CASTING SIDES — U.S. SOLDIERS (1898)
Roles: MERRICK (lead) · MILLER · HALE | Original audition scene — not from final material

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EXT. A DUSTY PLAZA - MIDDAY

A ration table piled with crates and sacks of rice. Heat shimmers. HALE (early 20s, eager) fans himself; MILLER (30s, watchful) counts coins. A line of silent locals waits.

MERRICK (40s, unhurried) steps up, surveying the crowd like a man admiring his own garden.

MERRICK
You know what wins a country, Hale? It isn't the rifle.

HALE
...The flag, sir?

MERRICK
(smiling, lifts a loaf)
Bread. Feed a man long enough and he forgets who used to bake it.

MILLER
They don't look grateful, Captain.

MERRICK
Gratitude takes a generation.
(beat)
Their children will salute us. You don't conquer the men, Miller — you raise the sons.

Hale laughs, uneasy. Miller doesn't.

HALE
And if the fathers won't line up?

Merrick sets the loaf down. Gently. Looks out at the line.

MERRICK
Then they go hungry. Hunger does the convincing I'd rather not.
(warm again)
Smile, son. We're the good news here.

Miller keeps counting. Hale forces a smile. No one smiles back.

MILLER
(quiet)
...They're still not smiling.

MERRICK
Give it time, Corporal. Everybody smiles eventually.

He walks the line, patting each crate as he passes.