

THE TRAMP AND THE ROUHRIDER

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Based on a meeting in Yosemite valley between
John Muir and President Theodore Roosevelt

ACT ONE

A rear-screen projector shows a slide of MUIR and TR in their famous Glacier Point pose. The image fades with the lights to dark, and slowly comes to reveal the characters in an identical pose, downstage center, awaiting the snap of a photograph. Down left, there is a small wood fire, enclosed by a circle of stones, along with cups and teapot. A picnic basket sits nearby, containing apples and bread. Upstage right there is a tourist bench, upstage left, a boulder large enough to sit upon. When TR and Muir speak, they continue to look straight ahead at the photographer. Take as long a hold between each line as seems bearable.

MUIR

(After a longish hold, groans, mutters under his breath) Oh, come on, man! Just snap the shutter!

TR

Stop your fretting, John, one last photograph, and I'll send him off.

MUIR

(Another few seconds) What could he be doing under that shroud?

TR

Now, John, he's just waiting for that cloud's shadow to move off the Yosemite Fall.

MUIR

The Fall will evaporate before he takes this picture. (Pause) Is he a government photographer? Do you suppose he's having his lunch?

TR

Patience, John. These photos are for the ages, after all. Think history!

MUIR

History? The pace of things makes it feel more like geology.

TR

Ha! I'm not overly fond of all this picture taking myself, you know. I don't think my features separately are very good - with the exception of my ears. I like my ears; they are good. (Pause.) I always notice the ears of everyone.

MUIR

He may have died under there.

TR

Patience now...(A flash, finally.) There we are! (They break the pose and relax. To the photographer offstage, down center) Thank you, sir. No, no, no, I think that is enough picture taking - two of me and two with John should be a great plenty. What do you think John?

MUIR

I believe history has been very well served, Mr. President.

TR

Thank you, gentlemen, now off with you, all of you. Mr. Muir and I wish to enjoy the sunset in a peaceful solitude. Oh, tell the cook to have our supper ready just after dark. I want the beans prepared exactly as last night's beans. Weren't they splendid beans, John?

MUIR

Splendid.

TR

(Shouting) And tell Charlie to set out extra blankets - I smell snow in the air. And no visitors - absolutely no visitors! No reporters.

MUIR

No politicians!

TR

No other politicians! Ha! Thank you... goodbye. (They wave, MUIR half-heartedly, at the departing photographers, until they've disappeared from their view.) Gone, all gone. (Looking carefully about) No one lurking in the bushes, eh? (Claps his hands with delight!) Hallelujah! Alone again, Muir, free at last!

(MORE)

TR (CONT'D)

Come then, back to our game! (He moves vigorously to pull up a stump or a rock beside Muir)

MUIR

Our game?

TR

Scars! The Scars Game! - suspended yesterday on account of darkness, remember?

MUIR

Oh, that. I should like to do that, Mr. President, but perhaps we should chat a bit about some of the Valley's problems before resuming...

TR

(Rolling right over him.) No, no politics, Muir. Not on this day! We have more important things to do. A contest begun is a contest in need of completion. (Stripping off his coat, and rolling up his left sleeve.) So, left arm now! I am sorry about the picture taking, John, - when I wrote to ask you to spend these four days alone with me in the wilderness, I fear I'd forgotten some of the more annoying demands of my office.

MUIR

Well, now they've gone, I expect we'll have an opportunity to discuss some of issues...

TR

Tomorrow, Muir. I am today a truant schoolboy, and I intend to enjoy every moment of it. This morning I promised myself that as soon as the photo session was over, I would listen only to birdsong and friendly conversation. (Studying his left arm.) Come on now, your left arm. I'm ahead nine to five, right? Legs and right arm done, left arm and head to go.

MUIR

Aye, but it's a glorious time of day to stroll about the rim

TR

Come, we're nearly done. The left now. Ah, here! Look, Muir, the elbow, note the scar.

MUIR

(Resignedly, rolling up his sleeve.) Noted, Mr. President.

TR

Cuba again! Nicked by a Mauser bullet charging up San Juan Hill! That's two for Cuba, what with the shrapnel on the right wrist. Ten now for me, five for you. What have you got? (Muir half-heartedly studies his arm.) Remember the rule, visible scars only.

MUIR

Alas, this arm seems to have led an uneventful life.

TR

Nonsense, there must be history on there somewhere. Now, now, what's this? Other side. (Points) That large white patch there.

MUIR

Oh, yes. No idea really. A scrape somewhere. No, I remember now - it was when I was very young, a boy in Scotland, climbing about the ruins of the old Dunbar castle - the first of my mountaineering experiences - caught it on an iron grating.

TR

Good one! Good one!! Both good history and geography, eh? Ten to six then. My turn... ah, here, see that, runs around biceps?

MUIR

I do.

TR

Barbed wire. Dakota territory, running cattle at night. Thought I'd taken my arm off. Eleven-six. What have you got?

MUIR

I believe I've exhausted the history of my left arm, Mr. President.

TR

Me too. Right then, eleven-six, the head's next.

MUIR

I'll concede the head, if we could only...

TR

What about that blurry right eye?

MUIR

Ah - that. Indianapolis, working in a carriage material factory, I'm in my late twenties, prying out stitches in a leather belt with the sharp end of a file, it slipped, pierced my right eye. It blinded me - but only temporarily.

TR

Blinded you! Not bad. Eleven-seven, you're gaining on me. Here, right there, see it? (Indicating his forehead)

MUIR

I do.

TR

Buffalo hunt! A long, hard chase, Muir. A bull charged me as I was closing in for the kill. My pony, frightened, spun around and tossed up his head; I was holding the rifle in both hands, and the pony's head, striking it, knocked it violently against my forehead, from which, heated as I was, the blood poured into my eyes...

MUIR

Twelve-seven. You see, it's hopeless, Mr. President; please, do allow me to concede.

TR

Ah, John, very well. You'd never overtake me with just the head to go, anyway. A lifetime of clumsiness and charging headfirst into everything ensures my triumph.

MUIR

(Raising his cup.) To the victor then, and to his noble Scars.

TR

Thank you, Mr. Muir, thank you. I do like to win, even if I have to create my own game to do so.

