

ONCE AN EMPRESS

Written by

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Based on the book *The Happy Days of the Empress Marie Louise* by  
Imbert de Saint-Amand  
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INT. COLORNO PALACE, DUTCHY OF PARMA - MORNING

Reclining in an elegant Rococo Chaise in the Ducal Gardens of Colorno Palace in the Duchy of Parma, fifty-five-year-old Duchess Marie Louise recounts the happiest years of her life with Napoleon Bonaparte, decades after his death.

OLDER MARIE-LOUISE

I am probably the most misunderstood woman in the pages of history.

My name is Marie Louise of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine. Among my titles were Archduchess of Austria; Empress of the French; Queen of Italy; and now Duchess of Parma, Piacenza, and Guastalla.

I was born Maria Ludovica Leopoldina Franziska Therese Josepha Lucia, in my family's winter residence of Hofburg Palace in the year 1791. My father, Francis, was Emperor of Austria and the Holy Roman Empire. My mother, Maria Theresa, was Princess of Naples and Sicily, and Empress of Austria.

At the tender age of 18, I was given by my father in marriage to the most powerful and feared man in the world: Napoleon!

I was only an innocent girl at the time, but I was treated to the most spectacular and illustrious life imaginable with him. Napoleon loved me, and I, eventually, came to love him. Let's just say our marriage blossomed into the very stuff that dreams are made of. But, the happiness we both shared lasted but four short years.

Then came the retreat from Russia, his forced abdication as Emperor, and banishment to the infamous Island of Elba. I never saw him again, Papa saw to that! Nor did he ever play again with the son we had together, his namesake, Napoleon the Second.

Permit me, if you will, to confine my story to those happy days in the palaces and manicured gardens of The Tuileries, Fontainebleau, and...Saint-Cloud.

I/E. AUSTRIAN-FRENCH PAVILION, ST. PETER AM HART, BAVARIA -  
AFTERNOON

The screen reads, St. Peter am Hart, on the Austrian-Bavarian  
Border, March 16, 1810.

A finely decorated wooden pavilion is approached by a long  
entourage escorting Austrian Archduchess Marie Louise to her  
rendezvous with select members of the French Imperial Court,  
who will accompany her the rest of the way to the Château de  
Compiègne, located north of Paris, to meet her betrothed  
Emperor of France.

This ceremonial site consists of three buildings,  
interconnected by adjoining doors. The easternmost structure  
is to house the Austrian delegation. The westernmost, the  
French. The middle room will serve as neutral ground, where  
the Archduchess will sit on a throne to witness the signing  
of her marriage contract with Napoleon Bonaparte.

Soon exiting her coach, Marie Louise is guided to the  
Austrian side of the pavilion through a gauntlet of freshly  
planted trees.

INT. FRENCH QUARTERS, AUSTRIAN-FRENCH PAVILION, ST. PETER AM  
HART, BAVARIA - MOMENTS LATER

As for the French, they impatiently wait in their easternmost  
quarters to see this new Empress.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Whatever are you doing Monsieur de  
Bausset?

DE BAUSSET

Well, I have made some tiny holes  
in the door to get an advanced  
look. Don't you want to see the  
Archduchess?

He holds out a wood-boring gimlet for the members of the  
Court to see. Monsieur de Bausset decides to try out one of  
the holes.

Wait! She's coming into the center  
room.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Monsieur de Bausset!

Stomping her foot, then pausing to reconsider.  
What does she look like?

DE BAUSSET

Well, to begin with, she is tall.  
The Emperor will have to get  
loftier shoes!

(laughing)

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Monsieur de Bausset!

(musing)

What else?

DE BAUSSET

Alright. She is stately, with  
porcelain skin, fine features,  
blond hair, and the most radiant  
blue eyes. Come, see for yourself.  
Try that hole right there.

Pointing much lower.

I bored that one especially for  
you.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

I'll do no such thing!

COUNTESS LUCAY

Allow me. I'll take a look.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

You certainly will not. Back to  
your place!

COUNTESS LUCAY

Yes, madame.

(frowning)

PRINCESS CAROLINE

This is unseemly...

DE BAUSSET

We're talking about your future  
sovereign, Your Highness, and your  
brother's new wife. My goodness,  
she's as beautiful as your sister  
Pauline.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Oh well, alright. One look.

Peering with her left eye, then the right.

Such a beautiful gown. Gold brocade  
inlaid with dazzling flowers. Too  
bad she'll have to leave such an  
expensive garment behind.

(MORE)

PRINCESS CAROLINE (CONT'D)

(observing)

She's seating herself on the throne. You're right, Monsieur de Bausset, she is striking. So quintessentially German!

DE BAUSSET

To be sure. The Emperor will be pleased!

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Oh, wait...

Covering her mouth, while looking up from the hole.

(giggling)

Our new Empress has a dog!

DE BAUSSET

You don't say! A big one?

PRINCESS CAROLINE

No, a small one. Very small, in fact.

DE BAUSSET

A dachshund, perhaps?

PRINCESS CAROLINE

I know what a dachshund looks like. No, it's a...

DE BAUSSET

May I?

Princess Caroline steps aside, allowing Monsieur de Bausset to determine the breed.

The dog is small alright. He wants to jump up on her lap! Is anyone familiar with varieties of German dogs?

COUNT OF SEYSSEL

I am.

The courtiers turn their heads toward the Count, who approaches Monsieur de Bausset. He soon gains access to the doctored door.

Where exactly is the dog again?

Peeking into the large hall.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

On her lap, Count!  
(impatiently)

COUNT OF SEYSSEL

Oh, yes, I see him. He's laying down, but by his size and coat, I would say he is a dachsbracke!

PRINCESS CAROLINE

A dachs, what?

COUNT OF SEYSSEL

A dachsbracke. It's German for badger hound. Though, this dog is much smaller. It's very possible the Austrians are working on a smaller breed. A lapdog, if you will!

Moving away from the door.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Well, that dog will not be accompanying us to France. In fact, the Archduchess can take nothing with her from Austria! That's a French royal tradition for foreign brides. That goes for clothing, shoes, jewelry, furniture, luggage, everything! Besides, my brother hates dogs, especially Pauline's.

As she bends to take another look, an Austrian dignitary now walks towards the French delegation's door.

Quick, everyone back in your places! The Austrian Master of Ceremonies is coming to the door. I hope he doesn't notice the holes.

DE BAUSSET

He won't! I made them extra small. Why, you'd have to be a surgeon to notice them...

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Quiet! Here he is.

There's a knock at the door.

INT. CENTER ROOM, AUSTRIAN-FRENCH PAVILION, ST. PETER AM HART, BAVARIA - LATER

With the marriage contract firmly in place and Marie Louise's dowry fully inventoried, every member of the Austrian delegation, however low their station, lines up to kiss the hand of their departing Archduchess.

As these last kisses are given, Princess Caroline nervously readies herself to receive the Empress into the arms of the French. The young monarch soon rises majestically from her throne and, after cordial introductions of the Austrian Court are made by Prince Trautmannsdorf, the new Empress is presented to the French Court by the Prince of Neufchatel, who then escorts her to the West room, followed by her Grand Mistress, Countess Lazansky. Once inside the French room, with the now-perforated door securely shut, Princess Caroline welcomes the new Empress by draping both arms around her neck.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Dear sister Marie Louise, I welcome you in the name of my brother, Napoleon, Emperor of high France. He bids you safe voyage and anxiously awaits your arrival at Compiègne.

Princess Caroline now invites only the most distinguished duchesses, counts, and dukes within the French Delegation, to pay their respects to the new Empress. With that, they depart the pavilion and proceed by carriage to nearby Braunau.

INT. HOME OF A WEALTHY MERCHANT, BRAUNAU - DUSK

After a lavish celebration given for Austrian and French courtiers, as well as local dignitaries and guests, Princess Caroline and Marie Louise retire inside the home of a local wine merchant, where the Empress is required, by tradition, to strip off all of her Austrian clothing, bathe, and re-dress in opulent French attire.

That next morning, the French entourage travels sixteen hours to the first stop on their way home: Munich.

INT. THE RESIDENZ, HOME OF THE BAVARIAN ROYAL FAMILY, MUNICH - AFTERNOON

The French delegation and escort, having just completed their leg from Braunau to Munich, embark on the palatial rooms of the Residenz, home of the King and Queen of Bavaria. Great festivities, the likes never seen before in Munich, continue late into the night.

INT. THE RESIDENZ, PALACE OF THE BAVARIAN ROYAL FAMILY,  
MUNICH - MORNING

The next morning, it's another sixteen-hour journey, this time to Stuttgart, but not before Princess Caroline requests a last-minute private conversation with Marie Louise in her suite.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Good morning, Your Highness. I hope you had a restful night.

Marie Louise's little dog runs between Princess Caroline's legs.

Oh! How charming.  
(sarcastically)

MARIE-LOUISE

His name is Schatzen. It means sweetie.

Laughing, as she watches her little dog run circles around her sister-in-law.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

How...nice. May we sit somewhere?

MARIE-LOUISE

Why, yes. I'm sorry. How inconsiderate of me!

Marie Louise leads Princess Caroline into a sitting room. She waits for her guest to begin the conversation, with both hands folded on her lap.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

I'm afraid something has come up among my lady courtiers. It seems that they're opposed to having your Grand Mistress, Countess Lazansky, accompany you to France.

MARIE-LOUISE

Heavens, why?

PRINCESS CAROLINE

They feel, oh...how shall I say this? They feel that her presence could somehow interfere with properly acquainting you with French culture.

MARIE-LOUISE

Why, that's ridiculous! Countess Lazansky is the most French-acquainted member of my staff. Besides, the Countess is my sole confidant.

Gazing at the floor.

She has been with me since I was a child!

PRINCESS CAROLINE

I understand, Empress, but...

MARIE-LOUISE

(restrained)

I was promised that one of my very own servants could accompany me to France and remain there with me for an entire year.

Lifting her brilliant blue eyes to meet Princess Caroline.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Granted, but, never the less, the ladies are strongly insisting that Countess Lazansky return to Vienna.

MARIE-LOUISE

This is a complete...

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Today!

MARIE-LOUISE

I shall protest to my husband!  
(defiantly)

PRINCESS CAROLINE

And upset the emperor upon your arrival with such a trivial request! Risk a bad first impression?

Countess Lazansky gently knocks on the door.

COUNTESS LAZANSKY

I'm sorry to interrupt you, Empress, but the carriages are due to leave in one hour.

MARIE-LOUISE

Very well.

Waiting until Countess Lazansky is safely out of the suite.  
 This is a clear violation of the  
 agreement made with my father, not  
 to mention our ambassador.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Well, this was unforeseen and, as  
 such, it changes the arrangement. I  
 need you to send Countess Lazansky  
 home, friend or no friend. Now!

Reluctantly yielding to the wishes of her brother's  
 representative, Empress Marie Louise buries her face in her  
 hands.

MARIE-LOUISE

(sobbing)

I shall yield for the time being...

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Good. I'll make the necessary  
 arrangements. And another thing! I  
 can't bear another sixteen hour  
 ride with your little dog. Tomorrow  
 she will have to be consigned to  
 the baggage train.

MARIE-LOUISE

Oh, alright.

(reluctantly)

I'll be sure to have her fed in the  
 morning. Just make sure the  
 courtiers give her plenty of water.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

I shall, Empress. There now, wasn't  
 that easy...?

Princess Caroline departs the room, leaving the suite.

Later, fearing her sister-in-law will prevent any kind of  
 farewell meeting with Countess Lazansky, Marie Louise sends  
 word to two reportedly friendly ladies-in-waiting to arrange  
 a private visit with her Grand Mistress.

INT. THE RESIDENZ, PALACE OF THE BAVARIAN ROYAL FAMILY,  
 MUNICH - MOMENTS LATER

A short time later, Marie Louise receives a knock at the  
 door. She now stops the lady-in-waiting in her tracks.

MARIE-LOUISE  
I'll get this. Yes, what is it?

MARGUERITE  
(whispering)  
Pardon me, Your Highness, but I  
have been sent by Countess  
Lazansky.

Marie Louise retorts to her servant.

MARIE-LOUISE  
That will be all. You may go now.

The young maiden departs the suite through a servant's door.  
Come in.

MARGUERITE  
No, no! I've been instructed by the  
Countess to wait outside the door  
to stand watch.

MARIE-LOUISE  
To stand watch?

Marguerite nervously darts her eyes down both ends of the  
broad hallway.

MARGUERITE  
Oui, votre Altesse. My fellow lady-  
in-waiting and good friend, Jeanne,  
will be bringing Countess Lazansky  
through a secret passageway door in  
your suite any moment now, and I am  
to, well, stand watch.

MARIE-LOUISE  
Je comprends.  
(complying)

Marie Louise proceeds to sit patiently on the bed, awaiting  
her Grand Mistress. A knock is now heard in the far corner of  
her bedroom. She rises and follows the sound of the knock,  
feeling her way along the wall, and finally stands back from  
the disguised entranceway.

Come in!

COUNTESS LAZANSKY  
Your Highness!

Sweeping through the secret entranceway.  
Thank you, Jeanne. That will be  
all...  
(smiling)

JEANNE

I shall return in fifteen minutes,  
madame.

COUNTESS LAZANSKY

Very well. I'll be ready...  
(hesitantly)

Jeanne ducks back into the passageway, securing the door from the inside.

MARIE-LOUISE

This is all so terrible.

Throwing herself into her Grand Mistress's arms and sobbing.

COUNTESS LAZANSKY

I know, Your Highness! But I am confident that when your husband and your father hear about this, they will grant me permission to be with you in France, as originally planned.

After their embrace, they proceed to sit down on the edge of the bed.

Princess Caroline has no right to deny me passage with you! Watch out for her mein süßes Mädchen!

MARIE-LOUISE

I will, mein liebster Freund! And I shall count the days until we're together again.

COUNTESS LAZANSKY

As will I. Who knows, I might even receive word to join you in France before reaching the Austrian border.

MARIE-LOUISE

(misty)  
Oh, that would be the best wedding gift imaginable.

