting in hotel and saloon eddies, leaving the rocks and falls eloquent as ever with imperishable greatness. You and I will go to pathless places beyond the reach of their world.

TR

Near the hollow of the wave one always finds the crest. We will ascend to the crest, with our eyes on the stars and our feet on the ground.

MUIR

Eyes on the ground as well, Mr. President.

TR

Fresh bear scat. How bully! Let's follow the track.

MUIR

It's very fresh, Mr. President. You have more important services to perform than providing meat for a bear's dinner.

TR

I far prefer taking my chances with a bear to being at the Capitol where not only are the droppings ubiquitous and exceedingly odorous; they lead, if one tracks them, to beasts who are much more destructive than any carnivore in the wild.

MUIR

Savageness is natural, civilization strained and unnatural. I thank my stars that President Lincoln set this valley aside.

TR

It is a glorious heritage.

MUIR

Unfortunately, he established it as a state-run park.

TR

During the Civil War he had no alternative.

MUIR

I did play a part, more than a decade ago, in creating Yosemite National Park around the valley, but California has kept control of this marvel.

TR

My father knew Abraham Lincoln, and I have always admired him. He believed in the people, the "plain people" he called them, though that did not blind him to popular faults and failings. He drew strength, as I do, from the folk who work hard on the farm, in shops, on the railroads; who own little stores, little businesses they manage themselves; people of the rough and tumble workaday world. I saw many of them during my trainride to California: grizzled, bearded, elderly men; smooth-faced, shy, hulking young men; older women either faded and dragged or exceedingly brisk and capable; robust, healthy, high-spirited young girls. There were enormous crowds at stop after stop: masses of school children, self-conscious local committees, little girls dressed up as Goddesses of Liberty.

MUIR

Like the statue?

TR

The very image. Many of those people habitually lead rather gray lives, and they came to see the President much as they would have come to see a circus. Still, I think that besides the mere curiosity there was a good feeling behind it all.

MUIR

People believe in ye.

TR

I'm happy to say they do, and I will not betray their trust!

MUIR

I'm sorry to say that I cannot trust the elected officials of California to protect this valley. I'm sure you understand how vulnerable Yosemite remains to the pressure of contractors and financiers, given the influence they exert on the State's politicians.

TR

Of course I do.

MUIR

What may befall the forests of this valley one sees in the Sierra to the south: companies of lumbermen who, after felling trees at a rapid rate, flush the timber down steep flumes to the Central Valley forty miles and six thousand feet below. Unless protective measures be applied, all that will be left of the giant sequoia, the largest tree on God's great Earth, will be a few hacked and scarred monuments.

TR

These trees are astonishing. That sequoia must be over two hundred feet high.

MUIR

That's why the federal government must incorporate this valley into the national park.

TR

I will consider that, Muir. Sequoia deserve protection simply because it would be a shame to our civilization to let them disappear. We are not building this country of ours for a day. It is to last through the ages. Even so, a politician must not get too far ahead of the people.

MUIR

A President must lead the people.

TR

I agree up to a point. I heartily despise the public servant who fails to do his duty because it might jeopardize his future. But to be effective, one cannot appear to be the extreme advocate of any cause. But I came here to get away from politics. What's that?

MUIR

The winds are vocal everywhere—

TR

Which bird is that?

MUIR

I don't know.

TR

Its sound is extraordinary: a high melody where the chords vibrate with a touch of sorrow. I'll bet that's a hermit thrush. Don't you think so?

MUIR

I was never as interested in ornithology as in botany and geology.

TR

I've loved ornithology since boyhood.

MUIR

What hampered me from becoming an Audubon of the Sierra was that to know the birds close up, one has to shoot them.

TR

Audubon was my hero! My parents gave me a 12-gauge doublebarreled shotgun when I was thirteen. It had a lot of kick. But I couldn't hit anything until I got a pair of spectacles. I could not see and yet was wholly ignorant that I was not seeing.