(He stands, stretches.) Ah, I feel bully! Fine as silk! I can't tell you, John, how much this means to me, being back in the wilds of this great land - coming West, revisiting my beloved Badlands, chasing birds with Burroughs - Old John of the Birds - in Yellowstone, and now being here with you - Old John of the Mountains - in Yosemite!

MUIR

And I certainly appreciate your invitation...

TR

It is absolutely invigorating! I would have thought last night's camping among the solemn Sequoia utterly unbeatable, with that great fire you built, exchanging my stories of the hunt with your grand wild mountain adventures...

MUIR

And the beans.

TR

Ah, of course, the beans! But you may have outdone yourself here on the brink of this cliff - just look at the view into that Valley! Three thousand feet down to the Valley floor, you say?

MUIR

Aye, three thousand, more or less.

TR

Just look at this view.

MUIR

Well, God never made an ugly landscape, eh? All that the sun shines on is beautiful, - as long as it is wild.

TR

And Half Dome! Bully! Is there another mountain half so noble? You've conquered it, you say?

MUIR

Conquered? Well, it's not the San Juan Hill, Mr. President, brimming with hostile Spaniards. I've climbed it - climbed most of the mighty peaks you see before you.

TR

Bully! Except when hunting, I've never done any true mountaineering - save for climbing the Matterhorn and the Jungfrau in Switzerland as a young man.

MUIR

Significant mountains!

TR

Oh, the Matterhorn! It was like going up and down enormous stairs on your hands and knees for nine hours - excessively laborious.

MUIR

But the mountains call, and we must go, eh?

TR

Actually, there were some English climbers there. And I made the ascent chiefly to show them that a Yankee could climb just as well as they could. Ha! (Looks over the mountains.) And wouldn't I be a proud Yankee to stand atop any of these mountains!

MUIR

I could only wish we had more time, Mr. President. I've sauntered about these mountains for nearly forty years; you can hardly do Yosemite justice in just four days.

TR

True, but even a few days provides a much-needed break from politics - and from men who are nothing but politicians.

MUIR

Your break may be briefer than you hope Mr. President; when we drop down to the Valley tomorrow, you'll be finding more politicians than pine trees.

TR

Ah, yes. Those State Commission people... So much for dropping politics... Well, at least we have this afternoon and evening to do nothing but enjoy the sunset, - and one another.

MUIR

They've planned quite a celebration for tomorrow night, I'm told - a banquet, of course, exploding \$400 worth of fireworks - they even plan to 'improve' Yosemite for you, - by illuminating the Yosemite Fall with searchlights.

TR

Searchlights? Searchlights!

MUIR

Aye. Insuring that you'll better see their point of view, I suppose.

TR

They are a persistent lot, aren't they? On the train from San Francisco, one of those Commissioner fatheads poured more bibblebabble into my ear... If it wasn't for the high office I hold I would have taken him by the seat of the breeches and nape of the neck and chucked him out of the window.

MUIR

And I would have gladly held the window open for you.

TR

The whole lot of them circling about us as if we were a pair of coyotes in a convention of tom-cats...

MUIR

Well, they fear for their jobs. They know I hope to persuade you to return the Valley to the Federal Government, to attach it, as it should be attached, to the National Park.

TR

I don't know, John - California legislators seem heartily opposed - why would I do such a thing?

MUIR

Because you're a sensible man, Mr. President. And because, down there, in the Lord's grandest gardens, the State Commissioners have permitted, nay encouraged, such incredible neglect and abuse. Shabby buildings - butcher shops, liquor-saloons, lumberyards...

TR

Well, tomorrow, John...

MUIR

...even a hog pen, the stench of which floats to the top of these Domes on a rising wind. And the meadows! Every meadow in that Valley is fenced, and all the flower people trampled by horses and cattle. Tin cans and other rubbish lay about for all to see as if it were precious silverware exposed for sale.

TR

Tomorrow, John, eh? Tomorrow I'll examine the issue firsthand, silverware and all...

MUIR

And despite of all their abuse and neglect, the Commissioners are actually trying to persuade Californians that if the Valley were given back to the Federal Government, the state's sovereignty and honor would be somehow violated - as if you'd immediately remove it, Half Dome and all, to Washington.

TR

By Jove, a bold idea! (He sizes up Half Dome, located just back of the audience.) Just off the west wing of the White House, I should think. (They laugh.)

MUIR

Mr. President, we need a well managed, and unified park, defended by the United States Cavalry...

TR

Tomorrow, John, tomorrow I'll...

MUIR

...because frankly, the state commissioners are universally seen as hopelessly corrupt. The Valley needs federal control.

TR

Well, unfortunately, John, corruption can flourish just as rankly under federal as well as under state control.

MUIR

But it's ridiculous to have this Valley managed by the state when it's utterly surrounded by our national reserve.

TR

Our National Reserve! I always like the sound of that! A grand and noble concept! For which the nation owes you, John Muir, our heartiest thanks. (He shouts off across the Valley.) Hurray for John Muir! Hurrah for Yosemite - our National Reserve!

MUIR

But again, it is not - all of this - a national reserve. It is there, and there and over there. But down there, in that magnificent Valley, it is not. That is California's Yosemite Grant, and I tell you, it is being desecrated.

TR

I'm still not sure that I see what Federal control of it would accomplish...

MUIR

(Pressing) The national park idea is still young, the concept still being shaped. Federal control would allow what conditions here so desperately beg for - a fresh start.

TR

Tomorrow, John! Have I mentioned the word, tomorrow? Tomorrow will take us down to the Valley, where I can get a first hand look at conditions there, and as soon as our mountaineering is done, and (pointedly) politics once more becomes my daily bread, perhaps we can revisit this discussion.

MUIR

Well, good, Mr. President, of course - I know people sometimes find my passion for things a bit tiresome.

TR

Really?

