

U.S. Grant, Four O'clock in the Morning

R.F. Tripp

Let's get started. I'm famished! Eggs and a cigar for me, thanks. Make those sunny side up. Black coffee? You bet! Listen to those birds! We had birds like that in Illinois. Don't know their names. Never could remember names of birds, *or* plants. Trees? I'm hopeless with trees too, except for the obvious—oak, pine, poplar, what have you.

Illinois? That was tough. Drink helped, some...got me through the day. But damn, how many days can you survive working in a harness shop, and with no end in sight...much less purpose? When they asked me to come back, when I got that letter, what a relief. Like I had to decide! A war!—something to sink your teeth into, a reason to put your brain back in gear...full employment, ideas to kick around, thinking on your feet. Real stuff. Poetry-down-the-road stuff.

Of course it's horrible, war...but then, but then, something, something...can't put my finger on it, but it's there. Good, too. Shouldn't say good. Shouldn't say great. Inclined to, though. Men are great at it, for sure. Maybe a kind of small great. But big, any way you look at it...huge, really. Unbelievable when you see it, are in it. A privilege in a way. Sounds strange, but true, for me anyway. Air's alive, caissons clattering and clanging, rolling into place—clutter, dust, sweat. Horses, they know, they know somethin's up...see it in their eyes, and how they work their ears. Nostrils, too, all big, nervous—can't keep'em still.

Confusion on the surface. Not really though. Sometimes maybe. Chaos sometimes. Like when you loose direction, when everything gets switched around, jumbled. People 'round you disappear—like that! You're in a group you know, then suddenly you're with people you've never see before.

Beats Lincoln's job, though. How does he stand it? You couldn't hand it to me on a silver platter—sitting in that little room in that ridiculous white house...runners coming and going, in and out, in and out all day, and half the night...and him scribbling notes, wondering what the next move should be, always trying to second guess, being blindsided.

Me? I'm going home after all this. Then west. Lend a hand with the Indian wars. Keep moving, keep moving. Stay away from the politicians, not get suckered in. I'd have to stay drunk to stay in Washington after all this.