MUIR

That's true of many people with spectacles.

TR

After that, I shot birds as fast as I could. My game bag and taxidermy kit smelled none too good; my family had their moments of suffering! But the discomfort of my mother and sisters did not lessen my passion for killing and collecting birds. And I have loved to hunt ever since.

MUIR

Mr. Roosevelt, when are you going to get beyond the boyishness of killing things? It is all very well for a young fellow who has not formed his standards to rush out in the heat of youth and slaughter animals. But are ye not getting far enough along to leave that off?

TR

Whatever I shoot is for museum purposes. Besides, hunters have campaigned for the preservation and perpetuation of wild life and of the places they depend on. And in that we have made common cause with you.

MUIR

Then let us make common cause in protecting this valley.

TR

You're a persuasive man, Muir. Shall we build a fire? Those stars are so different from the stars over the Great Plains, which spread out like a bowl over one's head. There you feel at the center, taking it in. But here, seeing all those stars and galaxies framed by tall trees and dark mountains, my mind goes on a journey, an immense journey.

MUIR

Here are pine needles to lie on. Remember what Emerson said, that if the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how men would adore them and preserve over generations remembrance of the city of God that they had seen. Yet even though the stars come out every night, they awaken our reverence. Don't you agree, Mr. President? Mr. Roosevelt—?

TR has fallen asleep.

SCENE FOUR: WASHINGTON DC, 1906

The founding Chief of the Forest Service speaks from behind a podium. His words are punctuated with applause.

GP

"The forest problem," according to President Roosevelt, "is, in many ways, the most vital internal problem of the United States." Because it is essential to the well-being of the nation that the forests not be destroyed, the Forest Service began its existence last year within the Department of Agriculture. The national forests, which at present cover an area of more than sixty-three million acres, are of importance for irrigation and grazing as well as for the production of wood. The principle that guides our administration of these lands is that they are for use. And they must be useful first of all to the people who live in their vicinity. Naturally, conflicts arise concerning competing uses of the public lands.

To resolve these conflicts, forest officers keep one criterion in mind: that public lands are to be used for the greatest good by the greatest number over the long run. Those lands are to be devoted to their most productive uses for the permanent good of the whole people, not for the temporary profit of individuals or companies. The entire agency from the forest ranger to the Chief will stand up for the honest small man and fight the predatory big man as no government bureau—

During these last words comes the roar of an earthquake. BLACKOUT.

SCENE FIVE: SAN FRANCISCO, 1906

This scene consists of voices with sound and lighting effects. Photos may also be used. No one is onstage.

MAN 1

Listen! That rumble coming from the west gets louder and louder. It's hit! The earth is rising!

WOMAN 1

O God!

MEXICAN MAN

Levantate! Rápido!

WOMAN 2

I awake on the floor, the house rising and falling like a ship. Too terrified to think, I crawl to the door on my knees.

ITALIAN WOMAN

Vigilanza fuori!

WOMAN 2

I get up and go to the window. What I see makes me tremble with fear. Buildings toppling over, big pieces of masonry falling. Barefoot in night clothes I join the people in the street.

FRENCHMAN

Incroyable!

CHINESE MAN

Chu hoy! Chu hoy!

MAN 1

The cobblestones of Market Street seem alive. Every one of them is moving. Power and trolley lines snap like threads. The ends of the power lines writhe and hiss like reptiles.

WOMAN 2

Valencia Street is convulsed. Sinking and rising, it vomits up its car tracks.

ENRICO CARUSO

We're doomed, we're both doomed!

WOMAN 2

That building, shaking and rolling like a mad thing—it's full, was full of living people!

MAN 2

What's the use of digging out those that's dead?

MAN 3

I found a woman underneath, still alive, a slender thing. I had no trouble carrying her down to the sidewalk.

WOMAN 1

The roof is on fire!

MAN 2

Look down the street. It's like looking into a furnace!

WOMAN 1

Watch out!

MAN 3

Pull the engine out of the blaze.