They sit silently on the edge of the bed for a moment. Countess Lazansky, now calculating the remaining minutes of their all-too-short visit, takes Marie Louise's hand.

COUNTESS LAZANSKY

Do you remember the first book I ever read to you?

MARIE-LOUISE

*Marchenbuch!*

COUNTESS LAZANSKY

Yes! Thousands of times, I might  
add...

MARIE-LOUISE

And the book of games, later on.  
(whimsically)  
*Allerhand Kinderspielund!*

COUNTESS LAZANSKY

Oh, yes, now I remember. What a  
good memory you have, Mein Schatz!

Raising Marie Louise's hand to her cheek.

MARIE-LOUISE

Then there was, oh, let me see...  
*Der geraubte Schleier*, and, of  
course, *Naturgeschichte für Kinder!*

COUNTESS LAZANSKY

Yes, that book of natural history  
for children! You couldn't put it  
down, showing me all the wonders of  
the World...

MARIE-LOUISE

Well, there are so many, Countess.  
The brooks, rivers, seas, and  
oceans.

Counting on her fingers.

And die Alpen, with its mountains,  
meadows, and deep green forests. So  
beautiful!

(yearningly)

I shall miss it.

COUNTESS LAZANSKY

I can only imagine. But, hopefully,  
I will be missing Austria for an  
entire year once I'm with you in  
France!

MARIE-LOUISE

Now that would be grand...

There is a knock on the passageway door. It's Jeanne.

JEANNE  
I'm sorry, times up.

MARIE-LOUISE  
Alright. You may come in.

They both rise, as the Countess straitens out the bed cover, then turns to embrace young Marie Louise.

COUNTESS LAZANSKY  
So long, kleines Madchen. Enjoy the wedding and your new life with the Emperor of France.

MARIE-LOUISE  
I shall. And I pray, Countess, that I'll be seeing you very soon! Auf Wiedersehen mein guter Freund.

Jeanne opens the secret door for Countess Lazansky, and, after closing it, follows her down the narrow passageway.

Oh, Countess!  
(now louder)  
Countess!

Throwing herself across the bed, murmuring.  
I, I suddenly remembered my most favorite book of all, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*...

EXT. THE RESIDENZ, PALACE OF THE BAVARIAN ROYAL FAMILY,  
MUNICH - LATER

While seated in her carriage, bound for Stuttgart, opposite Princess Caroline, Marie Louise looks out her window, only to find a grim-looking Countess Lazansky standing at the end of the driveway holding the Empress's little dog, Schatzen.

MARIE-LOUISE  
Schatzen!  
(shouting)  
Schatzen!

Now pounding on the wooden panel behind her head.  
Stop the carriage! Stop this carriage immediately!

Princess Caroline quickly gets out of the carriage and instructs the French driver to ignore Empress Marie Louise's demands.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

I command you, in the name of my brother, the Emperor, to drive on, and don't stop until we've reached the first stage of this leg!

DRIVER

Yes, Your Highness!

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Now, pass the word to the other coachmen up front to drive quickly for the next hour or so!

DRIVER

As you wish, Princess!

Princess Caroline gets back into the carriage, as it quickly pulls away. Empress Marie Louise, with her head leaning against the door, looks adamantly at her sister-in-law.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

(arrogantly)

Say nothing!

Meanwhile, Jeanne spots Countess Lazansky standing at the end of the palace driveway holding Schatzen. She immediately scrambles out of the slowly-moving carriage to take the little dog from Countess Lazansky, who immediately seizes upon Jeanne's objective. Running quickly to retrieve her ride to Stuttgart, Jeanne is soon safely inside the carriage, clutching the little dog to her chest, effectively concealing her from the five other passengers seated in the coach.

JEANNE

Sorry, I had to relieve myself behind a bush back there. It's a long ride to our first stop in Alzgern!

(justifying herself)

The wheels of the carriage now grind their way along the bumpy road to Stuttgart.

INT. NAPOLEON'S PRIVATE STUDY, THE TUILERIES PALACE, PARIS -  
SAME TIME

While his bride is on route to the Château de Compiegne, Napoleon talks in his study with his private secretary and close confidant, Claude-Francois Meneval.

During their discussion, the renowned tailor, Leger, makes alterations to an elegant topcoat recently selected by Napoleon's sister, Pauline. The Emperor is standing on a footstool in front of a large full-length mirror.

LEGER

Please hold still, Your Highness.  
Just a few more darts behind the  
shoulders.

NAPOLEON

Not too tight, Leger. I dislike  
anything confining.

LEGER

Yes, Your Highness. Can you please  
turn, facing your right side in the  
mirror.

Napoleon willingly complies.

Nice, now the left. Magnifique! You  
may step down, Emperor.

Napoleon steps off the stool and attempts to remove the coat.  
Leger steps in to assist.

Allow me, Your Highness. There...  
I'll be back tomorrow for your  
final fitting. I assure you, this  
manteau will fit you like a glove.

NAPOLEON

I'll be here.  
(grinning judiciously)  
You may go now, Leger.

LEGER

(nodding)  
Your Imperial Highness!

Leger is shown out by a chamberlain, who leaves Napoleon and Claude-Francois alone. Napoleon begins pacing the floor again, just as he's done ever since the day of his engagement to eighteen-year-old Archduchess Marie Louise of Austria.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Don't forget your meeting this  
morning with Talleyrand. He'll be  
arriving any moment.

Napoleon turns to look at the clock.

NAPOLEON

It completely slipped my mind... I simply haven't got the patience for that turd today!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

The Emperor is as jittery as a grenadier on his first military campaign. Shall I include that in my journal?

(amused)

NAPOLEON

I have a lot on my plate, Claude-Francois!

(sternly)

You wouldn't understand...

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

I understand perfectly. Admit it, you're anxious about meeting your new bride!

NAPOLEON

Is that so strange? Why, I've, I've never seen her before.

(vehemently)

What if she's...

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

What if she's...an ugly duckling?

(chuckling)

Napoleon, every eyewitness account we've received regarding her looks have been overwhelmingly positive. Our spies would never lie to you, Emperor, or hold back anything unappealing.

NAPOLEON

I know, and yet...

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Look, she's young and by all accounts inexperienced where love making is concerned. You'll have the upper hand this time, or, as it were, the upper, well, you know...

(chortling)

You'll be the teacher of Mademoiselle Habsburg-Lorraine, unlike your childish encounters with Josephine!

NAPOLEON

Your right!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Indeed, I am... School her in your likes and desires. She said it herself in one of her recent letters,

(in falsetto)

My only job is to please you!

(now lower)

Did she not?

NAPOLEON

She did...

(firmly)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Well, remember not to get in her way!

Both laugh. Napoleon goes over to a large corner window overlooking the vast, sculptured gardens outside, hands tucked behind his back.

NAPOLEON

Thank you, Claude- Francois.

(smiling)

You're a good friend!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Touché, My Emperor!

Claude-Francois springs out of his chair, walks over to a nearby table, and pours himself a Brandy.

NAPOLEON

And I'll promise you this, I won't let this one fall into the clutches of the French Court, particularly my sisters. In truth, very few women will have access to her without my strict approval.

Thumping his fist on the desk as he passes by. As for Josephine, I want her as far away from Marie Louise as possible. The Château de Navarre in Normandy, perhaps.

(confidently)

Men will be even more restricted!

Marie Louise's world will be limited to me;

(MORE)

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)  
 her art and music teachers, who  
 will be carefully surveilled, of  
 course; and you!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
 Me? My God, you're going to make me  
 a eunuch?  
 (laughing)

NAPOLEON  
 Why not you? You have my trust! My  
 respect and friendship. Besides,  
 you're cerebral. And any contact  
 you do have with her will be  
 strictly platonic. Understood?

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
 Perfectly. Poetry and prose...

NAPOLEON  
 Exactly! That's why I keep you  
 around, Claude-Francois!

Dropping himself into a nearby chair.  
 Oh, will she ever arrive...?  
 (stressing)

Napoleon once again stands up and proceeds to pace the floor.

EXT. NEW PALACE, SCHLOSS GARTEN, STUTTGART - EVENING

Monsieur de Saint Aignan, Equerry to Napoleon, delivers a  
 letter from the Emperor to Marie Louise while she is staying  
 overnight at the New Palace in Stuttgart. Jeanne, who admits  
 Monsieur de Saint Aignan into the Empress's suite, later  
 follows him out of the palace and into the Schloss Garten.  
 There, she catches up with the equerry and explains to him  
 the desperate need to transport the Empress's tiny dog,  
 Schatzen, to the Château de Compiègne.

JEANNE  
 Monsieur de Saint Aignan!

Lifting her dress while running down the garden path.  
 Monsieur Saint Aignan, please wait!

Monsieur de Saint Aignan stands off to the side of the path,  
 waiting for Jeanne to approach. She arrives completely out of  
 breath.

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN  
 Why, Jeanne, what is it?

Holding out his hand.

Forgive me, I never thought to ask about your husband back there when you admitted me into the Empress's suite.

JEANNE

He's well, Monsieur. But, it's taken him a while to get used to living in the dark.

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

How well, I know...

(sympathizing)

I'm a battle veteran, myself! The Emperor often says that Gilbert suffering the devastation of blindness that day in Abensberg, could have easily happened to him! He was sighting cannons all day, too.

JEANNE

I'm well aware...

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

The Empire owes your husband a great deal of gratitude!

JEANNE

Thank you, Monsieur. My husband would be pleased hearing you say that.

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

Now, what is it that caused you to run after me?

JEANNE

Oh, Monsieur, the Empress has been distraught since Princess Caroline...

(choked up)

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

What did she do now?

JEANNE

Well, as you know, the Emperor appointed her to lead our Delegation to receive the Empress at Braunau, and to lead the carriages back to Compiègne...

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

Go on.

JEANNE

Well, in following the royal tradition of stripping everything from a foreign bride-to-be, in this case everything Austrian,

(whispering)

including her clothes and undergarments, and replacing them with everything French, Princess Caroline saw to it to send her Grand Mistress as well as her little dog back to Schonbrunn Palace!

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

No!

(shocked)

JEANNE

Oui! So, when I saw Countess Lazansky, Marie Louise's Grand Mistress...

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

I know who she is!

JEANNE

When I saw Countess Lazansky holding that little dog yesterday at the end of the palace driveway in Munich, I jumped out of my carriage, retrieved the tiny dog, and ran back to my coach. I've been hiding her ever since. I don't dare tell anyone, including the Empress, fearing that Princess Caroline will get wind of it!

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

You're right, you mustn't!

A couple passes by on the garden path.

JEANNE

Shhh. We must be careful, Monsieur.  
(quietly)

It broke young Marie Louise's heart, I tell you. Especially the banishment of that little dog.

(MORE)

JEANNE (CONT'D)

She succumbed to loosing her Grand Mistress, who practically raised her, as well as the dog she loves, because of her duty to Napoleon and her father.

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

Princess Caroline is craven, so thoroughly depraved!

Jeanne, looking both ways on the garden path, now pulls Monsieur de Saint Aignan into a small gap in the hedgerow, out of the line of sight.

JEANNE

That little dog must be transported to the Château de Compiègne immediately! Can you help me, Monsieur? The Empress would be so pleased, which, I suspect, would please the Emperor too. No?

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

Indeed, it would! I will certainly help! Besides, it's my duty as his Equerry. When Napoleon hears of this he will bear the teeth of a lion.

Jeanne smiles to herself at the thought.  
Where is this dog?

JEANNE

He's in my room, hidden away in the courtier's wing of the palace.

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

This is most fortunate, I was leaving early tomorrow morning to meet the Emperor on Tuesday at the Chateau.

JEANNE

The Château de Compiègne?

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

Oui, oui! I will transport the little dog in my pouch and let her out to run during every stage stop.

Showing Jean the inside of his large courier bag.

JEANNE

Why, that's wonderful! Where shall I meet you in the morning.

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

Meet me at the stables behind the East Wing. Bring whatever food I should feed her from one of the palace's kitchens. For my part, I can supply her with plenty of fresh water.

JEANNE

That won't be a problem, and I'll have her food packaged for you. Her name is Schatzen, it's German for sweetie!

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

That's a fine name, but I need to know what breed of dog Schatzen is, to get an idea of how I should accommodate her.

JEANNE

I'm told she's an Alpine Dachsbracke.

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

I see...

(contemplating)

Believe it or not, I'm familiar with that breed. Well, it's a small dog, so this shouldn't be difficult!

JEANNE

I even found her a little basket to sleep in.

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

That's perfect! You've done a wonderful thing, Jeanne Montroy!

Looking into Jean's dark brown eyes.

I'll be sure to tell Napoleon when I return to Compiègne.

JEANNE

Oh, you've made me so happy, Monsieur!

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN

Imagine how the Empress will feel!  
As well as the Emperor! I'll meet  
you at 3 a.m. sharp. Don't worry,  
nobody will be up at that hour  
except the stable boys! I'll be  
sure they set out two lanterns,  
side by side, so you can find us in  
the dark... Goodnight, Jeanne!

JEANNE

Goodnight, Monsieur.  
(curtsying)

They disappear into the dwindling light, each heading to  
entirely different lodgings within the New Palace's walls.

EXT. KEHL BRIDGE, NEAR STRASBOURG, GREATER FRANCE - AFTERNOON

Empress Marie Louise, at long last, crosses over the Rhine  
into Greater France at 5 o'clock on the afternoon of March  
23, 1810. As the long procession of carriages passes over the  
heavily decorated bridge, twenty French generals and three  
armed divisions are there to greet them, along with a throng  
of notable dignitaries and distinguished citizenry.

Cannon reports now sound from the city walls to welcome the  
new Sovereign, followed by fresh bouquets of flowers  
presented by coveys of schoolgirls dressed in white; festive  
celebrations; pealing church bells; and spectacular fireworks  
bursting long after the revelry ends.

INT. HOTEL FLORAINVILLE, BAR-LE-DUC, FRANCE - THE NEXT DAY

Marie Louise arrives at the Hotel Florainville in Bar-le-duc  
at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Pleased to exit her coach  
after a ten-hour ride, she scales the steps of the famed  
venue, enters a private room to freshen up and change into  
new clothes, and takes in a mid-afternoon lunch with her  
retinue, free of dignitaries. A Maître d' soon approaches the  
new Empress.