MUIR

People sometimes do find my passions somewhat tiresome, I fear. I remember once I was standing before a magnificent forest in the Southeast, with my tree-lover friend, Sargent, from Boston. Boston! Well, I couldn't hold it in, eh? And I began to jump about and sing and glory in it all, when I happened to turn around and caught sight of Sargent standing there, cool as a rock. Oh, with a half-amused smile on his face, but never saying a word. "Why don't you let yourself out at a sight like that, man?" I asked him. "Well, I don't wear my heart upon my sleeve." he retorted. "Well, who cares where you wear your silly little heart, man? There you stand, with all heaven come down to earth, like a critic of the universe, as if to say, 'Come, Nature, bring on the best you have. I'm from Boston.'"

TR

Ha! Delightful!

MUIR

To which Sargent replied, "Muir, get a pulpit, man. Get a pulpit."

TR

(After a hearty laugh.) One more thing we have in common, John; I've often been accused, by friend and foe alike, of concealing a pulpit on my person. But Sargent...? Charles Sargent, the tree man from my alma mater?

MUIR

Harvard, yes, the very one.

TR

And the one you were about to travel around the world with, before you agreed to accompany me here.

MUIR

Aye. We're off to chase down some Old World trees, compare them with our own. We simply postponed the trip a few days. It made Sargent a bit cranky to do so, but I decided I couldn't refuse your invitation just because you happened to be President. And I did think we might be able do some forest good, talking freely around the campfire.

TR

Some forest good! Hmmm. This forest has certainly done me some good. Oh, those Big Trees last night! Like all Americans, I like big things, big prairies, big mountains, big wheat fields...

MUIR

I've heard you're fond of Big Sticks as well.

TR

Ah, yes. Muir, a President needs to careful in his public utterances. I could build a second White House from big sticks sent to me from all over the country. But being among the Big Trees last night! - John, no other country in the world could hope to match them.

MUIR

That's just what our trip around the world hopes to prove, Mr. President. Oh! I am reminded that Sargent - Sargent has a request of you. Well, here, I have his letter to me here; it should explain exactly what he hopes for. (MUIR takes a letter from his pocket, gives it to TR) But basically, for our trip, he thought a letter of introduction from you to some dignitaries abroad might smooth our path to the trees....

TR

Of course, I would be delighted to do what I can...(reading, while Muir pours himself some tea.) But Muir, the man wants me to write a letter to the Russian czar and the Chinese Emperor... (TR voice trails off as he becomes at first startled, and gradually, much amused at the letter's contents, eventually explodes.) Oh...Ha! By Godfrey...John, do you remember exactly the words in which this letter was couched?

MUIR

(Suddenly realizing that the letter contains more than he wants to share) Good gracious! There was something unpleasant about you in it, wasn't there? I had forgotten. Give me back the letter.

TR

Oh, but listen...'this President is altogether too much under the influence of that creature Pinchot'

MUIR

Please! Mr. President, I beg you, give me back my letter!

TR

'and has a sloppy unintelligent interest in the forest'

(He roars with laughter)

MUIR

This is dreadful... Please...

TR

Oh, Muir, think nothing of it. It is nothing I have not heard - and worse - a dozen times a day in Washington. Your crotchety Mr. Sargent will get a letter of introduction to our embassies abroad, which should give you what you need. Though I do think him a little harsh in regard to my good Chief of Forestry, "the creature Pinchot" (gives MUIR back the letter)

MUIR

Oh? I honestly believe that if this entire wilderness before us was utterly stripped away from us, and there remained only one tree - one tree reserved as the most beautiful and glorious - it would not be long before you'd find a lumberman, a lawyer, and Gifford Pinchot at the foot of it.

TR

(delighted) Harsh, John Muir, very harsh!

MUIR

Not so harsh as his plans for our wild lands, Mr. President.

TR

Well. (Deliberately changing the subject.)? Let's see what interesting tidbits Charlie may have packed for us! (He crosses to the picnic basket, picks out an apple, takes out a pocketknife to slice it up.)

MUIR

Pinchot is telling the timber thieves, the sheep men and all other spoilers of the forest that none of our public lands would be made into permanent reserves, if, in his exalted opinion, those lands could serve the "people" better in any other way. And by "the people" of course he means those same timber thieves and ...

TR

Gifford Pinchot is a man of tireless energy, devoted to the welfare...

MUIR

That man is devoted to sacrificing anything that stands in his way.

TR

That man is my friend.

MUIR

Well, your friend is compromising millions of acres of timberland...

TR

Oh, now, he has little opportunity to compromise anything! Pinchot's Bureau of Forestry is not yet in charge of any public timberland whatsoever. All of our forest reserves are now in the care of the General Land Office, managed by clerks, few if any of whom have ever seen a foot of the timberlands for which they are responsible, most with the intellectual capacity of your average balloon.

MUIR

Well, those balloons are now selling public land at two dollars and a half an acre on which a single tree is worth more than a hundred. Our government is like a rich and foolish spendthrift who has inherited a magnificent estate in perfect order...

TR

John, I agree! Unhappily, too many of our reserve managers - and some of our congressmen, too - seem to regard Public Life and Civil Service with the same enthusiasm that a vulture regards a dead sheep, but still...

MUIR

Yet another of Pinchot's pet projects! Allowing sheep in our national forest! Hoofed locusts! - Eating every blade of grass, every wild flower - at last leaving the ground barren...

TR

Well, now, some senators from the western states are insisting on some compromise there. Change will come, John, but I need some time to cultivate congressional friends for the battles ahead. Remember I was not elected to this office - and had not McKinley been assassinated...

MUIR

And Hetch Hetchy!

TR

Gesundheit!

MUIR

No, no, Mr. President - The Hetch Hetchy Valley. Pinchot actually favors damming up the Hetch Hetchy Valley!

TR

The Hetch Hetchy?

MUIR

Another beautiful Yosemite Valley, only a mountain or so away in that direction, part of our National Park, which Pinchot would drown hundreds of feet deep, to pipe water to San Francisco.

TR

Well, perhaps San Francisco's need for water...

MUIR

San Francisco needs water, yes, but that same water can be stored elsewhere, downstream! The Hetch Hetchy Valley, Mr. President, looks just like this one below you, a rare national treasure, carved by the same glacial forces as Yosemite, lying at the same height above sea level, with the same plant people, the same fellow mortals, the same waterfalls - all to be lost to our people's future? All this compromise and playing at politics...

TR

Bullfeathers! The constitution itself is a bundle of compromises. And public men are always obliged to compromise in order to do anything at all.