MAN 2

There's no water. The earthquake shattered the water mains!

Above the din, a telegram is transmitted.

TR

HEAR RUMORS OF GREAT DISASTER THROUGH AN EARTHQUAKE IN SAN FRANCISCO BUT KNOW NOTHING OF THE REAL FACTS. CALL UPON ME FOR ANY ASSISTANCE I CAN RENDER.

ENRICO CARUSO

'Ell of a place, 'ell of a place. I never come back here.

MAN 3

Chinatown has burned clean away.

WOMAN 3

The Emporium is gone, the Flood Building gutted by fire. Block after block is falling.

MAN 4

Even if you have water, you will not stop it now. You need dynamite.

MAN 3

I suppose you have a few sticks in your pocket.

Explosions

MAN 2

No water. It's awful. I want to get out of here—or be blown up.

JACK LONDON

San Francisco is like the crater of a volcano, around which are camped tens of thousands of refugees.

WOMAN 1

Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we go to Oakland.

SCENE SIX: THE WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON DC, 1907

President Roosevelt is at his desk. There is a telephone near the letters, reports, and newspapers that are piled up on the desk. TR reads from a few of these documents.

TR

"I saw the hillside covered by homeless people. And I know that a lot of their suffering was caused by the inefficient system of water that was supplied to the people of San Francisco." Well, yes, the water mains broke.

He picks up a newspaper and reads the editorial.

TR

"A people who undoubtedly met the greatest disaster in all the world's history and who rebuilt a devastated city ought to be allowed to select their own water supply and to ease the tax burden which falls most heavily upon those who work for a living." Now how does selecting a water source ease their tax burden?

The President scans an official report.

TR

"San Francisco obtains its water supply at present from sources all within about fifty miles of the city. It has long been recognized that these sources are insufficient." There is no more a shortage of water in San Francisco than of whiskey. What's that Mark Twain said? Whiskey's for drinking; water's for fighting! Hah!

He turns back to the report.

TR

"Investigations by the engineers employed by the City show that the most economical supply would come from the upper Tuolumne River, making use of two main reservoir sites: Lake Eleanor and Hetch Hetchy Valley, lying within Yosemite National Park." Yosemite? That's two hundred miles from San Francisco!

As Roosevelt consults a geological survey map of California, John Muir, surrounded by books and papers, writes the President from his Martinez, California "scribble den."

MUIR

Dear Mr. President, There is now under consideration an application of San Francisco supervisors for the use of the Hetch Hetchy Valley and Lake Eleanor as storage reservoirs for a city water supply. This application should be denied, especially the Hetch Hetchy part. For this valley is a counterpart of Yosemite, and to dam and submerge it would be hardly less destructive and deplorable in its effect than would be the damming of Yosemite itself. I am heartily in favor of a Sierra or even a Tuolumne water supply for San Francisco. But all the water required can be obtained from sources outside the Park, whose sacred mountain temples are the holiest ground that the heart of man has consecrated. It behooves us all faithfully to do our part in seeing that our wild mountain parks are passed on unspoiled to those who come after us. Faithfully and devotedly yours, John Muir.

Muir pauses, then pens a postscript.

MUIR

Oh, for a tranquil camp hour with you like those beneath the sequoias in memorable 1903!

TR

I wish I could see you in person. And how I do wish I were again with you camping out under those great sequoias or in the snow under the silver firs!

TR picks up the phone.

TR

Pinchot.

Immediately, GP enters.

GP

Mr. President.

TR

Please look over this letter from John Muir. It does seem to me unnecessary to decide about the Hetch Hetchy Valley at all at present.

GP

This is not just about water. It's about electric power. Hetch Hetchy is the best power site in California.

TR

Have you seen it?

GP

No. But I'm told that its walls converge so closely that a dam can be built across that valley at comparatively little cost.

TR

Cost should not be decisive when we talk about the destruction of what Muir calls a second Yosemite.