MAÎTRE D'

Your Imperial Highness, it is a  
great honor to welcome you to the  
Hotel Florainville.  
(bowing exquisitely)

MARIE-LOUISE

It's my pleasure, Monsieur! I'm not sure if anyone else in our entourage is famished, but I certainly am.

Drawing a terse stare from Princess Caroline, who is seated next to her.

MAÎTRE D'

Well, we're here to please, Your Highness!

(nervously)

I shall return momentarily to take your dinner order. The menus are on the table. Uh, may I bring you something to drink? Bordeaux, Burgundy?

(inquiringly)

Perhaps some Champagne, Rhin vin, or Vermouth?

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Oh, Champagne, by all means, Empress...

Jeanne looks across the table at Marie Louise and slowly shakes her head. Princess Caroline takes offence with Jeanne interfering in such matters.

That's enough, Jeanne! I'll be sure to inform my brother about your less than amicable conduct during this official expedition.

JEANNE

Why, I don't understand, Princess...

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Oh, you know perfectly well what I'm referring to. Take Countess Lazansky, for instance!

The Maître d' continues to wait for the Empress to make her beverage selection.

JEANNE

With all due respect, Your Highness, what exactly are you referring to?

PRINCESS CAROLINE

You were up to something with the  
countess back in Munich. I just  
don't quite know what, yet!  
(narrowing her eyes)

Jeanne hangs her head in fake obedience.

MAÎTRE D'

If you'll pardon me, Princess. Have  
you made a decision, Empress?

MARIE-LOUISE

I have. Rheinwein! Oh, pardon me,  
Monsieur.

Covering her mouth.  
Rhin vin!

MAÎTRE D'

And would you prefer the wine  
chilled?

MARIE-LOUISE

Ja, oh, I mean, oui.  
(embarrassed)

MAÎTRE D'

I'll be right out with your  
decanter. Marcel will be taking the  
drink orders for the others.

The Maître d' races to the rear of the establishment, as  
Marcel begins to take Princess Caroline's order. She proceeds  
to waive him off.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

May I have a word with you in  
private, Empress?

MARIE-LOUISE

Why, certainly, Princess...

They rise, leave the dining room, and meet behind closed  
doors within the private quarters assigned that day to the  
Empress.

What is it? Have I done something  
wrong?

PRINCESS CAROLINE

You're embarrassing me and our  
entire entourage with your  
incessant use of German! In this  
pigsty of a town, of all places.

(MORE)

PRINCESS CAROLINE (CONT'D)  
 Word will get out all throughout  
 the Empire of your stupidity and  
 lack of, what is the  
 word...bearing.

Throwing her arms in the air.  
 What's more, a real lady never  
 declares that she's famished! Only  
 swine conduct themselves this way.  
 Besides, you look like you could  
 lose a few meals...

MARIE-LOUISE  
 I, I don't know what to say...

PRINCESS CAROLINE  
 Like I told you in the carriage  
 when we departed Munich, say  
 nothing! Do I make myself clear?

MARIE-LOUISE  
 I...  
 (suddenly mute)

Princess Caroline bolts from the room, leaving its French  
 Doors wide-open. The Empress, after a few minutes of  
 reflection alone, rejoins her at the table.

After dinner is finished, the Maître d' approaches the  
 Empress once again, this time to suggest something for  
 dessert.

MAÎTRE D'  
 May I interest you in dessert,  
 Empress?

PRINCESS CAROLINE  
 Allow me...  
 (boldly)

MARIE-LOUISE  
 (interrupting)  
 I'm told, Monsieur, that Bar-le-duc  
 is famous throughout Europe for its  
 currant jam.

MAÎTRE D'  
 Oh, yes indeed, Your Highness! It's  
 the very finest on Earth.

Touching his fingers to his lips in affirmation.

(MORE)

MAÎTRE D' (CONT'D)  
 What will it be, Empress, red or  
 white?

(suddenly animated)

MARIE-LOUISE  
 Oh, red, of course. On sweet bread,  
 mon bon hote!

MAÎTRE D'  
 Oui. Excellent choice! You won't be  
 disappointed, I can assure you!

MARIE-LOUISE  
 You know

Addressing the Maître d' and others around the table.  
 almost two-hundred and fifty years  
 ago, Mary Stuart, Queen of  
 Scotland, and, for a time, Queen of  
 France, loved Bar-le-duc jam. If  
 I'm not mistaken, she called it  
 a...a ray of Sun in a crystal jar!

MAÎTRE D'  
 Oui, oui, I learned that in school,  
 growing up here...! I'll be sure to  
 let the entire town know about Your  
 Highness's exquisite taste and keen  
 appreciation of French culture.

MARIE-LOUISE  
 It's my pleasure as your new  
 Empress. You have a beautiful  
 little...burg.

Glancing over at the Princes next to her.

MAÎTRE D'  
 Who would have known that a foreign  
 bride, from Austria, no less, could  
 be so steeped in the pages of  
 French history.

He leaves an amazed table behind to order his chef to prepare  
 this rare, exclusively Bar-le-duc delicacy for the new and  
 soon-to-be-crowned Empress of France.

Later, outside the Hotel, Marie Louise motions for Princess  
 Caroline to ride in another carriage. The enraged Princess  
 forcefully runs up to the Empress.

PRINCESS CAROLINE  
 You can't do this. I'm in charge of  
 this delegation!

MARIE-LOUISE

Not any more...

PRINCESS CAROLINE

My brother will hear about this,  
and you'll be the unhappiest bride  
in all of France!

Moments later, before boarding her own carriage, Marie Louise makes it a point to pay a visit to Princess Caroline's reassigned coach. There, the Empress appears outside a partially opened window.

MARIE-LOUISE

If you're worried about your  
luggage, Princess, it's strapped to  
the top of your coach. I do hope  
the rain holds off!

Raising her palms.

That is all! And not another word  
from you until we reach Compiègne.

Comfortably composed on Princess Caroline's erstwhile settee, are Ladies-in-Waiting, Jeanne and Marguerite, who are now happily tasked with accompanying the Empress to the Château de Compiègne.

Meanwhile, an entirely gratified Marie Louise saunters back to her coach, enters its ornate door, and proceeds to sit across from her new friends, holding in her lap a basket of Bar-le-duc jam.

EXT. NAPOLEON'S BALCONY, CHATEAU DE COMPIEGNE, FRANCE - SAME TIME

Having just received a freshly delivered letter from Marie Louise, Napoleon discovers that she will be in Soissons by nightfall. He soon bolts from his study, walks through a set of balcony doors, and loudly calls out for his brother-in-law, Murat, who is strolling in the gardens below.

Minutes pass, and Murat soon appears on the balcony next to Napoleon.

MURAT

You called for me, Napoleon?

NAPOLEON

Yes, brother.

Handing him the letter.

It's from the Empress, she'll be in Soissons this evening.

MURAT

So early! Why, they weren't due to arrive until tomorrow night. The Empress's anticipation grows, as does yours...

(amusingly)

NAPOLEON

Never mind that!

(curtly)

I desire to meet her there tonight. I'll need an unmarked coach and a small compliment of Imperial Guard. See to it, Murat!

MURAT

I'll make the arrangements immediately! We should be able to make Soissons in, say, four hours.

NAPOLEON

Right! And Murat...

MURAT

Yes?

NAPOLEON

Not a word to anyone. If anybody asks, we're going out hunting together - alone! We'll meet at the stables in twenty minutes and depart by the Rear Entrance.

MURAT

Two horses, Napoleon?

NAPOLEON

No, four! We'll dress in infantry uniforms and bicorn hats. Nothing fancy. Incognito! Do you understand?

MURAT

Perfectly!

They walk back into the study. There, Napoleon retrieves a letter from his bureau and hands it to Murat.

NAPOLEON

Be sure to give this to my little sister as soon as you see her tonight.

Murat carefully inspects both sides of the envelope.  
Don't bother trying to open it, brother-in-law. It's sealed.

MURAT

(warily)  
Twenty minutes, then...

NAPOLEON

Twenty minutes! Come, brother, let us go to meet my bride...

They split up to ready themselves for the short ride.

EXT. INSIDE A CHURCH PORCH, COURCELLES-SUR-VELSE, FRANCE - NIGHT

Napoleon and Murat's unmarked carriage pulls up to the Courcelles-sur-Velse posting station just miles beyond Soissons. They soon climb out of the coach in a driving rain, scurry under a church porch across the road, and wait for Marie Louise's carriage.

As the teeming rain falls on the slate-roof above, Napoleon hears the cantering hooves of coach-horses making their way towards them. Lantern-lights, blazing in the distance, soon come into view, piercing the dark, misty night.

NAPOLEON

This might be her coming...

He moves closer to the apron of the porch. A carriage adorned with the Imperial Coat of Arms now turns into the posting station.

MURAT

They've stopped. Let's go see who's inside.

Napoleon and Murat cross the muddy road and approach the far side of the coach.

JEANNE

Someone is coming around the side of the coach. Marguerite, can you see outside your window?

Marguerite cautiously pulls the drape aside.

MARGUERITE

Oh, my Lord, yes! There's two men.  
They look to be bandits de grands  
chamin!

She covers her eyes. Jeanne quickly pushes Marguerite down to the other end of the settee, taking her place next to the window. The door handle now begins to move.

JEANNE

Cover up and prepare yourself,  
Empress! I'm going to open the door  
to take a look.

Louder voices are now heard outside. Jeanne opens the door a crack, only to come nose-to-nose with the Emperor himself.

NAPOLEON

Is that you, Jeanne Montroy?  
(half shouting)

Easily recognizing Napoleon's voice, Jeanne immediately opens the door for the Emperor.

Why, it is you, Jeanne!  
(surprised)

JEANNE

Your Imperial Highness!

Bending low on the coach floor.

NAPOLEON

Whatever are you doing in here?

Jeanne turns her head towards the Empress.

JEANNE

Empress Marie Louise,  
(swallowing hard)  
meet the Emperor Napoleon!

Jeanne opens the door, admitting Napoleon into the carriage. Murat sticks his head in, as Jeanne and Marguerite depart the coach. As they pass Murat, he asks her why his wife isn't in the coach.

MURAT

Where is Princess Caroline, she's  
supposed to be in this carriage  
alone with the Empress?

JEANNE

She was, um...reassigned to another coach in the escort. We can discuss it later, if you wish.

Jeanne and Marguerite now bolt from the coach, cover their heads, and sprint through muddy puddles of water into the livery barn. Murat soon follows behind.

INT. INSIDE THE IMPERIAL CARRIAGE, POSTING STATION,  
COURCELLES-SUR-VELSE, FRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Meanwhile, Napoleon and Marie Louise, seated directly across from each other in the carriage, introduce themselves, dispensing with all formality.

NAPOLEON

Marie Louise, I am Napoleon Bonaparte.

Removing his rain-soaked bicorn.

How I have waited for you these many days.

Kissing her ivory hand. Admiring her beauty at last, he gracefully maneuvers across the coach and seats himself next to her.

Let's see now... Blondes Haar.

MARIE-LOUISE

(giggling softly)  
Yes, I have blond hair...

NAPOLEON

And...uh, blaue Augen!

MARIE-LOUISE

Yes, I have blue eyes, as well. That's very good Deutsch you're speaking!

NAPOLEON

I'm told my French is far better than my German.

MARIE-LOUISE

Well, that stands to reason.

NAPOLEON

I have one final compliment to pay you, in German. I memorized it by heart...

MARIE-LOUISE  
Proceed, I am ready.

NAPOLEON  
Here goes. Du hast eine schone  
Weinhaut.  
(elated)

Marie Louise covers her mouth with both hands, overcome with  
laughter.

What is it? Didn't I pronounce that  
correctly?  
(bluntly)

MARIE-LOUISE  
You said, Du hast eine schone  
Weinhaut.

NAPOLEON  
Yes. What about it?

MARIE-LOUISE  
Du hast eine schone Weinhaut, means  
you have lovely wine skin.  
(amusingly)  
Here, let me help you. Du hast eine  
schone witthaut. Witt, not Wein.  
Witt is White. Wein is wine.

NAPOLEON  
I give up!

MARIE-LOUISE  
Surrender so soon? Why, that's not  
in your constitution, Emperor!

They both begin to laugh, breaking the ice inside the small,  
cramped carriage.

I've been told by members of the  
French delegation that mon francais  
est plutot bon aussi!

NAPOLEON  
Oui, oui.  
(laughing)  
C'est plutot bein, ma nouvelle  
epouse!

The Empress begins to blush, holding her hands to her face.

MARIE-LOUISE  
Oh, dear. Maybe I should introduce  
myself now.

NAPOLEON  
Poursuivre, ma Cherie!

MARIE-LOUISE  
My name is Maria, Ludovica,  
Leopoldina, Franziska, Therese,  
Josepha, Lucia.

NAPOLEON  
You go by many names, Marie Louise!  
As for me, I only go by one.

MARIE-LOUISE  
So I've heard... I was born in  
Hofburg Palace in 1791, making me  
eighteen-years-old.

Lifting her fair chin.

NAPOLEON  
I'm well aware of your age, Maria,  
Ludovica, Leopold...

Causing her to laugh vivaciously.

MARIE-LOUISE  
My father, Francis, is Emperor of-

NAPOLEON  
Allow me to finish for you,  
Empress. Your father, Francis, is  
Emperor of Austria and formerly,  
the Holy Roman Empire. Your mother,  
Maria Theresa, was Empress of  
Austria, and Princess of...Naples  
and Sicily.

MARIE-LOUISE  
It goes without saying that you  
know my father's royal titles. But,  
how do you know about my mother's?

NAPOLEON  
I have been schooled in all things  
Habsburg-Lorraine, of late!

MARIE-LOUISE  
I hope, husband, that you don't  
know everything there is to know  
about me?

NAPOLEON

I know enough to know,  
mademoiselle, I'm sorry, I mean,  
mon partenaire, that I loved you  
even before we met tonight!

Holding her close to him.

And now that I've seen you, I feel  
my love has grown even more, if  
that's possible.