MUIR

Well, if public men allow the city of San Francisco to rip away part of our national park, why not next invite the sheep back into the Yosemite high country, or encourage the lumbermen to chop down our Sequoia groves? Would you have sawmills in the grove we slept in last night, Mr. President?

TR

You know I would not. Camping out last night with under those giant sequoias was like... lying in a temple - a temple grander than any human architect could build from them. It would be shameful to let them disappear. And in due time, we'll identify some lands like those to be set aside forever.

MUIR

Due time? 'Tis well past due time!

TR

Muir, let me be clear here. For me, conservation means development as much as it does protection. And Pinchot and I agree here - we should open all the resources of our national forests to regulated use.

MUIR

Use! Use! The holy war cry of the temple destroyers! Endless use!

TR

John, we're breaking new ground here; we need time to gradually develop a system of forestry, conducted along scientific principles. But so far this Congress has shown little enthusiasm for granting appropriations to do any "forest good."

MUIR

You must persuade them, Mr. President; get out your Big Stick.

TR

In time, Muir, but we're still in the 'speaking softly' stage of things. But if we need to move to another stage of things, I'll not need any stick. A round or two in the ring should do it. (Flourishes a few boxing moves. Muir looks at him with curiosity.) Have you never boxed, Muir?

MUIR

(Horrorified) Boxed! No, no indeed not, Mr. President.

TR

Dee-lightful pastime! I learned as a boy; boxed in my Harvard years. Though now in the White House I do but little boxing; a President looks absurd with a black eye or a puffed up nose, don't you think?

MUIR

I do think so.

TR

I do have a couple of Japanese gentlemen come in to wrestle now and then, but I may to abandon it; such violent work tends to lay me up. Though just before leaving Washington, they taught me a diabolical move, Muir, a magnificent throw. Come let me show you. (He approaches Muir, ready to lay on hands.)

MUIR

Oh, no, Mr. President, I think not...

TR

Come; just extend your arms toward my throat, like this, as if attacking...

MUIR

Look, Mr. President! (Points off.)

TR

What? What is it?

MUIR

It looks like the bird we saw last night in the Grove.

TR

A hermit thrush! Where?

MUIR

There, on the lower branches of that ponderosa pine.

TR

I don't see...

MUIR

Ah, gone. Flown off.

TR

Blast! My favorite songster!

MUIR

Perhaps he'll return to us... more tea, Mr. President?

TR

(Waves it off) The sweetest bird music I have ever listened to belongs to the Hermit thrush. I do hope he returns. His species may be disappearing on the East Coast.

MUIR

And no wonder, nearly every bird in the country is being attacked by plume hunters and egg gatherers...

TR

I know, Muir, I know...

MUIR

That's another thing, you see? We need to create reservations to protect...

TR

Now there I'm well ahead of you, Muir, for I've done just that. Last year, some of the Audubon people in Florida were distressed at the slaughter of birds at Pelican Island, where, for the sake of their plumes, hunters were killing breeding birds, and leaving nestlings to starve.

(MORE)

TR (CONT'D)

I could not imagine that one day my children and theirs would lose forever the chance to see frigate-birds soaring in circles above the storm, or a file of pelicans winging their way home in the afterglow of the sunset. So I asked my advisors, "Is there any law that will prevent me from declaring Pelican Island a Federal Bird Reservation?" They raised their eyebrows, shrugged their shoulders, hemmed and hawed, and I said, "Very well, then I do so declare it." And it is now set aside, I trust forever, for the use and benefit of our people as a whole.

MUIR

For the use and benefit of the birds, eh? Well, that is splendid. But if you can declare, by presidential decree, wild lands to be sanctuaries I would have you declaring wholesale! From every mountaintop!

TR

Now, a bit of caution, Muir...

MUIR

Let's have a Glacier Point Declaration! Declare, Mr. President, declare away!

TR

Muir, there is little point...

MUIR

How large is Pelican Island?

TR

Four acres or so.

MUIR

Four acres! Four acres! Only four! But there are millions of acres where our wildlife is threatened! If you could declare...

TR

John, listen! I can declare the law of gravity null and void, but it will not keep from your pants from falling down!

MUIR

What? My pants...

TR

Until Pinchot and I can create a Forest Service that can regulate them, the mere fact of a reservation will not rid us of poachers, or other spoilers of our wild lands. They will not stop their activities for a mere Presidential declaration.

MUIR

But four miserable acres in the face of so much need!

TR

It is four acres of hope, John, four acres of potential. I would like to see all harmless wild things, and especially all birds protected in every way. Goodness gracious, Spring would not be Spring without songbirds. But ...

MUIR

There is such need for speed, Mr. President. Never before has the need for places for refuge and protection for all our fellow mortals been greater. And no one on this entire planet could be as well placed to provide them as you are now. Who could speak for the trees more effectively than you?

TR

Oh, John, it was to help along things like this that I took this job, but...

MUIR

You know, I've often thought that if but one, but one, of my Sequoia Kings, in all their god-like majesty, could go to Washington, and there plead it's own cause, they'd never again be any lack of defenders for wilderness. You need to be one of my sequoia kings, Mr. President.

TR

Oh, wonderful, it's not enough I have to carry a big stick, now I have to be one. (Muir shows his despair at the flip answer.) Sorry. Just a little joke there. But, Muir, you should wear my hat for a moment, you should understand that, unlike you, I must be able to see the entire forest for the trees. And my forest is a little larger than yours.

(MORE)

TR (CONT'D)

In my forest, the Germans are challenging me in Venezuela, rebels are killing my soldiers in the Philippines, the Japanese are tormenting China and about to invade Russia. (He begins to pace about, pontificating a bit, not looking at Muir..) In my forest, I have an army and a navy to modernize, a coal strike to settle, a canal in Panama to build, and sugar, steel, oil, and railroad trusts to bust. And every minute of the day in my busy, busy forest, I am chased about by office seekers, congressmen, cartoonists, reporters, - and some lunatic hoping I'll endorse the idea of 'Teddy' bears. Trust me, Muir, wear my hat for just a moment, and you'd have a very different vision of things.