GP

A dam will be built there, Mr. President, like it or not. California has no coal. If San Francisco doesn't use that valley for the public good, a power company will put a private dam across it by hook or by crook.

TR

So you would violate the valley to save it from exploitation?

GP

Corporate control of a Sierra watershed in a prime location can determine which lands are irrigated and which cities thrive. Not only would it be immensely profitable, waterpower can generate as much political power as the railroads have in California: with the legislature in its pocket and its man in the governor's mansion.

TR

You're dismissing the leverage government has with our control of public lands, including Hetch Hetchy Valley itself.

GP

How long will there be men like you in government, Mr. President? When public spirit is in the saddle, the public interest will govern. When it's not, private interests will have their way.

TR

I don't think we know enough about the future to know for certain how great any given danger is. And Hetch Hetchy is one of those cases where I am extremely doubtful. I want you to meet with Muir next time you are in California to discuss this with him thoroughly, with an open mind.

GP

I can do that. I have to go to Sacramento.

TR

See him then. And I'll meet you at the courts in an hour. We have another doubles match.

GP

We'll beat them this time.

GP exits. TR writes a letter.

TR

Dear John Muir, I will do everything in my power to protect not only the Yosemite, which we have already protected, but other great natural beauties of this country. But you must remember that it is out of the question permanently to protect them unless we have a certain degree of friendliness toward them on the part of the people of the State in which they are situated. I would not have any difficulty at all if nine tenths of the citizens took ground against the Hetch Hetchy project; but so far everyone I am aware of has been for it, and I have been in the disagreeable position of seeming to interfere with the development of the State for the sake of keeping a valley, which apparently hardly anyone wants to have kept under national control. Faithfully yours, Theodore Roosevelt.

ACT THREE

SCENE ONE: SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, 1907

MUIR

It's been too long since we were last together.

GP

And the time I have on this trip is too short. My appetite for being in your company always grew vastly by what it fed on.

MUIR

Tell me, Gifford, have ye gotten rich yet?

GP

Your advice has never gone out of my mind.

MUIR

Well, have ye?

GP

In a very small way I tried your plan of going alone. I was off for four days by myself.

MUIR

So much is deeply felt when we travel alone. Every leaf seems to speak. The love of nature's beauty grows in that sublime stillness.

GP

It's just very hard to do for someone in my position.

MUIR

Your position needs to move, mon! Let's go to the wild as straight as a bee to a flower. The American River is practically out the door.

GP

I have a train to catch.

MUIR

You would let iron rails speed you away from this magnificence?

GP

It is quite a sight: the glorious chain of Sierras tumbling like granite waves.

MUIR

A view from too great a distance, Gifford.

GP

I have been in those mountains. The big trees are the grandest of living things.

MUIR

You like big things.

GP

I always have, it's true: big rooms, big fish, big dogs, big leads in my pencils.

MUIR

Even big things need protection these days. Though it seems incredible that anyone would want to destroy such a valley. I wonder how you could side with those shifty politicians bargaining for half of Yosemite National Park like Yankee horse traders, as if the grandest of all our mountain playgrounds, full of God's best gifts, the joy and admiration of the world, were of no more value than a line in an accountant's ledger.

GP

You don't see the whole picture, John.

MUIR

The whole picture! What picture? Have you been to Hetch Hetchy?

GP

I have not.

MUIR

What else on God's good Earth does your "whole picture" depict that's so convincing to you?

GP

There's a political context to this, and it's not shifty. It's basic. You have made a great success of the Sierra Club. I congratulate you for that. But the love of nature cannot motivate a nation whose prosperity is built on the destruction of natural resources. We must make people recognize the responsibility our nation has toward those resources, that their continued destruction, without heed to future needs, will undermine our prosperity forever, robbing those who come after us.

MUIR

You needn't preach to me, Gifford. The bawling, blethering oratorical stuff drowns the voice of God Himself.

GP

We need political support to conserve the magnificence we both dearly love. Only through public advocacy of the principles of conservation did we secure the national forests and save a great expanse of the Sierra.