Now in Napoleon's arms, Marie Louise blushes even harder.  
Meanwhile, courtiers and station workers gather outside the  
carriage, fully recognizing that they mustn't disturb the  
occupants.

I have an idea! Let's dispense with  
all the incessant protocol planned  
for tomorrow in Soissons, and  
travel tonight to the Chateau. It  
calls for only a few more hours of  
road.

MARIE-LOUISE

But, won't Princess Caroline feel  
slighted as head of our delegation?

NAPOLEON

Well, she has already been replaced  
as head of the delegation!

MARIE-LOUISE

(surprised)  
But, why?

NAPOLEON

For the awful way she treated you  
and many others during your long  
expedition here. I have spies, you  
know! She knew that, and yet she  
went ahead and did those despicable  
things anyways. I'm going to have a  
private talk with her tomorrow,  
behind closed doors!

Hearing the team of horses being replaced.  
Excellent, they're changing the  
horses now.

MARIE-LOUISE

Well then, I, I guess it's off to  
the Château de Compiègne.  
(sheepishly)  
I'm...I'm ready, husband. Shall we  
ride alone?

NAPOLEON

What, and cast tradition to the wind?

MARIE-LOUISE

Not exactly. We are married in the eyes of the Church, aren't we?

Pleaching her fingers with his.

NAPOLEON

Indeed, we are! Why, you yourself were there when we married by proxy in the Augustins Church in Hofburg? Our holy union was blessed by the Prince Archbishop of Vienna himself, remember?

MARIE-LOUISE

I remember, Napoleon...

Leaning her head against his shoulder.

NAPOLEON

Well then, shall I kiss the bride?

Marie Louise now offers up her chaste lips to an eager, and much older, Napoleon, while they ride together to nearby Soissons, and from there, to the Château de Compiègne.

EXT. STONE BRIDGE, NEAR THE CHATEAU DE COMPIEGNE, FRANCE - NIGHT

A driving rain has failed to deter the faithful subjects of the Empire from gathering at a stone bridge near the Château de Compiègne, to greet the Emperor and Empress. The same stone bridge where, forty years earlier, the future Louis XVI met his intended, the Austrian Archduchess, Marie Antionette. Were it not for the flaming torches carried by this assembly, the carriage holding the Imperial couple would scarcely have been seen.

The Newlyweds are soon met at the foot of the Château's staircase by glittering throngs of nobles and dignitaries, as salvos of cannon fire sound in the distance. Napoleon, again dispensing with all formalities, leads Marie Louise to her renovated first-floor apartments, where she is overcome by the grandeur of her lodgment.

NAPOLEON

I had these apartments completely renovated for you. I shall tell you more about it when I return later.

MARIE-LOUISE  
I'll be ready, husband...

INT. MARIE LOUISE'S BEDCHAMBER, CHATEAU DE COMPIEGNE, FRANCE -  
LATER

Later that night, Napoleon, dressed only in a long nightshirt, leaves his upstairs rooms by candlelight, and enters Marie Louise's bedchamber through a secret passageway door. He finds her room tranquil. Now, quietly walking over to her bed, he pulls the curtain back, lets his nightshirt drop to the floor, and blows out the candle. With that, a bashful Marie Louise quickly throws the covers over her head.

Meanwhile, a crest-fallen Princess Caroline sits alone, cross-armed in the grand foyer, long after the crowds have disbursed.

INT. MARIE LOUISE'S BEDCHAMBER, CHATEAU DE COMPIEGNE, FRANCE -  
THE NEXT DAY

Early the next morning, Marie Louise receives a knock on her bedroom door, it's Napoleon with a special surprise.

NAPOLEON  
Empress, are you awake?

MARIE-LOUISE  
Yes...

Sitting up in bed, still undressed.

NAPOLEON  
I have a special delivery for you.  
Stay right where you are!

MARIE-LOUISE  
I'm not going anywhere, dear!  
(laughing)  
What did you get for me?

Napoleon opens the door wider, allowing Schatzen to enter. The little dog, easily recognizing her mistress's voice, leaps up onto her bed, greeting the Empress of all France with an affectionate lick on the cheek.

It's Schatzen! Oh, my Schatzen, how I've missed you! How in Heaven's name did she get here?

NAPOLEON  
I'll tell you later, Louise. I have an important meeting now. Enjoy!

Napoleon closes the Empress's door, very pleased with himself.

INT. CONCOURSE OUTSIDE OF NAPOLEON'S STUDY, CHATEAU DE COMPIEGNE, FRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Princess Caroline is seated in a chair outside Napoleon's Study, where she has been summoned for a private meeting with the Emperor.

CHAMBERLAIN

Your Highness, your brother will see you now.

The Chamberlain holds the door for the Princess, announces her in, and backs out of the room, closing the door behind him.

With the meeting over and Princess Caroline gone, Claude-Francois enters the study.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

So, how did she react?

NAPOLEON

My sister took it hard, but she deserves it!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

So, you're good with my approaching Jeanne.

NAPOLEON

Yes. She'll be an excellent companion for Louise. I tell you, retrieving that little dog in Munich was the best thing Jeanne could have done for the Empress. I'll never forget the look on Louise's face this morning when she saw Schatzen. Priceless, absolutely priceless!

(exalting)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

May I share that with Jeanne during our private meeting?

NAPOLEON

By all means... Sorry, I have a late breakfast with the Empress in a few minutes.

Claude-Francois stands up, taking Napoleon's cue. They walk toward the door, but before leaving the study, Napoleon stops to address his good friend.

You need to get yourself a German girl, Claude-Francois!  
(playfully)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Sire?

NAPOLEON

They're far different from French women, I can assure you. There's a sturdiness about them. Supple, yet firm! Unlike those scrawny coquettish twigs we have here in France.

Claude-Francois shuffles his feet, hoping to escape the Emperor before he discloses any further details about his young bride.

As for skin, it's soft, like eiderdown, and white as any snow, I tell you. And not one blemish appears on that bright alpine flower. Not one!  
(reminiscing)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Don't forget about your breakfast, Napoleon.

NAPOLEON

Oh! Right. I could go on, Claude-Francois, but my bride awaits.  
(merrily)

They exit the study and depart to different sections of the Palace.

I/E. WATERLILY BRIDGE, OUTSIDE THE CHATEAU DE COMPIEGNE, FRANCE - LATER

A note is handed to Jeanne in a hallway outside Empress Marie Louise's apartments. After checking both ends of the concourse, she opens the note and quickly reads the contents. It's from Claude-Francois Meneval, asking her to meet him at the waterlily bridge, a short distance from the Château. They meet moments later.

JEANNE

Monsieur Meneval.  
(curtsying)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Jeanne. I hope you had an agreeable trip.

Casting his eyes on the water below.

JEANNE

I won't lie to you, the trip was very long.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

I know, I closely followed the escort's progress, to and from Braunau.

JEANNE

Let's just say, I'm glad to be back... Am I in trouble, Monsieur?

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

What makes you think that?

JEANNE

Well, I ruffled a few feathers on our way home.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

So I heard! Princess Caroline-

JEANNE

Is that why we're here?

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Yes.

JEANNE

I knew it! I said to Marguerite, you watch, I'll get called on the carpet for helping return that little dog to the Empress. And sure enough...!

Throwing her hands over her head.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Calm yourself, Jeanne.

JEANNE

I'm sorry, Monsieur.

(more reasonable)

If I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't have done anything different. I did the right thing, Claude-Francois!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
Indeed, you did!

JEANNE  
(surprised)  
I did? So, you agree with me!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
Yes, and so does the Emperor!

JEANNE  
He does? Really?

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
He does. He personally delivered...  
Schatzen, is it?

JEANNE  
Yes, that's right.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
He personally delivered Schatzen to  
the Empress this morning.

JEANNE  
I don't believe it!

Firmly gripping the wooden railing.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
I tell you, I haven't seen him that  
satisfied with himself in years.  
Why, it's all he can talk about!  
And it's entirely due to your  
valiant effort.

JEANNE  
Let's not forget Monsieur de Saint  
Aignan!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
Certainly not, but you're the  
person who was there, who acted  
upon her instincts to help the  
young Empress! So...the Emperor has  
asked me to extend his gratitude.

JEANNE  
I, I don't know what to say.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
And he has appointed you to serve  
as the Empress's exclusive  
companion.

(MORE)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS (CONT'D)  
You see, the Emperor has decided to limit the Empress's access to a few select individuals, so as to keep her away from the clutches of the Imperial court. Not to mention Josephine! As for Princess Caroline, she's been demoted, and will no longer have any private contact with the Empress. That will now be your department.

JEANNE  
So my job, if you want to call it that, is to...what?  
(confused)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
Be her friend.

JEANNE  
I see!  
(nodding)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
Look, you're older than she is, about the same age as her stepmother to be exact. Moreover, you have displayed proven qualities to be the Empress's mentor and protector, where palace matters are concerned. And, as for befriending her, I'm told she picked you and your friend...

JEANNE  
Marguerite.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
Marguerite! I'm told she picked you and your friend, Marguerite, to ride with her all the way from Barle-duc to Courcelles-sur-Velse, after rightfully reassigning Princess Caroline to a far more modest coach.

JEANNE  
This is all true.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
Well, did she seem enamored towards you?

JEANNE

Pardon me, Monsieur, but I'm, I'm  
not sure what you mean by...  
(frowning)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Was she amused by you?

JEANNE

Oh, yes! We had a grand time! She  
was so relieved to be in our  
company.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Then it's done. You will begin your  
official duties immediately by  
order of the Emperor, with worthy  
compensation, of course.

JEANNE

Thank you, Claude-Francois. And do  
thank the Emperor.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

I'll be sure to inform him later  
when I brief him on our discussion.  
Come on, we can walk back together.  
It'll no longer be a secret what  
your new role is.

Jeanne and Claude-Francois step off the tiny bridge and head  
back to the Château terrace.

All I had to do is wait for the  
Emperor's meeting with Princess  
Caroline to end, before breaking  
the news to you.

JEANNE

I see. And what fine news it is.

As Jeanne walks along the flora, she considers her new role,  
as Claude-Francois leads the way back into the palace.

INT. GRANDE GALERIE, THE LOUVRE, PARIS, FRANCE - AFTERNOON

It's three o'clock on the afternoon of April 2, 1810. The  
Imperial couple, Napoleon Bonaparte and Marie Louise Habsburg-  
Lorraine, now enter the Grande Galerie of the Louvre and  
process past thousands of flamboyant invitees, who line both  
sides of the great colonnade. Their destination, a specially  
designed wedding chapel in the Carre' Salon.

The couple now make their way up the aisle to a spirited Bridal March composed for the occasion by Napoleon's Chapel Master, who has taken up a position near by. The marital rite is now spoken in a voiceover by the Grand Almoner of Paris, as the couple make their way to the sanctuary.

GRAND ALMONER

(voiceover)

Sire, do you acknowledge and swear before God and His Holy Church that you now take for your lawful wife Her Imperial and Royal Highness, Madame Marie Louise, Archduchess of Austria, here present?

NAPOLEON

(voiceover)

Yes, sir.

As Napoleon passes by a cordoned-off section of Cardinals, he becomes keenly aware that a number of them have declined to attend the ceremony in defiance of what they believe to be the Emperor's illegal marriage.

GRAND ALMONER

(voiceover)

Madame, do you acknowledge and swear before God and His Holy Church that you now take for your lawful husband the Emperor Napoleon, here present?

MARIE-LOUISE

(voiceover)

Yes, sir.

GRAND ALMONER

(voiceover)

Do you promise and swear to show to him the fidelity in all things which a faithful wife owes to her husband, according to God's holy commandment?

The couple pass a tearful Josephine, now directly next to them.

MARIE-LOUISE

(voiceover)

Yes, sir.

Reaching the end of the gallery, they pass through the Pavilion of Flora and into the chapel.

Later, while standing before the prelate, Napoleon places a ring on the finger of Empress Marie Louise.

NAPOLEON

This ring I give unto you in token  
of the marriage we are contracting.

The priest now traces the sign of the cross on the Empress's hand, receiving his blessing.

EXT. THE SALLE DES MARECHAUX, TUILERIES PALACE, PARIS - LATER

After the wedding ceremony, the newly married couple appear on the balcony of the Salle des Marechaux to view the Corps de la Garde, who soon present-arms in honor of the reigning Sovereigns. Later, in the Salle de Spectacle, a grand banquet is given in the Palace. After the blessing, toasts are given by members of the Imperial family, ambassadors, and distinguished guests. A band, seated in the highest boxes of the theater, plays incidental music for the occasion. That evening, a single rocket is sent flying high over The Tuileries, signaling the beginning of an elaborate fireworks display arranged for the many spectators waiting along the Champs Elysees. Midway through, the initials N and ML blaze in the night-sky before dropping to the ground in glowing embers. This concludes the day's formal Imperial agenda.

However, at 2:00am, ordinary Parisians are treated to the most spectacular festivities imaginable. Theater productions, dancers of every kind, wrestlers, tight-rope walkers, fire-eaters, strongmen lifting huge weights, acrobats, jugglers, stilt-walkers, together with elaborate masquerade balls, symphonies, oratorios, and endless wonders of sight and sound.

With her court and husband off to bed, Marie Louise, wide awake, rises, tiptoes around the many wedding gifts displayed around the room, and steps out onto her balcony. There, she beholds a Paris completely aglow, its every building, church, tavern, house, and hovel, illuminated by torches and lamps of various luster. To this Empress of the French, they shone like a million celestial diamonds in the heavens above.

INT. PRINCESS CAROLINE'S IMPERIAL APARTMENTS, TUILERIES PALACE, PARIS - MORNING

Three weeks after the wedding, an Equerry knocks on the door to Princess Caroline's Imperial apartments. He is soon shown into her sitting room by a chamberlain.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Close the door.

The chamberlain departs, as the equerry safely secures the door behind him.

I gather you have something for me,  
Henri?

HENRI

Yes, Your Highness.

Henri hands a single envelope to the Princess.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

You've read it?

HENRI

Only the cover and back of the envelope. I received it in Strasbourg. I'm told it's from the Empress of Austria.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

You mean the girl?  
(laughing)

HENRI

Madame?