MUIR

Muir, sitting near Roosevelt's hat, picks it up and places it on his head. It falls below his eyes; he nods.) Aye. I see what you mean. (TR goes to Muir, lifts the hat to expose his eyes. Teddy bears? (TR nods painfully. They both break up laughing.)

TR

Tell me something of your Yosemite bears.

MUIR

Bears?

TR

Surely you must have encountered a beast or two hereabouts.

MUIR

Many times. (Suddenly amused by the remembrance.) Though it was my first interview with a Sierra bear I remember best. We were frightened and embarrassed, both of us, but I confess the bear's behavior was better than mine.

TR

Interview?

MUIR

Aye. Well, when I first came here to the high Sierra, a mountaineer, a hunter from whom I sought information about bears, well, he told me that all bears were very shy, and that I might travel these mountains for years without meeting one, for they always ran away from bad Brother Man, never showing fight unless wounded, or in defense of their young...

TR

I can certainly attest that they'll fight when wounded! Once, in the Rocky Mountains, I was on a hunt alone in the Rockies, when about dusk, I spotted a true trophy of a bear - a huge grizzly - in a valley below me, and I at once took aim and fired. Though confident I had hit the bear, he bolted, disappeared on me. Then, while I cautiously skirted a laurel grove, he suddenly reappeared, and most menacingly. Scarlet strings of froth hung from his lips; his eyes burned like embers in the gloom. I held true, aiming behind the shoulder, and my bullet shattered the lower end of his heart, taking out a big nick. Instantly the great bear turned with a harsh roar of fury and challenge, blowing the bloody foam from his mouth, so that I saw the gleam of his white fangs, and then charged straight at me, crashing and bounding through the laurel bushes so that it was hard to aim. I shot again; the bullet entered his chest and went through the cavity of his body, but he neither swerved nor flinched, but came steadily on, and in another second was almost upon me. I fired then for his forehead, - a bear's brain, you know, is about the size of a pint bottle; and anyone should be able to hit a pint bottle offhand at thirty or forty feet - but I am a poor shot, my bullet went low, entering his open mouth, smashing his lower jaw and going into the neck. I leaped to one side almost as I pulled the trigger; and through the hanging smoke the first thing I saw was his paw as he made a vicious side blow at me. The rush of his charge carried him past ... he made two or three jumps onward... his muscles seemed suddenly to give way, his head dropped, and he rolled over and over, and then down he went, like a shot rabbit. (A slight pause, Roosevelt feverishly excited by his remembrance, Muir stunned.) Now how's that for an interview?!

MUIR

(Slowly) ...Different... That's all very
...exciting... Mr. President.

TR

By Jove it was! Excepting my day on San Juan Hill, the most exciting and dangerous moment of my life was with that bear. Oh, I do hope we see bear here, Muir! I missed them in Yellowstone, although I was certain I had seen evidence of their presence in the garbage dumps.

MUIR

A noble setting for our mountain beasts. We provide the same dinning opportunities for our Yosemite bears in that shabby Valley down there.

TR

(Won't be drawn in) A hotelkeeper informed us that they had not yet emerged from their winter dens. But I think he lied to avoid my company because he did not like my politics.

MUIR

Well, the bears, too, might have heard something of your 'politics.'

TR

Nonsense, all bears are good Republicans! Indeed, I'm thinking of rounding up a few dozen grizzlies or so out here, take them back with me to roam about Washington. With luck they'll develop a taste for the sweetbread brains of some of our more fuzzywuzzy congressmen.

MUIR

Like most of our citizens, the bears may have difficulty separating Republicans from the Democrats?

TR

If they'd stay and feed long enough it won't matter. Ha! (He begins to exit.) I'll be right back.

MUIR

Well, you'll have some difficulty in gathering your grizzlies hereabouts, Mr. President.

TR

(Stops) I know they are in decline here.

MUIR

Muir now in front of TR, preventing his exit.)
 In decline? Remember that hunter I mentioned, the mountaineer who told me of the 'shyness' of bears? - Well, I shall never forget his dreadful enthusiasm on the subject of their general usefulness. "Bears!" He said, "Bear meat is the best meat in these mountains, their skins make the best beds, and their grease the best butter. Biscuits shortened with bear grease goes about as far as beans - a man can walk all day on a couple of them biscuits." I'm sure the bear would be grateful to know just how useful he is to Brother man. So, yes, the grizzly bear, here in California, is about all used up. I've not seen a grizzly bear now in these mountains for many, many years. All gone to biscuits, I suppose. "In decline."

TR

Well, still that hunter had something of a point, eh? And in the natural order of things, it seems clear man is entitled to make use of other creatures.

MUIR

Natural order? You know, in all my travels I never came across a wild animal that was made more for man than for itself.

TR

But meat, at least, is always a useful thing, is it not? The hunts I have most enjoyed supplied my cowboys with game.

MUIR

Meat? Well, if you need it the shops are full of dead cows, eh? .

TR

But still, it is useful to man - you must grant me that. Praise God for a steady aim and long rifles!

MUIR

Well, consider, Mr. President, had your grizzly made a meal of you, instead of you of him, would he not be entitled to believe that men were very useful - as meat for bears. Praise God for sharp claws and long teeth!

TR

Perhaps, but of course bears are not in the business of creating a republic in what was once remote wilderness. If wild animals were allowed to breed unchecked, they'd render any country uninhabitable by man.

MUIR

Good - we could declare that part of the country a National Park! We need more country uninhabited by man. It's only fair, since the land we do inhabit so often becomes uninhabitable by any other of God's creatures.

TR

Oh, bullfeathers!

MUIR

Now what's more uninhabitable than a city street?

TR

Seriously, Muir! If thoroughly protected, any bird or mammal would speedily increase in numbers so as to drive man from the planet; this has been proved by experience - deer in Vermont, for example, or the elk in the Yellowstone where the prime need now is to kill at least five thousand annually.

MUIR

Well, if you didn't annoy them so much, the bears would be delighted do the killing for you.

TR

Come, Muir, you must at least agree that it is always necessary to kill dangerous or noxious animals, like the bear, cougar, and wolf..

MUIR

I do not agree!

TR

...and I'll gladly agree that other game should only be shot when there is need of the meat, collecting for science, or for the sake of an unusually fine trophy.