MUIR

Then why will you not save Hetch Hetchy?

GP

There's no way to do that.

MUIR

There are other abundant sources of water for San Francisco.

GP

Nothing can provide water power more cheaply than that valley.

MUIR

So that's the greatest good for the greatest number?

GP

Over the long run, yes.

MUIR

The greatest number is often found to be number one. To win votes for your party and your ambitions, you have joined the mischief-makers and robbers from Satan to senators, city supervisors, cattlemen, farmers, men often disguised in smiles and philanthropy, who try to make everything dollarable, who call their plundering "utilization of natural resources!" You had such great promise, Gifford, until you gave in to the enemy in the eternal battle between right and wrong.

GP

I don't see it that way at all, John.

MUIR

Of course you dinna ken my diminutive ramblings. The great mountain truth is hard to see when you're in the muckle down-dragging mud of politics.

GP

I am exceedingly sorry you feel that way. You're the best man I ever carried my pack beside. But I am fighting for what is right just as you are. I see conservation as a moral issue.

MUIR

You would flood Hetch Hetchy for morality? Those the gods would destroy, they first drive mad.

GP

You seem rather mad yourself.

MUIR

We have two ears and one mouth that we may hear more and speak less. Have your say.

GP

I think I care about the ranchers and farmers, shopkeepers, citizens who are trying to make their living, more than you do. I support the people who need to work, to build homes, to provide for their families. And that includes giving them the water and water power they need. The question for me is, will that water bring them prosperity or will it bring profits to the few. You have said I'm ambitious. Do you want to know my real ambition, John? It is to prevent the forces of monopoly from exploiting the wealth of nature that should go to everyone. I'm not ashamed of that. I'm proud of what I've accomplished. But there's more to do, and that's the picture you do not see.

MUIR

There's a bigger picture, Gifford, that you don't see. A bigger monopoly I am determined to prevent: the total control of nature by the man beast. Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the Creation? In going to Yosemite or to Hetch Hetchy, its twin, in looking through God's great stone books that were millions of years in the making, it is great comfort to know that multitudes of creatures, great and small and infinite in number, lived in God's love before man was born. Ignorance alone channels human love into stagnant pools, making it selfish and impure when it should be boundless as air and light. I want people to see this greater picture.

GP

They have Yosemite. They have many wonderful—

MUIR

Gifford, come with me. There will be another train another day, but never again a chance like this to receive the mountains into your soul.

GP

I would love nothing better, but I have responsibilities—

MUIR

You do have a responsibility. How can you, in your position of power, call for the destruction of a wonderland you have never seen? Dam Hetch Hetchy? As well dam the people's cathedrals for water tanks. No one that I know of who has seen Hetch Hetchy could ever want it dammed and flooded from wall to wall, its gardens and groves buried beneath a hundred and seventy-five feet of water. I believe that once people realize what they will lose, nine tenths or more of even the citizens of San Francisco will oppose the destruction of Hetch Hetchy Valley.

GP

I doubt that. San Franciscans in your own Sierra Club are against you on this issue.

MUIR

Let me show you what could be lost forever. Let's go there. The valley is close. And the view from the top of the wall of the main canyon is one of the grandest I have ever seen. Immediately beneath lies a yellow, sun-lit ribbon, with a silvery thread in the middle: that ribbon a strip of autumn-colored meadow; the silver thread, the Tuolumne River. Along the floor of the valley, between precipices like those of Yosemite, we will stroll to five waterfalls, each indescribably lovely. You must come there with me. It will take only a few days; days you will treasure for the rest of your life.

GP

I am afraid that you are being used by people who do not love that valley at all; men whose goals are very different from yours, John.

MUIR

Will you at least give the Sierra Club the chance to make a full presentation before the Administration?

GP

You will have a complete hearing. Now, regrettably, I have to catch that train.

MUIR

We must be true to ourselves.

GP

That we must.

GP walks away.