PRINCESS CAROLINE

The girl! The Austrian Empress. She's only a few years older than our new Sovereign, who is also a girl!

(dismissively)

HENRI

Oui. Is that all, Madame?

Princess Caroline sets the envelope down on the table next to her chair, then turns to her favorite equerry.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

No...! I want to remind you once again of our little agreement.

(poignantly)

In case you've forgotten, any letters from the Empress of Austria, and heaven forbid, Countess Lazansky, are to be successfully intercepted and delivered into my custody. That way our girl here in France, as well as others in her orbit, will remain free of foreign influences, particularly Austrian!

HENRI  
And their Emperor?

PRINCESS CAROLINE  
No! His correspondence is not to be  
disturbed in any way. Understood?  
(strategizing)  
Let the Austrian Emperor and my  
brother play their father and son-  
in-law tennis match, at will.

HENRI  
Very well...

PRINCESS CAROLINE  
By the way, how is Marguerite?  
(musing)

HENRI  
She is well and glad to be back  
home after such a long trip.

PRINCESS CAROLINE  
I'll bet she is!  
(mockingly sympathizing)  
Not to worry, Henri. Your secret is  
safe with me.

Pausing as she picks up the envelope and reads it over once  
again.

But, if word ever got out about  
your marriage, I'm afraid...

Waiting for a response.

HENRI  
I know! Marguerite would be  
dismissed from the Court on the  
spot!

PRINCESS CAROLINE  
You're very, how do I say...  
discerning, Henri.

HENRI  
Indeed. Thank you, Your Highness.

PRINCESS CAROLINE  
Until next time?

Henri bows and immediately departs Princess Caroline's  
Imperial Apartments.

With no one else around, Princess Caroline slits open the envelope with an ornate letter opener, removes the contents, and proceeds to read a letter from Marie Louise's 22-year-old stepmother, Maria Ludovika, to Napoleon.

MARIA LUDOVIKA

April 10, 1810

Hofburg Palace, Vienna

My brother,

I cannot express to Your Majesty the feeling of gratitude I have experienced on receiving your last letter, which has filled me with joy by the assurance it contains of your satisfaction with the being we have confided to you. My maternal heart was the more open to this emotion because I had felt doubtful about the result. Now, however, that I am reassured by Your Majesty, I have no further fear, and I cheerfully share my daughter's happiness. She has described it to me with touching sincerity, and is never tired of telling me how gratified she is by the many attentions she has received since your meeting. Her sole desire is to make Your Majesty happy, and I venture to flatter myself that she will succeed; for I know her character well, and it is excellent. Louise promises to write to me regularly, and this somewhat consoles me for a real loss. It is pleasant to be able to keep up one's relations with a person one loves, and I am sure that I feel for her the tenderness of a mother, so kind has she been to me, treating me like a real friend.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Oh, brother...!

MARIA LUDOVIKA

Your Majesty is good enough to say that your wife has spoken about me. I am not surprised; for I know that she, like me, has a very loving heart. But with due regard to truth, I cannot leave Your Majesty under any mistake with regard to her obligations towards me.

(MORE)

MARIA LUDOVIKA (CONT'D)

From what she says you may form a favorable opinion of her candor. If I can boast of anything, it is that I have tried to preserve this candor, which may at first have made her seem timid, while in fact it renders her only the more worthy of Your Majesty's esteem and friendship. Some may blame me because my daughter has so few ideas, such a meager education. I acknowledge it; but as to the world and its perils, one learns them only too soon, and I will say frankly she was only eighteen, and I wanted to preserve her innocence, and cared only that she should have a loving heart, an honest nature, and clear ideas about what she did know.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

This one lays it on pretty thick!

MARIA LUDOVIKA

I have entrusted her to Your Majesty. I beg you, as her mother, to be my daughter's friend and guide, as she is your devoted wife. She will be happy if Your Majesty will always confidently appeal to her; for, I say once more, she is young and too inexperienced to face the world's dangers and to fill her position understandingly.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Well, that's an understatement.

MARIA LUDOVIKA

But I perceive that I'm wearying Your Majesty with this long letter.

Princess Caroline rolls her eyes and yawns. You will pardon this outpouring of a mother's heart, which knows no bounds when a beloved daughter's happiness is concerned. I must say one thing more. Your Majesty sets too high a value on my eagerness to satisfy you by letting you have the portrait of my dear Louise.

(MORE)

MARIA LUDOVIKA (CONT'D)

I was too anxious to please you as soon as possible, not to be selfish in this matter, but I shall certainly thoroughly appreciate the portrait you promise me. It will have this advantage, that it will show me how happy she is.

Maria Ludovika Beatrix  
Empress of Austria

Princess Caroline smiles and proceeds to read the entire letter all over again.

EXT. HONEYMOON TOUR OF THE NORTHERN DEPARTMENTS, FRANCE -  
CONTINUOUS

On the morning of Friday, April 27, 1810, the Emperor and Empress embark on a one-month tour of various locations in the northernmost reaches of the Empire. Only weeks after their illustrious wedding in Paris, this excursion gives their subjects the unique opportunity to lavish their Sovereigns with merriment, ovation, and reverence. Among these honored towns, villages, and hamlets, are Saint Quentin; Bois-le-Duc; Berg-op-Zoom; Breda; Middelburg; Flushing; the Zeeland islands of Tholen, North and South Beveland, and Walcheren; as well as Schomven; Brussels; Ghent; Bruges; Ostend; Dunkirk; Lille; Calais; Dieppe; Havre; and Rouen. For, everywhere the Imperial Couple goes, they are treated to countless replicas of the yet-to-be-completed Arc de Triomphe, followed by festive celebrations, balls, illuminations, and every manner of adulation. During one such visit, Marie Louise finds herself within reach of the city of Amsterdam, a place she openly expresses a desire to visit.

INT. EMPRESS MARIE LOUISE'S SUITE, LAEKEN PALACE, BRUSSELS,  
BELGIUM - EVENING

Napoleon and Marie Louise enjoy a three-day rest at Laeken Palace. During a late-night dinner alone in her suite, the Empress shares her desire to some day visit Amsterdam. Pushing himself back from the table, Napoleon forcefully replies.

NAPOLEON

Amsterdam! Why, you should've said something when we were riding along the Meuse. We were very close to the capital, you know.

MARIE-LOUISE

I know, only fifteen leagues away,  
but you were in a foul mood and  
would never entertain such a thing.

NAPOLEON

I'm sorry, sometimes I get  
completely carried away with myself  
while inspecting defensive  
fortifications!

MARIE-LOUISE

Sometimes?  
(smiling)

NAPOLEON

We men can be testy fellows when it  
comes to battle preparations.  
(grinning back)  
I'll tell you what, you shall have  
an entire month in Amsterdam next  
year!

MARIE-LOUISE

Splendid!

Reaching across the table to take his hands.  
But, it will have to be in April...

NAPOLEON

April is too wet! Why April?

MARIE-LOUISE

That's when the tulips are in  
bloom. Very romantic!  
(blushing)

NAPOLEON

Then we shall spend two months  
there! And I promise not to be in a  
foul mood the entire time.  
(laughing)

MARIE-LOUISE

I'm serious! You don't know what  
it's like to be on the receiving  
end of your...moods.

NAPOLEON

Well, if I recall correctly, I was  
on the receiving end of your silent  
treatment that day.

MARIE-LOUISE

Sometimes I have no choice but to  
employ that tactic.  
(pouting amusingly)

NAPOLEON

I was busy with work, you know.  
Sorry! I must learn how to put the  
Empire aside, and uh, spend  
valuable time with its beautiful  
Empress.  
(playfully)

MARIE-LOUISE

Flattery will get you no where,  
husband...

NAPOLEON

We'll see about that!

Napoleon rises from the table and leads a nearly wooed Marie  
Louise into her bedroom.

INT. THE ORANGERY, LAEKEN PALACE, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM - THE  
NEXT DAY

The next morning, after breakfast, Napoleon and Marie Louise  
visit the Orangery on the palace grounds, to stroll between  
its fresh-scented orange trees, enclosed there over the  
winter.

MARIE-LOUISE

(breathing deeply)  
Oh, don't you just love the scent  
of oranges?

NAPOLEON

Yes. These trees are magnificent!  
But, then again, I have passed by  
millions of them while conducting  
military campaigns in Italy and  
Spain.

Marie Louise stops to lightly squeeze an orange and draw in  
its sweet aroma.

MARIE-LOUISE

Actually, the Orange originated in  
China, of all places!

NAPOLEON

(half smiling)

Well, I haven't taken my army that far East, yet...

MARIE-LOUISE

Elizabeth the First took a liking to oranges and had these conservatories built on her royal estates.

Lifting her hand to the ceiling.

Long after the French, I might add! She savored their strong bouquet and the health benefits they provided. It's been said, that the Romans introduced oranges to Britain.

Napoleon begins to tug at his collar, uncomfortable with his wife knowing such things.

Is something wrong, dear?

NAPOLEON

Not at all! Go on. Tell me more about the history of  
(clearing his throat)  
the Orange!

MARIE-LOUISE

Very well! Orangeries must always face south, to better absorb the Sun. And the north side should consist of a hardy brick wall to block the harsh wintery winds.

NAPOLEON

Um hmm.

MARIE-LOUISE

And another thing-

NAPOLEON

By all means, Louise!

Prompting further commentary, Marie Louise finds a marble bench to sit upon.

MARIE-LOUISE

Thank you, husband! Due to our many ports and trade routes, Continental Europe is populated by many large orangeries like this one, most prominently in Germany, France, and here, in the Netherlands.

NAPOLEON

Is there any subject you haven't mastered?

MARIE-LOUISE

(her mouth agape)

Why, Napoleon, you're jealous! I simply cannot believe my ears.

NAPOLEON

(laughing)

Well, you have to admit...

MARIE-LOUISE

Admit what? That I'm well read? And can discuss the World in a learned way?

She stands up and firmly places both hands on her hips.

Tell me, husband, are all Bonapartes easily threatened when faced by those who appear more scholarly than themselves...?

NAPOLEON

You've made your point, Eierkopf!  
(chuckling)

Napoleon makes for the nearest exit.

MARIE-LOUISE

Eierkopf! Why you...come back here!

Marie Louise quickly takes off and playfully chases Napoleon out the door.

EXT. A COUNTRY ROAD IN AN UNCHARTED HAMLET, FRANCE -  
AFTERNOON

In a tiny hamlet, on the last stop before Paris, inhabitants have fashioned a triumphal arch, bearing the simplest of inscriptions. On the front is written Pater Noster; on the back, Ave Maria, gratia plena.

The mayor, along with a local priest, soon present wildflowers to the beautiful young bride. All this serves to provide the Empress with a breathtaking vision of a happy life among the French.

EXT. MONTROY FARMHOUSE, AVIGNON, FRANCE - DUSK

A month later, Jeanne is writing yet another letter to her husband, Gilbert, while away with the Emperor and Empress in Antwerp. Blind, Gilbert relies on his elderly neighbor, Javier, to read her letters out loud to him inside his stone farmhouse, located just miles from Avignon, in the heart of Provence.

JEANNE

(voiceover)

May 2, 1810

My dearest,

Duty to the Empress finds me in Antwerp, of all places. We arrived by boat on the Scheldt late last night. By the time we disembarked and reached the Prefect's house, it was too late to write! I think being on the water all day took its toll on me.

Anyways, I am fine, in superb health, and thoroughly enjoy my new duties with the Empress. She is adjusting to French life more and more each day. Princess Caroline is along on this trip, but she steers clear of the Empress, except for public events, that is!

How are you getting along? Please be sure to turn over the cheese I am curing in the root cellar. In my estimation, the Mimolette should be ready for us to enjoy come July, when I'm with you once again, mon doux amour! Since Javier will most surely be reading this letter to you, I extend a fond bonjour.

The scene shifts to Gilbert's Avignon farmhouse.

JAVIER

And a fond bonjour to you too,  
Jeanne!

Removing his cap and scratching his balding head, he continues Jeanne's letter.

According to the Admiralty here,  
the weather looks nice tomorrow. I  
do hope it clears, the Empress has  
been nauseous all day from the  
odeurs putrides emitting from the  
street outside.

Javier waives the imaginary stench with his cap and laughs.  
He now returns to the letter.

It's got me a little woozy, too!  
Though she has a far more sensitive  
nose than me, I'm afraid.  
My love, I wish you could see how  
much the Emperor loves his young  
bride. Nothing he can do is enough  
for his dear Louise, as he calls  
her. He affords her much  
allegiance, I tell you, and I thank  
God for being able to witness it up  
close every day! They are newlyweds  
in every sense of the word. As for  
the Empress, she is amused by his  
doting on her so. I know she loves  
Napoleon, though not to the extent  
that he loves her! Time will tell.

JEANNE

(voiceover)

I must go, mon amour, the Empress  
has dinner with Napoleon in one  
hour and she has asked me to help  
her get ready.  
I love and miss you very much!  
Ta femme aimante  
Jeanne

Jeanne passionately holds the letter up to her lips, kissing  
it twice, before tucking it into an envelope for the morning  
post.

Gilbert reaches out for the letter, and Javier willingly  
hands it over. Feeling along the edges of the paper, Gilbert  
soon holds it up to his nose and draws in a fragrance his  
friend could hardly begin to fathom. Javier patiently waits  
for Gilbert to set his illusion aside.

JAVIER

Come, Gilbert, let's go down cellar  
and check on that fromage, eh!

GILBERT

Oui, my old friend!

Gilbert stands and is slowly led into the root cellar by an amenable Javier.

INT. CONCERT ROOM, THE EMPRESS'S APARTMENTS, TUILERIES PALACE, PARIS - MORNING

On June 12, 1810, the Empress begins her piano lessons with Italian composer Ferdinando Paer. Maestro Paer, chapel master to Napoleon, is announced into the room by a Chamberlain. It is there, that Marie Louise, seated at an Erard Freres piano, receives the Maestro. He enters the room, gives his bow, and proceeds to sit on a straight chair arranged next to the Empress. Jeanne sits close by.