MUIR

Ah, yes, trophies - adorn the saloons and parlors with body parts. Oh, such useful horns and hides!

TR

Well, in fact, true sportsmen, even trophy hunters, men who shoot only in season and in moderation, do no harm whatever to the species.

MUIR

The California grizzlies shall rejoice to hear of it.

TR

I mean that killing a reasonable number of bulls, bucks or rams - indeed, to slay half the males of any game would not stop the natural increase.

MUIR

Oh! Excellent! Such enlightened slaughter. Simply spare the women and the children!

TR

(begins to seem physically agitated) And there are many other positive aspects of the hunt. It requires skill in the use of the rifle, encourages self-reliance, resourcefulness, willingness to endure fatigue and hunger and risk, - all of which is of no small value to the national character.

MUIR

Character? How did I saunter about these mountains for so many years without a gun, and retain any character whatsoever?

TR

And all of you excellent people who protest against all hunting seem ignorant of the fact that - in a civilized and cultivated country - wild animals only continue to exist at all when preserved by sportsmen, who help keep the larger and more valuable wild creatures from total extermination.

MUIR

And so, all this endless, useful slaughter, preserves the species!!!

TR

(A slight pause, TR thinking.) Precisely.

MUIR

Oh, Lord!

TR

Even better! - Hunting provides for the free, adventurous life, for experiencing wild surroundings, the chance to study the ways and habits of the woodland creatures. Hunting - and this even you, Muir, should vigorously applaud - hunting allows the hunter to get nearer to the heart of wild things.

MUIR

Applaud?! Every time you get near the heart of a wild thing, you put a bullet in it!

The previous action during the hunting argument has brought TR to the edge of stage, and this last salvo by Muir has him thoroughly exasperate. Forgetting where he is, TR turns abruptly away, and nearly falls, Muir catches him as he totters.

TR

Arhhhg! Blast!

MUIR

Mr. President!. You're all right?

TR

I could have fallen. (He crawls over and looks out over the edge.)

MUIR

Well, a glorious death, eh? A mountaineer's death!

TR

Three thousand feet, straight down!

MUIR

Well, not entirely straight, Mr. President. You'd have done a bit of bouncing first.

TR

I did promise the commissioners I would drop into the Valley, but...

MUIR

I wouldn't have let you fall, Mr. President. You have far too much to offer us wilderness lovers alive and well.

TR

Oh, now Muir, ...

MUIR

In due time, of course.

TR

Those Commissioners have prepared fireworks for tomorrow night, you say?

MUIR

Four hundred dollars worth.

TR

And searchlights?

MUIR

That's the plan.

TR

Silly, nature-faking nonsense!

MUIR

I agree. (Pause) It's growing chilly. Sun's nearly down; the stars will soon be out.

TR

I still say it will snow.

MUIR

Hummm.

TR

(Slight pause) How long will it take us to get down to the Valley floor tomorrow?

MUIR

It would depend on the route we choose...

TR

I'm been thinking ... we could leave late in the day, give us a chance to walk about on the rim up here. Perhaps avoid at least some of the festivities planned by the Commissioners. Where's the most direct route down?

MUIR

The one you were about to experience, I suppose, (Mimes plunging off cliff) though I'll find us a lees exhilarating way. I tried your route once as a younger man, found it quite unpleasant.

TR

The direct route? (TR mimes it back)

MUIR

(Points across the Valley)_Well, not here, but one glorious winter day, - thinking it just the medicine I needed to recover from too long a stay in San Francisco, with it's stupid town stairs and dead pavements, I decided to climb up and through the Teneya Canyon, just over there. Well, I was ascending a precipitous rock-front, worn very smooth by glacial action, when - for the first time since I touched foot to Sierra rocks - I suddenly slipped and fell, and began somersaulting down the mountain until I became insensible from the shock. When consciousness returned I found myself on the brink of the precipice, wedged among some short, stiff bushes, trembling as if cold, though not injured in the slightest.

TR

Not even injured? You see? You'll never win my Scars of History game with anyone Muir, you've been far too lucky. No bruise, no broken bones?

MUIR

No bruise, and I've never had broken bones in my wilderness travels. Though I saw that if I had rolled just a bit further, my mountain climbing would have been over, for just beyond my bushes the canon wall steepened...

TR

Amazing! Never?

MUIR

(Having lost the thread) Never....?

TR

Had a broken bone? I myself have broken nineteen bones to date.

MUIR

(Astounded.) Nineteen!!

TR

Nineteen, yes. But you know, I once had an experience very similar to yours - a lucky fall - hunting in the mountains of the Pacific Northwest while I was stalking Bighorn sheep. It was during a rainstorm...

MUIR

The Bighorn. (Muir suddenly seems elsewhere.)

TR

Yes. Well, it was during a rainstorm... Are you with me, Muir?

MUIR

Oh, sorry, Mr. President... The Bighorn...

TR

Well, it was during a rainstorm ...hunting the sheep, when I slipped off a mountain ledge and fell about fifty feet into and through the branches of an evergreen. That tree broke my fall, though in that case at least, nothing else. By divine providence I escaped entirely unscathed.

MUIR

Did the Bighorn do as well?

TR

Did the...? Ha! On that occasion, Mr. Muir, the sheep did as well as you could hope for. Indeed you'll no doubt be pleased to know that since I've taken office, I've had little opportunity to enjoy a hunt. In Yellowstone, I very much wanted to supply our party with meat while we were out on the trail, as I always did in the Dakota territory. But I suppose it would not do for the President to be hunting in or near a national park, eh? I did manage to hunt down a mouse. I spotted it scurrying across the snow, leapt out of our sleigh and captured it in my hat!

MUIR

A mouse?

TR

My only Yellowstone trophy, but a successful hunt, Muir -.

MUIR

Must have been a sizable mouse, to provide meat for the table.

TR

The mouse was not for the table Muir, but for science. I sent the skin off for identification, hoping I have discovered a new species.

MUIR

Hmm. (Pause) Mr. President, I have something of a confession to make.

TR

A confession? Do tell.