MUIR

And to the Lord.

GP turns back.

GP

John, you do know you are always welcome to visit us at Grey Towers. If you have work to do, you will find my stenographer could be of assistance.

MUIR

I'm not ready to write my memoirs, Gifford. But thank you for a' that.

Exit GP.

MUIR

The fight is finished, and I am almost finished myself. But wrong cannot last. Truth and right must prevail. Some good must surely follow.

SCENE TWO: THE WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON DC, 1907

At his desk TR looks through a pile of papers. He finds a document, scans it, then stops, his attention fixed on one page. The President picks up the phone.

TR

Pinchot.

GP enters.

GP

Mr. President.

TR

Did you see what they did on the Hill?

GP

I've been out of town.

TR

Look at this amendment to the Ag bill. The congressman from Astoria wrote it.

GP

Fulton's been out to get us for some time.

TR

He got us. Look: "prohibits the President from creating or expanding forest reserves within Oregon, Washington, Montana, Colorado and Wyoming."

GP

We're preparing reserves for you to establish in all of those states. Much of it mountainous. Headwater country.

TR

Now it's all up for grabs.

GP

I can't believe it! Did you see this coming?

TR

Fulton said nothing. He inserted this in silence.

GP

Tit for tat. That tactic established forest reserves in the first place.

TR

I remember well.

GP

But now we have public support. Can't you veto the bill and demand that Congress pass a new version?

TR

This is for appropriations. I must sign it to operate the government. They put the knife in us up to the hilt.

GP

What a defeat!

TR

It could just be the beginning. There are other bills I have to sign.

GP

Are you saying Congress can stop us from reserving public lands from now on?

TR

From now to the end of my term. It is hard to fail. But worse is never to have tried to succeed.

As his head drops, dejected, TR looks again at the document.

TR

Tell me, how far along were you on the paperwork?

GP

For the reserves? We identified twenty-one new national forests and planned to expand eighteen more.

TR

How much land?

GP

About sixteen million acres. We had yet to work out where to draw the boundaries. We still had to draft proclamations placing the land under federal regulation. I had hoped to put the first one on your desk a month from now.

TR

What can you do within a week?

GP

Within a week?

TR

I have seven days to act on this bill or it goes into effect without my signature.

GP

One week! It won't be like water off a duck. But we could drop everything else. Work day and night. I don't know. Maybe we could process them all, or many of them at least.

TR

This has to be completely secret.

GP

Many of us in the Forest Service are from Yale, Mr. President.

TR

Put your skulls and bones to work. And tell them: not a single word, to anyone.

GP

Are you sure you want to do this? If Congress discovers—

TR

Seize the moment, Pinchot. Seize the moment!

SCENE THREE: THE WHITE HOUSE AT NIGHT LATER THAT WEEK.

There are maps all over the walls and windows of the President's office. GP knocks softly. TR, kerosene lamp in hand, opens the door. GP enters. He has maps rolled up and fastened under his coat.

GP

Mr. President.

TR

Not so loud! Did anyone beside the watchman see you come in?

GP

No one.

TR

Is any light getting through to the outside?

GP

None at all.

TR

I knew these canvas maps would make good curtains. Let's get started. We have to get through all of these by dawn.

GP takes the maps from his coat and puts them in a cabinet.

GP

These are for tomorrow night.

TR

Are all the boundaries marked?

GP

I made sure of that. They all correspond with where the documents say they're supposed to be.

TR locks the cabinet, then turns to the maps on the walls and windows.

TR

All right. Which one is this?

GP

That will be the Rainier National Forest.

TR

I've seen that mountain, towering over Puget Sound. Utterly stunning. And this is in eastern Washington: Columbia River drainage.

GP

Right.

TR

And this?

GP

The Little Rockies, in Montana.

TR

I killed my grizzly there. In the foothills. From sixty yards away I shot him through his flank into the lungs. Then, after the second shot, which went in just below his heart, he charged straight at me. I saw the gleam of his white fangs.