MAESTRO PAER

It's a great pleasure to meet you again, Your Highness. I was formally introduced to you after your wedding, if you recall.

MARIE-LOUISE

I certainly do.

Offering her hand.

How could I possibly forget. Not to overly flatter you, Maestro, but the music you composed for our wedding was simply amazing. I particularly enjoyed the spirited Bridal March that Napoleon and I walked down the aisle to. Magnificent, really.

MAESTRO PAER

Believe me, Your Highness, the pleasure was entirely mine.

MARIE-LOUISE

Please, call me by my real name. We're going to be working closely together refining my technique, so we can dispense with the formalities. Don't worry, my husband most certainly approves... I understand you're of Austrian descent, but, born in Parma.

MAESTRO PAER

Yes, Marie Louise.

MARIE-LOUISE

Thank you. May I call you Maestro?

MAESTRO PAER

By all means! Whatever is easiest for you. Perhaps I should share a little bit of my background. I was born in Parma, of course, and attended the Conservatory of the Pieta Turchini in Naples, where I studied music theory under Gasparo Ghiretti. After a decade or so of composing and producing operas in Italy, it was on to Vienna where I was made music director of the Karntnertortheater.

MARIE-LOUISE

Ja. The Carinthian Gate Theater!

MAESTRO PAER

By the way, while employed by the Viennese Court, I actually composed several pieces for your Mother's private concerts. Terribly sorry about her passing.

Dropping his eyes to the floor.

MARIE-LOUISE

I was sixteen...  
(soberly)

MAESTRO PAER

Anyways...from there, I was hired as court composer at the Morettisches Opernhaus in Dresden.

MARIE-LOUISE

I've been there on several occasions in my capacity as Archduchess of Austria!

MAESTRO PAER

Why, of course you would... Finally, as fate would have it, I caught the eye of the Emperor in Dresden, and the rest, as they say, is history!

MARIE-LOUISE

I'm taken. You've already had such an illustrious career, and now you're here sitting next to me!

MAESTRO PAER

It would appear that way, but, as Chapel Master, my position involves much more than just teaching the Empress of France...

Ever the student, Marie Louise waits for her teacher to continue. She now darts her blue eyes, prompting him to speak.

Oh, yes! Uh, you have a lovely piano! An Erard Freres, no less. Do you like the action the instrument provides?

MARIE-LOUISE

Oh, yes! The keys are most responsive, and the sound is truly pleasing, especially in my spacious concert room.

MAESTRO PAER

Tell me, what do you enjoy playing?

MARIE-LOUISE

What do I enjoy playing? Well, given that I'm Austrian, I prefer... German composers!

Leaning in Paer's direction.

MAESTRO PAER

I see. Anyone in particular?

MARIE-LOUISE

Bach, for one. Mozart, Haydn, but I especially enjoy Beethoven.

MAESTRO PAER

Excellent! I would like to hear you play now. Do you have anything memorized so as to demonstrate your skill level?

MARIE-LOUISE

Let's see... Alright. I've got it! This is a cadenza written for Mozart's Piano Concerto Number 12, by Johann Hummel.

MAESTRO PAER

I'm familiar with it. Please, go ahead, Marie Louise.

Peeking over at Jean.

MARIE-LOUISE

Oh, forgive me, Maestro, this is my  
Grand Mistress, Jeanne Montroy.

Maestro Paer nods his head in Jeanne's direction, while Marie Louise holds her hands over the keys.

Here goes...

Marie Louise performs this piece with pinpoint precision and frightening virtuosity. Jeanne's eyes are as large as Twenty-Franc coins at the conclusion of the cadenza.

MAESTRO PAER

Very good, Marie Louise. Very good!  
Well, it seems from this piece  
anyways that you're ready for top  
drawer material.

MARIE-LOUISE

Why, thank you Maestro. That's  
quite a compliment coming from  
someone with your musical  
background.

MAESTRO PAER

Not at all. You're wonderful...!

Marie Louise blushes, as she turns her head around to catch sight of her friend.

Let me gather some pieces for you  
that just might expand your talent  
beyond mere technical skills. I'll  
bring them along to your next  
lesson.

MARIE-LOUISE

I look forward to it. Until then...

The Maestro, following Marie Louise's lead, kisses her hand.  
That will be all. Come on, Jeanne.

The Empress departs the concert room, with Jeanne trailing close behind.

JEANNE

(whispering aloud)  
I had no idea!

INT. IMPERIAL GUARD MILITARY SCHOOL, CHAMPS DE MARS, PARIS - NIGHT

In late June 1810, the Empress is treated to the grandest ball of all, given by the officers of the Imperial Guard at their Military School, and nearby Champs de Mars, in what is known as The Napoleon Quarter. Upon their arrival, female invitees are each given a bouquet of flowers by young, bright, impeccably uniformed soldiers, then escorted down a long gallery where they are seated along the walls leading to the newly-built ballroom and dining complex. Inside, are hung large tapestries of purple muslin, on which golden bees, myrtle, and laurel branches are sewn. Upon arrival of the Imperial Couple in the vast foyer of the gallery, all three-thousand women stand as one while holding their bouquets. All this appears to the Empress as living flowers, rising to greet a miraculous dawn.

Around midnight, the Emperor and Empress leave the ball. As they ride back to the palace, starlight and an unusually bright moon bathe their carriage, far away from the fetes and well wishes they leave behind. As for the officers of the Imperial Guard, the only reward they prize for hosting tonight's tribute is the sure and steady admiration their young Empress has for them.

INT. MARIE LOUISE'S IMPERIAL APARTMENTS, TUILERIES PALACE, PARIS - THE NEXT DAY

The next morning, Jeanne enters the Empress's suite and finds her sitting at her vanity, looking in the mirror.

JEANNE

Good morning. Sorry I'm late. There were so many people getting tea in the north wing kitchen.

Marie Louise continues to study her face in the mirror.  
Are you feeling well? Louise?

MARIE-LOUISE

Quite well. Yet, somehow, I don't know...I, I feel different.

Jeanne bends down, level with the mirror, and discovers the difference immediately.

JEANNE

Why, you're glowing!

MARIE-LOUISE

I am?

Jeanne stoops down to take another look.

JEANNE

Most definitely! Did the Emperor visit you after returning home last night?

MARIE-LOUISE

(abashed)

Yes.

Jeanne pats the Empress on the shoulder.

JEANNE

Allow me to brush your hair and we'll take another look when I'm done.

Jeanne retrieves a hair brush from the bureau. Let's start with one hundred strokes. Tell me what happened at the Military School last night when I returned to the palace?

MARIE-LOUISE

Well, there was the ball, of course. It was wonderful. I tell you, Jeanne, the young Officers were lining up to dance with me! And I obliged, after dancing with Napoleon, of course.

JEANNE

Twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven...

MARIE-LOUISE

Then, we headed back to the palace, but not before being surrounded by thousands of attendees, who streamed out of the venue and accompanied us to our carriage. On the ride home, the moon was shining so brightly that I believe the horses found their own way home.

JEANNE

Forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty...

MARIE-LOUISE

Ouch! Ow!

JEANNE

Sorry, you've got a rat in there!

A knock is heard on the secret passageway door. Napoleon opens it slowly.

NAPOLEON  
May I enter?

JEANNE  
Certainly...uh, uh...

Napoleon now joins the pair.

NAPOLEON  
Jeanne, there's no need to be so formal here! Call me by my first name. It's fine, but only in private.

MARIE-LOUISE  
Yes, Jeanne, please do.

Jeanne resumes her brushing.  
You call me Louise!

JEANNE  
I know, but that's different. I just can't bring myself to say the Emperor's name in his presence.

MARIE-LOUISE  
Come on, we'll say it together!

JEANNE  
I don't know...  
(hesitantly)

NAPOLEON  
I'll count to three.  
(grinning)

MARIE-LOUISE  
Yes. Come on, Jeanne. We're all part of the same household.

JEANNE  
Alright, then...

NAPOLEON  
One, two, three!

Joined by the royal couple.

JEANNE  
NAPOLEON.

Returning to her brushing.  
 Seventy-nine, eighty, eighty-one...

NAPOLEON  
 (amusingly)  
 And how did you sleep last night,  
 Louise?

Placing his hands on her shoulders.

MARIE-LOUISE  
 Fine.

Darting her blue eyes hither and yon.  
 Uh...Jeanne believes that I'm  
 glowing.

NAPOLEON  
 Glowing? Whatever does that mean?

MARIE-LOUISE  
 Maybe you can explain, Jeanne?

JEANNE  
 Oh, no, please. I couldn't! You  
 tell the Emper, uh, sorry,  
 Napoleon.  
 (mistakenly)

MARIE-LOUISE  
 Well, you best sit down!

NAPOLEON  
 Is it serious?

Napoleon sits down next to her on the vanity couch.

MARIE-LOUISE  
 It's serious alright!

NAPOLEON  
 Tell me, please.

MARIE-LOUISE  
 Well... Given my age-

NAPOLEON  
 Yes!  
 (impatiently)

MARIE-LOUISE  
 Given my age, and, well you know  
 how, how...intimate we've been.

Raising her shoulders, embarrassed as a schoolgirl.

NAPOLEON

Go on...

MARIE-LOUISE

Some would suggest that I'm...  
pregnant!

Napoleon looks back and forth at the two women.

NAPOLEON

Pregnant? For real? Jeanne?

Jeanne bends again to look in the mirror.

JEANNE

She's still glowing.

Napoleon looks into the mirror, then over at his wife.

NAPOLEON

Indeed. Louise, you're glowing!

MARIE-LOUISE

Yes, yes, I am!  
(laughing)

They embrace on the vanity couch, while Jeanne turns her head momentarily.

It's not by any means definite, but  
we'll know one way or the other  
very soon. Let's just say it's a  
positive sign.

NAPOLEON

That's good enough for me! And  
thank you, Jeanne Montroy.

JEANNE

You're welcome, Napoleon. Ninety-  
eight, ninety-nine, one-hundred!

Perspiring and completely out of breath. Witnessing this stirring moment firsthand, Jeanne begins to treasure her special role in the Bonaparte household even greater.

EXT. POSTING STATION, AVIGNON, FRANCE - AFTERNOON

Jeanne is waiting for Javier to pick her up at the Avignon posting station to bring her to the Montroy Farmhouse. Javier arrives forty minutes later.

JEANNE  
Javier, over here!  
(excited)

Javier backs his Phaeton up and swings it around to where Jeanne is standing.

JAVIER  
Welcome home, Jeanne Montroy! Here,  
let me take your bags!

JEANNE  
Oh, thank you.

Javier secures the bags, then helps Jeanne up the side of the Phaeton. They depart the posting station and head out for the farmhouse. During their half-hour ride, Jeanne and Javier catch up on life in Avignon.

JAVIER  
Gilbert will be waiting for us at  
the end of the road to the  
farmhouse.

JEANNE  
And how exactly does he plan on  
doing that?

JAVIER  
Well,  
(laughing)  
Gilbert has been quite busy since  
you were called to Paris!

JEANNE  
For instance?

Wiping her brow.

JAVIER  
For instance, take today! A month  
ago, he ordered five dozen  
specially forged iron stakes from  
Talbert, the blacksmith.

JEANNE  
Yes. I know his wife, Yolande!

JAVIER

Yes, yes! Then, using the hundred yards of rope we acquired at the General Store, he pounded in the stakes and slowly strung it through the eyelets all the way to the end of the farmhouse road. He then tied a knot on both ends, and voila! An excellent way for a sightless man to go to meet his cherie, no?

JEANNE

Oui! What else has he fashioned?

Javier snaps the reins, urging his horses to pick up the pace.

JAVIER

Oh, all manner of gadgetry. He's able to do everything by himself, and I mean everything! With the exception of driving and reading, of course! That, as you know, I take care of whenever he needs me... Maybe I'll get a break over the next three weeks, eh?

JEANNE

Oh, but of course, Monsieur!

JAVIER

And wait until you see the house! He cooks and cleans, does laundry. Everything sparkles, I tell you! As for the garden he planted this spring, you've never seen more precise rows of beans, carrots, tomatoes, onions, and peas. Such a bounty of produce!

Jeanne surveys the familiar Provence countryside, blinking through the Sun.

Is it true, Jeanne, that your farmhouse is the Montroy Family's ancestral home?

JEANNE

It's true, Javier! It was in the family for many generations.

JAVIER

How long?

JEANNE

Well, I'm told it dates back to the 1600s. The original family patriarch was named Isaac De Montrond. Apparently, he was a French Army hero during the war in Spain, who received formal letters of commendation for valor under fire.

JAVIER

Much like Gilbert, no?

JEANNE

Oui! He still has one of the letters from 1642 that he's quite proud of. It was signed by the Count of Tournon, bearing his seal.  
(proudly)

As for the farmhouse, all was well until Gilbert's greedy ancestors divided the estate, causing the property to be sold.

JAVIER

So, how did Gilbert's father come to acquire it?

JEANNE

He was a farmer, and he needed the land!

(laughing)

The house was simply an afterthought. He only became aware of the Montroy connection after he purchased it.

JAVIER

I knew a little bit about the family's history, but...

Distracted by a fox darting across the road.

JEANNE

As the story goes, the Count's letter sat in an old cabinet left behind by the previous owner. It must have changed hands many times before that. Gilbert found it when he was a boy! He's always been proud of that document. It's framed, and hangs in his library.

JAVIER

What did his father make of the letter?

JEANNE

He was too busy farming to fully appreciate it. Besides, Gilbert told me that his Papa couldn't read!

They pass over a wooden bridge, then focus their attention on the road ahead.

We're getting close. That's the Ruisseau divide we crossed back there, no?

JAVIER

Oui. Only a few more minutes is all.

Jeanne notices a distant figure standing by the side of the road.

JEANNE

It's Gilbert! Quick, let me off!  
I'll run the rest of the way!

Javier pulls back on the reins, as Jeanne clammers over the side. She runs the remaining fifty yards, finally reaching Gilbert. They embrace, and after a brief exchange, slowly walk arm in arm up the farmhouse road, as Javier follows behind.

Later that night, Jeanne leads Gilbert up the stairs by candlelight. They enter their bedroom, as Jeanne slowly closes the door.