MUIR

Well, in our earlier... discussion... on the merits of hunting... I asked how civilized people could possibly find pleasure in the slaughter or maiming of animals... you remember?

TR

Vividly.

MUIR

Then a while ago, you mentioned the Bighorn sheep, and I had a sudden -uncomfortable - recollection. Many years ago, I was sauntering through the Modoc lava beds, up in northern California, and I chanced upon four hunters, eagerly bent on hunting the wild sheep, to get their magnificent horns with which to adorn their walls. I joined them, not for the sport of killing sheep, but, I hoped, to learn something of their habits. The hunters came back to camp night after night, weary and sheep-less, and I was glad to see the sheep had so wild and safe a home. Then, one morning, while crossing the lava beds, one sharp eyed hunter spotted some, a flock of fifty, three hundred yards distant, standing proud, gazing at us. An old ram set off toward the safety of a nearby mountain, all the others following in single file, racing on by us at right angles - an thrilling scene. The hunters drew up, took deliberate aim, fired. One of the rams fell, a noble old fellow, broad and ponderous as a buffalo, probably weighing three hundred and fifty pounds. The brave sheep were now bounding wildly over the plain in a direct line for their castle mountain; yet a second fell, a ewe this time. Then the first, the ram, suddenly arose, and after staggering a few rods, while the hunters were reloading, ran firm and erect again. And I remember he halted, clearly outlined against the sky, broad and massive, huge horns thrown back over his shoulders - inspiring sight! - and then he vanished, going down back of a cliff. We raced up to the ewe, all that was left of the fifty. She was breathing still, but helpless, and with so gentle an eye ... poor woman sheep! One of the hunters drew a big knife and coolly shed her blood, which formed a crimson pool in a hollow of the gray lava.

TR

Now, Muir, I know how distasteful you...

MUIR

No, no, Mr. President - what I need to say is this: just a moment before, unarmed as I was, I would have worried that poor ewe like a wolf. And in the excitement and savage exhilaration while chasing that wounded ram, I, who have never killed any mountain life, - again, I felt like a hungry wolf in pursuit of prey.

TR

Well, Muir... (He is at a loss as to what he might say.)

MUIR

The truth is, - as much as I should like to deny it - only a few generations separate us from our grandfathers who were savage as wolves. This is the secret of our love of the hunt. Savageness is natural, it is civilization that is strained and unnatural. I expect we little know just how much wildness there is in us. In us, Mr. President, in both you and me. So if, in some of our discussion, if my opinions have offended you...

TR

John, I keep my very good health by having a very bad temper, kept under good control. Give it no further thought, it's all dust in a windy street.

MUIR

Well, I know I've been pressing you a bit...

TR

A bit! A president always feels he's within the range of the rifle pits, but Muir, you have sent more bullets my way than a battalion of Spaniards.

MUIR

But Mr. President... I... (He doesn't quite know how to say it)...well.

TR

Out with it, John! I can take one more volley, if absolutely necessary.

MUIR

It's just that... Well, here I am, a mere citizen, sauntering about alone with the President of...

TR

Now, John, I too am a mere citizen...

MUIR

Here I am, with the most exalted mere citizen of these United States, in the very wilderness I have spent a lifetime trying to protect. I would be ashamed of myself if I did not take this opportunity ...well, to press you.

TR

And I would be ashamed if I did not give you that opportunity - as I have done, and have promised to do again - tomorrow. John, the truth is, long before I arrived here, I was of course already well briefed on Valley problems, on your opinion of Pinchot, even the Hetch Hetchy, but it is for your particular views of these matters that I invited you on this trip. But for the last few hours of this lovely day, can you not give "the most exalted mere citizen" a chance to... well, to be a mere citizen. It's been all Pinchot here, Hetch Hetchy there, that, and Valley problems everywhere - could we not find another subject or two for the rest of this glorious day?

MUIR

We could. Of course, Mr. President. (Pause, an awkward few moments while each search for a safe subject matter. Then a loud report, off.)

TR

Wha...?? Thunder?

MUIR

Gunshot, I think, down on the Valley floor.

TR

Gunshot, here?

MUIR

Well, truth to tell, it likely represents tomorrow night's dinner. Shot in your honor, I expect.

TR

Dinner?

MUIR

The Commissioners still allow hunting in the Valley for the table. Some foolish deer has no doubt mistaken the Valley for a National Park.

TR

Hmmm. (Pause.) John, you know as soon as we reach the Valley floor tomorrow, the Commissioners will be subjecting me to all sorts of nonsense - and I now have a sudden vision of being thrust into the glare of searchlights, together with some innocent deer, blown apart by fireworks and gunshot. Do you suppose we could outflank them? Could we perhaps find another good camping spot for tomorrow night?

MUIR

On the Valley floor? Well, easily, Mr. President! Bridalveil Meadow is a stunning spot.

TR

Good. It's settled then; Bridalveil Meadow! We'll leave late, speechify but little, and evade the enemy.

MUIR

Grand idea, Mr. President - and it'll give us a grand chance to discuss the Valley's problems, and Pinchot's Hetch Hetchy plans...

TR

Muir, you are pressing ...(smiles) a bit.

MUIR

Ah. (He relents, pokes at the fire a while; TR studies him.)

TR

(Long pause, he smiles - it's clear John will never give up.) You know John, were I able to recall only one experience in all my life, to have erased from my memory all others, do you know what I would chose to remember?

MUIR

Yours has been an extraordinary life, sir; I could not guess.

TR

It would be my life on the frontier - on my Dakota ranch. The most vivid moments of my life.

(MORE)

TR (CONT'D)

When I first arrived there in the Badlands in '83 - only twenty years ago now - I found a land of vast snow-clad wastes, melancholy marshes, mighty rushing rivers, and especially, the endless prairies shimmering in the bright sun. It was already past the time when the great herds of buffalo covered the waving grass land for hundreds of square leagues, and when on the march occupied days upon days in passing a given point, but the wild game seemed plentiful, and even the buffalo still stared at the passing horsemen - adding great pleasure to all the innumerable sights and sounds of the wilderness. I spent a happy time there, fulfilling a boyish ambition of mine on our American frontier. We are so very rarely able to, actually and in real life, dwell in our ideal 'hero land'.