GP

Mr. President.

TR

Hand me the proclamation. What's the matter?

One corner of a map covering a window drops loose.

GP

The Umpqua is falling. Light's getting through to the outside!

TR quickly blows out the flame on the kerosene lamp.

TR

There's a ladder around here somewhere. Godfrey! Where is it?

GP

I'll hold the map up— By George, I'm not tall enough.

TR

Hang on.

Opening a drawer, TR grabs a hammer and some nails and thrusts them into his pockets.

TR

Give me a hand. Not that way!

TR grabs GP's hand and boosts himself onto his shoulders. He nails the map back into place, then drops to the ground.

GP

Well done.

TR

Nothing's done. We haven't even begun, which is utterly my fault: I put that map up myself, and not well enough.

GP

It was ingenious of you to cover—

TR

It's lucky we can't kick ourselves in the backside, because if a man could kick himself for the trouble he causes himself, he wouldn't sit for a month. Now where are my matches?

GP

Here, I'll light it.

GP relights the lamp.

TR

All right now, give me the document for the Little Rockies. Where's my pen? Godfrey! Ah, here. I grabbed it with the nails.

Taking the pen from his pocket, TR signs a proclamation that transfers land to the US Forest Service.

GP

There's going to be an uproar in Congress, you know.

TR

That's for certain. Our opponents will turn handsprings in their wrath!

GP

They sure will. Which one shall we do next?

TR

Look at this. Look at this great country we're keeping for the public, forever. Sixteen million acres in seven days.

GP

And there'll be no rest on that seventh day.

TR

No sleep at all, at this rate.

GP

If anyone asks who created the national forests, the answer will have to be God. With an assist from President Roosevelt.

TR

Standing on your shoulders.

GP

Jumping on my shoulders.

TR

Which is this? Las Animas. "The souls." In southern Colorado and New Mexico. Incredible, beautiful country.

GP

There's nothing like it.

TR

I thought "alma" was soul in Spanish. Does "anima" mean the same thing?

GP

In Latin it means the vital breath, which we share with the animals. In Spanish it's the souls of the departed.

TR

Las Animas. I'll think of it as the soul of the land.

With a flourish, the President signs the document.

POSTLUDE IN GEOTIME

GP

What a sleep!

MUIR

How do you feel?

GP

Pretty serene.

MUIR

Coming to the mountains is going home.

GP

It's not wise to keep the spring too constantly compressed.

MUIR

Every dawn we arise into a new-created world, to begin a new life in a new body.

GP

Awakening in the mountain air with a fresh mind, all these glorious marvels sink deep in.

MUIR

On this day, life seems neither long nor short, and we take no more heed to make haste than do the trees and stars. This is true freedom, a good practical sort of immortality.

GP

We are at the pivot of the Earth, on the main current of the stream of time.

MUIR

Let's explore this timbered path. Do you see how the hardest rocks pulse with life? Secrets of divine beauty and love will be revealed to you by lakes, and meadows, and a thousand flowers, with an atmosphere of spirit brooding over it all.

GP

Which river is that?

MUIR

The Tuolumne.

GP

Are we upriver—?

MUIR

Of the reservoir. And the dam.

GP

I have a confession to make.

MUIR

A confession?

GP

An admission. I failed after all to keep the water power of the Tuolumne in public hands.

MUIR

Oh really? I've been out of touch.

GP

In spite of an explicit prohibition in the Act of Congress authorizing the Hetch Hetchy dam, in spite of a Supreme Court decision confirming the Act, profits from its energy output flow to a private corporation.

MUIR

And not to San Francisco?

GP

The City gets the inflow of water with no income from the power.

MUIR

How did that happen, Gifford?

GP

After the project went many years behind schedule and many millions over budget, certain politicians claimed the City couldn't afford enough copper wire to bring the electricity across the Bay. By then, the voters weren't willing to pay more. So Pacific, Gas, and Electric completed the transmission lines for the right to profit from the power they carried. Forever. What I feared came to pass.