INT. MARIE LOUISE'S IMPERIAL APARTMENTS, SAINT-CLOUD PALACE,  
PARIS - MORNING

Two weeks later, a chambermaid is standing over a kneeling Marie Louise as she hurls into a toilet in the lavatory. To cool the Empress down, she holds a wet washcloth to the back of her neck. Later, outside the Imperial Apartments, the same chambermaid shares the news with a fellow attendant.

CHAMBERMAID

I tell you, Madeleine, she's sicker than a colic broodmare!

MADELEINE

(nodding)  
Pregnant, to be sure...

CHAMBERMAID

Uh hmm.

INT. NAPOLEON'S PRIVATE STUDY, SAINT-CLOUD PALACE, PARIS -  
LATER

Claude-Francois is seated across the desk from Napoleon,  
sharing disparaging news.

NAPOLEON

She said what?

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

She said, the Empress is, uh...let  
me see if I got this right, sicker  
than a colic broodmare.

NAPOLEON

(enraged)

And this is the same chambermaid  
who attended to my wife only  
moments before?

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

The very same one. The attendant  
she told is waiting outside, if you  
want to hear it directly from her.

NAPOLEON

Did she identify the chambermaid in  
question?

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

So far, she's refusing! I  
threatened her with dismissal, but  
to no avail! Unless...

NAPOLEON

Unless, what?

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Unless you would prefer to question  
her yourself, Napoleon!

NAPOLEON

That won't be necessary. But, any  
woman who refers to my wife as a  
broodmare needs to be discharged  
immediately!

Thrusting his finger at his friend.

And since we don't know who it is,  
I want every single chambermaid on  
the Empress's domestic staff  
reassigned immediately!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
Very well! And replace them with  
whom?

Napoleon rubs his smoothly shaven face waiting for a plan to  
materialize. Minutes pass.

NAPOLEON  
Jeanne!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
Jeanne?  
(puzzled)

NAPOLEON  
Jeanne!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
Jeanne Montroy?

NAPOLEON  
Yes!

Getting up to tramps the marble floor, Claude-Francois soon  
joins his Emperor.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
I have witnessed the way your wife  
and her spend their days together.  
Jeanne, quite literally, could have  
been the Empress's older sister in  
another lifetime.

Claude-Francois passes by a decanter of cognac and pours  
himself a drink.

While we're on this topic, I know  
you expect me to serve as the  
Empress's mentor, but I can lend  
nothing to your young wife that  
Jeanne isn't already providing.  
Soundly, I might add!

NAPOLEON  
I fully agree. Consider yourself  
relieved of this responsibility.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS  
Thank you, Napoleon.

NAPOLEON

However, I do have another assignment for you.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Nothing too difficult, I hope.

NAPOLEON

Let's dispense with the jocularities. Jeanne is in Avignon for one more week. Get her back here!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

(pivoting)

Now?

NAPOLEON

At once! Send your fastest riders and retrieve her now, Claude-Francois!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Shall I secure a carriage for her return journey?

NAPOLEON

No. Jeanne is to return to the Tuileries on horseback! She's young and manages horses well. I often see her riding with Louise! I shall write Jeanne a personal letter ordering her return. And when she does, I'll place her in charge of hiring an entirely new domestic staff.

Snapping his fingers smartly.

Why not? Jeanne has a good temperament, Louise enjoys her company, as you've rightly observed, and she's an excellent judge of character!

(now resolved)

I'll prepare a letter for you and have it ready in half an hour...

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Consider it done, Napoleon. And I hope the Empress feels better soon!

NAPOLEON

Thank you, Claude-Francois. You're already insuring her wellbeing with your capable assistance. Be back here in thirty minutes!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Yes, Napoleon!

Claude-Francois immediately leaves the study to recruit the finest riders for this mission. For his part, Napoleon pulls a sheet of personal letterhead from his center drawer, selects a freshly cut quill, dips it into the inkwell, and begins composing his letter. But not before grumbling the very words that prompted his Imperial decision moments ago.

Sicker than a colic broodmare...!

(steaming)

INT. PRINCESS CAROLINE'S IMPERIAL APARTMENTS, TUILERIES PALACE, PARIS - MORNING

Princess Caroline is once again visited by her equerry, Henri. He hands her the most recent letter from The Empress's mother-in-law, Maria Ludovika.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

This is the third letter! Sooner or later, the Austrian Emperor will bring up his daughter neglecting to answer his wife with Napoleon.

HENRI

Indeed. But, how does this concern me, Princess?

PRINCESS CAROLINE

I need to send something to Maria Ludovika to stop these letters from coming. But what? I need some ideas, Henri...

(thinking)

You'll have to excuse me for a few minutes.

Princess Caroline rises from her chair and heads to her toilette cabinet next door. Henri looks around the bedroom and spots the intercepted letters scattered across the bureau. The Princess returns to her bedroom ten minutes later.

Any ideas, Henri?

HENRI

I'm at a loss.

PRINCESS CAROLINE

I'll bet! How is Marguerite doing?  
I hear she's been promoted to the  
Empress's apartments, with a pretty  
hefty raise I'm told!

Henri keeps his eyes on the floor, saying nothing.  
That must improve your household  
income significantly... Tell me, in  
your travels have you ever crossed  
paths with a forger?

HENRI

Excuse me, Madame?

PRINCESS CAROLINE

You heard me, Henri!

HENRI

But, why would you need a forger?  
Not to forge something from the  
Emperor, I hope? Why, that's a  
capital crime!  
(swallowing)

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Not the Emperor!

HENRI

(probing)  
Then, who...?

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Why, the girl!

Raising her brows.

HENRI

Our Empress?

PRINCESS CAROLINE

Yes, Henri. Find me a forger, my  
well-to-do Equerry! Once you have  
one, I'll draft a letter to Maria  
Ludovika, to be written in the  
forger's own hand!

EXT. ON ROUTE FROM AVIGNON TO PARIS, FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE -  
CONTINUOUS

Jeanne swiftly rides from posting station to posting station  
with her assigned escorts.

As she makes her way on this mission of mercy, Napoleon's letter summoning her back to the Tuileries Palace is recited on screen. Finding the letter on the kitchen table while visiting Gilbert, Javier reads the closing lines to himself.

NAPOLEON

(voiceover)

July 14, 1810

Saint-Cloud

Jeanne -

As your Sovereign, I am ordering you back to Paris to attend to the needs of your Empress. I do not like the way she's being treated by the help, and need you back here immediately. You are to ride by horseback with my escorts and arrive at the Tuileries Palace posthaste.

JAVIER

While it distresses me to take you away from Gilbert ahead of time, duty of the upmost kind calls. I am relieved already by my decision, so be on your way and extend my best regards to your esteemed and loyal husband.

- Napoleon

Moved by the high regard the Emperor has for Gilbert, he gently places the letter back into its envelope.

INT. FRANCIS II ROYAL APARTMENTS, HOFBURG PALACE, VIENNA -  
EVENING

One week later, a perturbed Maria Ludovika appears at Emperor Francis's apartment door in Schonbrunn Palace. Admitted in by a chamberlain, she is soon seated on a couch next to her husband in the library. There, she presents him with her step-daughter's newly received letter.

MARIA LUDOVIKA

I'm speechless! Marie Louise insists that her husband frowns upon any correspondence from Austria, save yours, and she informs me that my letters were discarded upon receipt on orders of Napoleon. Can you believe this? Something about safeguarding her French identity. Complete and utter rubbish!

FRANCIS

I completely agree with you.  
Honestly, I do! However, I feel...

Standing up and studying the letter near the candelabra.  
that I mustn't rock the boat where  
my daughter is concerned. I believe  
we all need to sit down and address  
this matter, together, when we see  
them, possibly next year in  
Dresden.

MARIA LUDOVIKA

Next year!

FRANCIS

Yes, next year. Until then, I'll  
gleam as much information as  
possible about her from Napoleon.  
This arrangement obviously agrees  
with him. Who knows, we may be  
getting together beforehand...

Maria Ludovika continues to sit pensively on the couch, with  
her arms folded, while the Emperor of Austria stands reticent  
before her.

INT. CONCERT ROOM, THE EMPRESS'S APARTMENTS, TUILERIES  
PALACE, PARIS - MORNING

With her morning sickness at bay and Jeanne back in the  
Tuileries, Marie Louise resumes her weekly piano lessons with  
Ferdinando Paer. He is already in the concert room when she  
and Jeanne arrive.

MARIE-LOUISE

Maestro.

MAESTRO PAER

Marie Louise.  
(bending)

Marie Louise starts for the piano.  
As promised last month, I brought a  
collection of pieces that I thought  
would challenge you, and, at the  
same time, broaden your exposure to  
even finer music.

He sets the pieces down on top of the piano for the Empress  
to consider. She now stands by his side, sifting through the  
collection.

MARIE-LOUISE

Oh, here's a piece written by Beethoven. You remembered!

(elated)

Hmm. It doesn't appear to be very challenging, however!

MAESTRO PAER

I was hoping you'd say that! I so admired your technique and speed during our first lesson, that I thought we needed to try something with a bit more emotion. More introspective, if you will. Langsam.

MARIE-LOUISE

Ja wohl! I see...

Studying the Maestro more closely.

MAESTRO PAER

Music that sings to the heart is, quite simply, the best guide a musician can have.

Taking the score over to the keyboard.

Do you mind if I play it? You can stand behind me and look over my shoulder, if that works for you. Sorry, Empress, but it's my only copy.

MARIE-LOUISE

That's quite alright, Maestro! Play it for me. I'll follow the notes on the page.

MAESTRO PAER

This work of Beethoven can be very deceiving, given its monotonous melody and tempo. Never confuse a lack of notes for lack of difficulty, Marie Louise.

Looking at her reflection in the piano's mirrored baseboard.

Very often, the slower the piece, the harder it is to perform.

MARIE-LOUISE

I'm afraid I don't understand...

MAESTRO PAER

Maybe if I play it, you'll better grasp my meaning. Notice here it's marked *Quasi una fantasia*, meaning, almost a fantasy. I say almost, because in this sonata, I believe that Beethoven is searching for something, but hasn't quite found it yet... Ready?

MARIE-LOUISE

I am. Please.

Maestro Paer plays this slow, haunting piece, later known as Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. Marie Louise is already sold well before the conclusion of the piece.

MAESTRO PAER

Beethoven dedicated this sonata to his beautiful young student, Julie Guicciardi. It's said that he fell in love with her, but socially, he was far from her equal.

Maestro Paer now stands, allowing Marie Louise to sit down after spending so long on her feet.

That won't be happening here, I can assure you.

(humorously)

JEANNE

I should say not!

(cleverly)

MAESTRO PAER

I value my profession, and, dare I say, life, too much...

Tugging at his collar. The Empress begins to play this alluring dirge, which will soon become a constant companion for her while Napoleon is away on future campaigns.

INT. EMPRESS MARIE LOUISE'S BEDCHAMBER, TUILERIES PALACE,  
PARIS - EVENING

Eight months later, a single bell from Notre Dame Cathedral tolls, followed by belfries throughout Paris, summoning its citizens on the evening of March 19, 1811, to pray for their Empress as she goes into labor. By this time, Dr. Dubois has already been living in the Tuileries for an entire month, awaiting this impending event.

For his part, a highly anxious Napoleon enters in and out of his wife's bedchamber from an adjacent room, checking on her status and offering intimate words of encouragement. But, as the night progresses, nothing happens. Then, hearing screams of agony from the next room, Napoleon is suddenly approached by Dr. Dubois.

NAPOLEON

What is it, doctor? Is my wife going to be alright?

DR. DUBOIS

(ashen)

The baby is breach, Your Highness!

NAPOLEON

What!

DR. DUBOIS

I'm afraid I have to make a terrible decision.

NAPOLEON

Concerning?

DR. DUBOIS

Whether to save the life of your wife at the expense of your heir...  
(gravely)

NAPOLEON

Let there be no doubt, physician, save my wife! I command you! Concern yourself with nothing else. She can have other children, but there's only one Empress. Go, you have my blessing.

Dr. Dubois immediately rushes back to the Empress's side, quickly followed by Napoleon, who stays with her until the screams become deafening. At the height of Marie Louise's agony, the Emperor gently kisses her forehead and leaves. By now he is pale with grief in the next room, enduring a quarter-hour of unrelenting anguish, the likes no battle ever visited upon him. Then, silence. Napoleon now bolts into the bedchamber and kneels by her side.

My sweet Louise.

Drying her tears with the back of his hand and detecting no cries from the baby, he assumes the worst. Unconcerned, and at once resolved, he again directs his attention to his ailing wife and whispers.

Heaven forbid anything should ever happen to you.

(MORE)

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)

I simply couldn't bear it. Please know, my darling, that we'll have other children, many of them!

Meanwhile, the baby boy, lying still in a weighing-basin, has failed to draw a detectable breath for almost seven minutes. He suddenly receives a few drops of Brandy on the lips from Jeanne, who takes charge by rapidly slapping him about the body and wrapping his nine-pound frame in hot towels. Miraculously, the child lets out a tiny cry and comes to life.

JEANNE

You have a healthy nine-pound boy, Napoleon!

Suddenly realizing her public gaff.

NAPOLEON

It's alright.

(winking)

She's used to calling me that when we're with the Empress in private. In fact, I insist on it! Thank you, Jeanne, for your courageous action! Louise and I shall never forget it.

An exhausted Marie Louise remains fast asleep, as an enormous throng below her window quietly waits to learn the sex of the child. Ceremonial cannons arranged on top of the palace now pound out their reports, surpassing twenty-one, for a girl, and all one-hundred one, for a boy, pleasing the ecstatic crowd. A hot-air balloon, containing aeronaut Madame Blanchard, soon rises high over the Champs de Mars. Reaching a proper altitude, she tosses reams of handbills over the side, announcing the birth of the King of Rome to waiting subjects on the ground. With that, the revelry begins with cheers heard in the Empress's bedroom, causing her to form a simple, unpretentious smile, while Napoleon stands in front of a floor-length window, taking in his adoring public.