MUIR

We have been fortunate men, Mr. President, to have gained so much from wild America.

TR

Fortunate men, yes. But Muir, a few weeks ago, on my way west here, I again had an opportunity to ride out over that rough, rugged land I love so much - a ride, I confess to you now, I found quite... disheartening. A mile off I could see on the horizon, through the strange shimmering haze, the shadowy white outlines of something which loomed vaguely up till it looked as large as a prairie wagon; but as I drew nearer it dwindled, took a clearer form, until it at last changed into the ghastly skull of some mighty buffalo long dead - gone to join the rest of his vanished race. And all around me, the Badlands were strangely silent, the buffalo, yes, but the elk, big horn sheep, grizzly bear too - gone, all gone, driven to the far reaches of the continent by hunters and civilization. In just twenty years, John. All that wildlife. Then at Yellowstone..

MUIR

(Jumping in) Wildlife, yes, but it is our wild lands that support that wildlife too, Mr. President. (He begins reasonably, but grows passionate, scarcely acknowledging TR's attempts to interject.) Already, from Maine to Georgia and all the way over the Rocky Mountains, the land has already been cleared and burned into melancholy ruin.

(MORE)

MUIR (CONT'D)

And now having reached the very last of the great aboriginal forests, here on the shores of the Pacific, the ax and the saw are still insanely busy - chips are flying as thick as snowflakes, from the Sierra to Alaska. Every year thousands of acres of pine-clad forests are vanishing in clouds of smoke - and vanishing with them go the soil, the underbrush, the springs, climate, scenery and our fellow mortals. And the poetry and the religion. All sold to the highest bidder!

TR

Yes, but John, you must realize that I shall always believe it is the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land.

MUIR

But mountain parks and reservations are useful, not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life!

TR

That is one of the principle reasons ...

MUIR

Any fool can destroy a tree. It cannot run away, and if it could it would still be destroyed, chased and hunted down, as long as a dollar can be got out of its bark hide.

TR

John, I do not recognize...

MUIR

(really on a roll now) And few that fell trees plant them, nor would planting do much towards getting back anything like our noble primeval forests. During a man's life only saplings can be grown - in the place of trees tens of centuries old. It took more than three thousand years to make some of the trees we camped under last night. And in all those wonderful, eventful centuries since before the time of Christ, God has cared for these trees - saved them from drought, disease, storm, tempest, flood, avalanche - but he cannot save them from fools - only Uncle Sam can do that!

TR

(Abruptly) Well, Uncle Sam should like a chance to speak!

MUIR

(Pause, Muir realizes to whom he is pontificating.) Mr. President...

TR

Now let me finish my thoughts, John! You know, of course, that after I left the Badlands I went to the Yellowstone. And there I saw those thousands of elk; saw that the herds of buffalo there and the Bighorn, though small, are progressing nicely. Well, observing the difference between Yellowstone and the Badlands, and now, adding to those experiences our ...chats... well, I confess I'm convinced of an urgency I have not felt before.

MUIR

Oh, yes sir, unless we are able to quickly rouse ourselves...

TR

Muir! (Muir shuts up and sits.) I do see now that unless we are very quick to act, the coming generations will be reproaching us, not for what we have used, but for what we have wasted. We are on the threshold of a new century, Muir, and what will they say of us a hundred years hence if we do not leave this land a better land for our descendants than it is for us? And so, John, I have decided. When I return to Washington I'll begin immediately. (Pause, Muir silent.) I will see what I can do. (He extends his hand) For wild America, John. And to get you off my back.

MUIR

The Valley?

TR

I shall make every effort to make that Valley part of our National Park.

MUIR

The Hetch Hetchy?

TR

San Francisco will make do without it while I am President.

MUIR

Declarations?

TR

I will declare (picking a number at random) ...
50 ... wildlife preserves. And throw in a few
national parks as well.

MUIR

A grand beginning, Mr. President.

TR

Beginning?!!

MUIR

And for every acre that you gain, ten thousand
trees and flowers, and all the other mountain
people, and the usual unborn generations, will
rise up and call you blessed!

TR

Now don't get all giddy on me, Muir. And you'd
be wise to remember the words of one of my
Rough Riders campaigning for me: "Mah Colonel
told us we might meet wounds and death and we
done it, but he was thar in the midst of us,
and when it came to the great day he led us up
San Juan Hill like sheep to the slaughter and
so will he lead you."

MUIR

(laughs) For the cause of wildness, lead on,
Mr. President. The enemies of wildness are
beginning to tremble.

TR

Before our battle is over, the enemies of
wildness will cross themselves at the mention
of our names. We will beat them to a frazzle;
do not forget the word, frazzle.

MUIR

Frazzle! Oh, happy word!

TR

For wild America, Muir.

MUIR

For wild America, Mr. President. (MUIR takes
his hand enthusiastically) For wild America!
A noble promise, Mr. President. (The two men
have arranged themselves on stage to match the
opening photo shot.) I confess I do feel
giddy, very ... bully, Mr. President. My head's
swollen larger than Half Dome.

TR

Mine too. Ha! (They hold the pose a moment, enjoying themselves. Then, TR point to the sky.) But there! There's nature's remedy for a swollen head. Look east, Muir, where the stars are already out. Look, there, do you see it?

MUIR

See what?

TR

There. The Great Square of Pegasus?

MUIR

I do, Mr. President.

TR

And do you see a faint light-mist, in the lower left hand corner.

MUIR

Andromeda?

TR

Indeed. The great Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda. Muir, that one little smudge in the sky is as large as the Milky Way. It is 750,000 light years away. It consists of one hundred million suns, each larger than our sun. And it is but one of a hundred million galaxies.

MUIR

Well, that snaps my head back into its proper proportion!

TR

Always works for me.

MUIR

And if our hats still fit our heads, I think we should put them on and head for camp, eh?

TR

Indeed we should! (They put on their hats; stop for a last look at the dying sun.) Well, then - to the beans, Mr. Muir!"

MUIR

To the beans, Mr. President! To the splendid beans! (They begin to exit, Muir leading, but he turns on TR.) But Mr. President - about Pinchot and his...

TR

Muir!

MUIR

The beans. (They exit, chuckling)

THE END