MUIR

"The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley."

GP

Instead of trying to dam the valley on my terms, I should have stood with you to protect it from exploitation. I made a terrible mistake.

MUIR

What about the big political picture and the value of my opposition to you?

GP

We needed each other.

MUIR

What about the greatest good? Using nature's resources?

GP

Sometimes the best use is no use at all.

MUIR

I have an admission to make to you, Gifford. I've come to recognize that if it hadn't been for your political games, the public lands would have been lost, as you said they would be. Had you not created your utilitarian, politically astute Forest Service, little land would have remained intact without roads to let in tourists and machines; little land to preserve for wild life and for having wild places. Then too, had you and I not fought over Hetch Hetchy, there would be no system of national parks. That arose from the ashes of my defeat.

GP

But John, all these things happened after you died. I'm dreaming you. I must be dreaming!

MUIR

I am with nature in the most divine of her earthly dwelling places. You see, Gifford, death is as beautiful as life. Death is a gracious mother calling her children home.

GP

I am having a dream of you in the Sierra Nevada.

MUIR

The forest is full of dead and dying trees. It needs their beauty to complete the beauty of the living.

GP

I am living. I'm fully alive. I can move.

MUIR

How infinitely superior to our physical senses are those of the mind.

GP

I can wake up now.

MUIR

Don't be upset, Gifford.

GP

Upset! You imply I am dead and tell me, don't get upset?

MUIR

You'll get used to death. It's all very familiar. Earth and heaven are the same, one and inseparable. There are no stiff, frigid, stony partition walls betwixt the living and the dead. The blendings are as immeasurable and untraceable as the edges of melting clouds.

GP

This can't be death. It's too easy.

MUIR

The grave has no victory; it never fights. We are like flakes of grass through which light passes.

GP

My family won't be philosophical. My agency. My State! Twice I was governor of Pennsylvania!

MUIR

Congratulations.

GP

Can I see my funeral? I'd like to hear the speeches.

MUIR

Look, the reservoir's in the distance. Hetch Hetchy. The word means an edible kind of grass. The Indians ate it when it seeded. Look closely, Gifford. Can you make out those marks on the canyon wall that rising and falling water levels leave, like bathtub rings?

GP

That's no testament of the ages. It's practical as a pickax.

MUIR

It is a testament: A reminder of the multitude of lives and only the Lord knows how many species that died in that flooded valley. Eventually, though, the river will flow freely again. Time will wear the dam away. I only wonder if it will last longer than those who built it.

GP

Almost everyone involved in it is already dead.

MUIR

I mean mankind. Species die like individuals. Man will become extinct as surely as sequoia or mastodon.

GP

That is a very melancholy thought. I'm still getting used to my own death, John. That's enough.

MUIR

Usually, changes of this kind are exceedingly slow in their movements, though waste and destruction are taking place at a terrible rate.

GP

You did not live to see the two world wars. More than a hundred million people died of deliberate violence. God knows what the future will bring.

MUIR

Once I dreamed it possible that human destructiveness, like that of nature, will work out a higher good, a finer beauty. That a better civilization will come in accord with obvious nature, and all this wild beauty be set to human poetry and song.

GP

That is a great dream.

MUIR

One has to imagine a better world and work for it, as we did. And there is a better world which man is part of, if he could only see it. As soon as one begins to describe a flower or a tree or a storm or an Indian or a chipmunk, up jumps the whole heavens and earth and God Himself in one inseparable glory! When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe. Do you think human beings, with all our intelligence, cannot realize that? Will not ken the links between ourselves and everything else?

GP

We did all that we could, John. There's nothing more we can do. Nothing at all.

MUIR

For my part, I am glad the world does not miss me and that all of my days with the Lord and his works are uncounted and unnumbered. Come, Gifford, we have this endless day to read terrestrial scriptures. How interesting does man become considered in relation to the spirit of this rock and water! How significant is every atom of our world!