EXT. COURTYARD, CHATEAU DE COMPIEGNE - AFTERNOON

Seated in their wicker chaise lounges on a warm September day, Marie Louise and Jeanne watch Napoleon play on the lawn with his six-month old son. Due to leave for Belgium in the morning, he wistfully spends his final hours in Compiègne with his family.

JEANNE

I'm told by the head chamberlain that everything is ready for tomorrow.

(MORE)

JEANNE (CONT'D)

He assures me that much of your luggage will travel with Napoleon, so when you meet him in Antwerp you'll have everything you need for your trip to Amsterdam.

The Empress listens to the shrills of a gleeful son, as Napoleon gently lofts him into the air.

MARIE-LOUISE

Not too high, now!

(concerned)

I can't say I'm thrilled about going to Amsterdam in October, but this may be our only chance to get there before Dresden next Spring.

More laughter is heard from father and son, as Napoleon sets his child down on the grass.

Oh Jeanne, get the blanket you brought down here and lay it next to Napoleon, so our son doesn't get soiled.

JEANNE

Alright. Any ideas yet of what you want to do while in Amsterdam?

Laying the blanket on the grass, Jeanne returns to her chaise.

MARIE-LOUISE

Well, exploring the tulips is out of the question! I told my husband that April is the optimum month to visit, but he said he forgot.

JEANNE

Typical man.  
(incisively)

MARIE-LOUISE

Oh, Napoleon, use the bib to wipe his mouth off, please!

JEANNE

(whispering)  
Careful, he dislikes it when you dote on your son.

MARIE-LOUISE

I know... My husband is perfectly happy when I dote on him!

JEANNE

He adores it!

MARIE-LOUISE

Napoleon, set him on his tummy, so we can watch him roll over. Still, there are plenty of other attractions to see. The canals, for instance. I also want to shop in Delft.

She and Jean watch for the baby to roll over.

JEANNE

They say the Dutch are very clean!

MARIE-LOUISE

Oh, yes! So neat and orderly. Everything in its place...

JEANNE

Is it true they take great pride in their well-burnished cupboards?

MARIE-LOUISE

Every house, I'm told. Unlike the abysmal hovels we had to endure in the other parts of the country!

JEANNE

I tend to agree! Living with your livestock under the same roof has its downside, to be sure.

MARIE-LOUISE

PU!

Squeezing her nose, as they look at each other and laugh. Though, I hear under no circumstance is that kind of living arrangement permitted in Amsterdam.

JEANNE

Too cleanly for that!

MARIE-LOUISE

Jawohl... Wait a minute! Napoleon wants to leave. I can tell when he's had enough leisure time for one day. Let's go!

Jeanne retrieves the blanket and toys, while Napoleon and Marie Louise walk arm-in-arm into the Chateau with their son.

INT. PALACE ON THE DAM, AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS - MORNING

Napoleon and Marie Louise, having arrived at the Palace on the Dam only a few days ago, discuss their respective itineraries during breakfast.

NAPOLEON

I leave for Den Helder at noon and will be gone three days...

Marie Louise gets up from her chair and begins to select breakfast items off the buffet table.

MARIE-LOUISE

Husband, you know how much I hate it when you leave!

NAPOLEON

It cannot be avoided, Louise. As Emperor, it is my responsibility, while here in Amsterdam, to inspect ongoing projects along the Zuider Zee. Why, Gaudin, himself, is counting on it. You know that!

MARIE-LOUISE

I know, I know.  
(sighing)  
Far be it from me to come between you and your Finance Minister! But, with our son back in Compiegne, there is little for me to do until you return. I do wish you would take me with you!

Sitting down at the table, while her husband pours himself another cup of coffee.

NAPOLEON

I would, were it not for the weather up there. It can get most violent, I assure you!

MARIE-LOUISE

But, I'm told that Den Helder is the sunniest town in Holland!

NAPOLEON

I've been told the same thing, but that's not saying much about the Netherlands. Louise, we're talking about the North Sea here!

Setting down his cup.

No! It's far too unpredictable up there, even for me. Duty calls, to be sure, but it's certainly not required of you. Besides, you said yesterday that you have big plans for exploring Amsterdam over the next week.

MARIE-LOUISE

You're right, I do! I'm sorry, you know that leaving always causes me great distress. But, it's only three days.

The Empress stops to study the flowery centerpiece adorning their table.

And, it's not like you're leaving on a military campaign!

Their plates are soon removed from the table by a member of the dining staff. Napoleon squeezes his wife's petite hand.

NAPOLEON

No, it's not.

(exhaling)

Now, let's talk about your plans while I'm away! Tell me what you have in store for yourself?

MARIE-LOUISE

Well, for starters, I'm going to visit the lovely canals here. I've never been around so much water! It's refreshing, don't you think? Then, there's shopping to be done.

(smiling)

I want to ride to Delft.

NAPOLEON

What's in Delft?

(inquiring)

MARIE-LOUISE

Why, Delftware, of course!

NAPOLEON

And what exactly is Delftware?

MARIE-LOUISE

It's a kind of specialty China. Dishware!

Napoleon leans back in his chair with his right arm loosely draped across the back.

NAPOLEON  
That sounds gratifying!  
(teasing her)

MARIE-LOUISE  
Oh, you...! And, I want to walk  
through the herb garden out in back  
of the palace. I'm told it's  
wonderful! So very Dutch.

NAPOLEON  
I'm sure it is, but not as fine as  
those in Provence...

Their conversation stalls for the moment. Marie Louise soon  
breaks the impasse.

MARIE-LOUISE  
I'll be fine, husband!

NAPOLEON  
Of course you will, Louise...

They both finish their coffee and pass their remaining  
mealtime in silence.

I/E. INTERIOR VESTIBULE, PALACE ON THE DAM, AMSTERDAM,  
NETHERLANDS - AFTERNOON

Ever since Napoleon's departure it's been one rainy day after  
another in Amsterdam, while farther to the North, the Zuider  
Zee has remained sunny and dry. Left with nothing to do,  
Marie Louise arranges her easel in a large first-floor  
vestibule, directly beneath Rembrandt's masterpiece The Night  
Watch. There, she paints a diminutive figure in this work  
known as the Golden Girl. Jeanne, as usual, accompanies the  
Empress, who is close to completing her replica.

JEANNE  
She is beautiful!

MARIE-LOUISE  
She certainly is!

Setting down her paintbrush.  
Giles insists that the Golden Girl  
bears a striking resemblance to me,  
when I was a child.

JEANNE  
And how would he know?  
(puzzled)

MARIE-LOUISE

He saw my portrait once in a Viennese gallery. I was about seven when it was painted.

JEANNE

You don't say!

MARIE-LOUISE

Yes. Small world, though I was Archduchess of Austria at the time!

JEANNE

True.

MARIE-LOUISE

My teacher claims he never forgets a face! I'm not sure whether I believe him or not, but he suggested to me during a recent lesson that I should paint the Golden Girl, if I had the time while in Amsterdam.

(laughing)

Well, little did I know that there'd be plenty of time for painting!

Jeanne studies the Rembrandt more closely.

JEANNE

Tell me more about this painting. You're always so knowledgeable when it comes to subjects like this!

MARIE-LOUISE

Very well. The artist's name is Rembrandt van Rijn. He was born in Leiden, I believe, in 16-0 something, and died here in Amsterdam at age sixty-three. He is considered to be the greatest painter in Dutch history, and this particular painting, among his finest.

JEANNE

I see. So, why is it hanging in here and not in some highfalutin gallery?

MARIE-LOUISE

Good question. I'm told, this palace used to be the Town Hall, and this room served as one of its primary galleries.

Jeanne looks around the ornate room, then up to the ceiling.

JEANNE

This interior is stunning, really. So different from our palaces. Not better, just different, mind you! I can't quite put my finger on it...

The Empress retrieves her brush, dabbing it on the pallet.

MARIE-LOUISE

Getting back to the painting...

JEANNE

Oh, yes.

Pulling up a chair and sitting down next to the Empress.

MARIE-LOUISE

From what Giles tells me, one of the local militias during the sixteen-hundreds commissioned this painting to hang inside the banquet hall of their headquarters.

JEANNE

It must've been a pretty large room!

MARIE-LOUISE

Indeed.

Applying more paint to the girl.

There! So...Rembrandt completed this enormous portrait just three years later. Time went by. Then, in 1715, the painting was moved into this building. But, it was too large to fit between those two columns. As a result, the workers were forced to trim the canvas down on all four sides.

JEANNE

What? You're kidding!

MARIE-LOUISE

Sadly, no. For the past hundred years the spare pieces have never been found.

Jeanne stands up and moves closer to the painting to figure out where the cuts were made.

JEANNE

Did this cause any of the characters to be lost?

MARIE-LOUISE

I'm not quite sure. Besides, I'm only interested in the little girl. Anyways, when Napoleon's brother, Louis, was made King of Holland, he converted the Town Hall into this palace. And now the painting-

JEANNE

And now the painting hangs in the palace where Empress Marie Louise resides!

(curtsying)

MARIE-LOUISE

Oui, so it does! We'll leave the painting to dry for now.

The Empress places the paintbrush in a turp jar and exits the opulent vestibule, returning arm in arm with Jeanne to her apartments.

Napoleon returns to the Palace late that evening. Notified immediately, Marie Louise bolts from her apartment, runs down the long hallway, and leaps into the courtyard, where she greets her husband by youthfully swinging herself around his neck. Later, in the Empress's bedroom, Napoleon admires his wife's latest painting, prominently displayed on the vanity. He now looks over at Marie Louise, who is reclining in bed.

NAPOLEON

Isn't that the little girl in the militia painting here in the Palace? Why, she's beautiful!

MARIE-LOUISE

Oh, husband. You noticed!

INT. CHRISTMAS DAY, SAINT-CLOUD PALACE, PARIS - MORNING

On a bright Christmas Day inside Saint-Cloud Palace, the Emperor and Empress watch as their nine-month-old son, Napoleon the Second, plays with colorful ribbons and wrappings now strewn across the floor. Jeanne soon joins them to witness this endearing event.

As snowdrifts begin to form on the ground outside, the camera retreats out of the window to reveal equally joyful households all over Paris, as Notre Dame Cathedral tolls its mighty bell.

I/E. PALACE OF THE TEUTONIC ORDER, MAYENCE, FRANCE

Some months later, after three days of rest, Napoleon and Marie Louise leave Mayence to cross over the Rhine River. As she passes over the bridge, the Empress glances back at France outside her window, just as she did two years earlier when leaving Austria for the formal transfer at Braunau.

EXT. THE ROYAL CASTLE, DRESDEN, SAXONY - NIGHT

Torches light the way for the Imperial carriage as it arrives at Dresden's Royal Castle just before midnight. Soon shown to their royal apartments, the couple ready themselves for a fortnight of diplomacy and, as destiny would have it, a Habsburg family reunion.

EXT. AUGUSTUS BRIDGE, ABOVE THE ELBE, DRESDEN, SAXONY - MORNING

Two days later, Napoleon and Marie Louise stroll along the top of the Augustus Bridge, which has been temporarily closed while the Imperial Couple share private time together. Midway across the bridge they turn and lean against a cast-iron railing, high above the Elbe, with a stiff wind blowing in their face.

MARIE-LOUISE

How could your sister do such a thing?

Attempting to contain her flailing hair.

NAPOLEON

She will be punished, I assure you!

MARIE-LOUISE

I don't want her punished!

NAPOLEON

Then, what exactly...?

MARIE-LOUISE

I want her stopped from doing any more harm to me, as well as our son. Going out of her way to actively intercept mail from my step-mother - my mail!

Forcefully slapping the railing with both hands.  
Why, it's not only unconscionable of your sister, but cruel and mean...

NAPOLEON

Of all my siblings, Caroline resembles me the most, figuratively, and now, it seems, literally!

MARIE-LOUISE

Oh, husband, don't sell yourself short. I've been working on your harsher side going on two years now, remember?

NAPOLEON

I remember, but, she committed a capital crime by hiring a forger to write a letter in your Imperial hand! No wonder the Empress has been so cold towards you these past few days! It's unhealthy what Caroline has done. She needs to live far, far away from the French Court! There'll be no exceptions this time...

(decisively)

I will inform your father at once. He will want my sister sorely disciplined.

Marie Louise moves her fingers closer to Napoleon's, as he gazes down upon the slowly moving current.

MARIE-LOUISE

How long until you leave on your Russian campaign?

NAPOLEON

A week or so...

MARIE-LOUISE

Then, let's make them the happiest  
of days, husband!

Pecking his freshly shaven cheek.

Besides, there'll be plenty of time  
to dwell on your absence after you  
leave.

Napoleon vainly tries to tame her blowing strands by tucking  
them behind her ears.

NAPOLEON

(smiling)

Blonde Haar...

MARIE-LOUISE

Yes...blonde Haar.

(melancholy)

The couple now make their way back to the Royal Palace,  
passing through the parting crowd, who patiently wait to  
cross the bridge.

INT. ROYAL PALACE APARTMENTS, DRESDEN - AFTERNOON

One week later, while running an errand for the Empress,  
Marguerite finds a wheelchair sitting outside her Royal  
Apartments. Inside, she discovers Empress Maria Ludovika  
rummaging through Marie Louise's personal effects.

MARGUERITE

May I assist you, Empress?

MARIA LUDOVIKA

I need a stole to match my gown.  
There's an outdoor concert tonight  
and I don't want to catch cold.

MARGUERITE

The Empress's closets are back  
here.

Marguerite escorts the Empress out of the bedchamber, and  
opens up a massive walk-in-closet in the adjoining room.

The stoles are likely laid out in  
one of the large drawers over  
there, along the wall. Here, I'll  
get a candle.

Marguerite returns with a candelabra, setting it on a  
wardrobe trunk.

While helping the Empress select a suitable article to wear, a diamond necklace and a pair of cameo earrings fall out of Marie Ludovika's dress, onto the floor.

MARIA LUDOVIKA

Oh! My necklace and earrings seem  
to have fallen off.  
(panicking)

Just then, an elaborate emerald brooch also drops out of the Empress's dress.

MARGUERITE

Wait right here!  
(forcefully)  
I'm going to get Jeanne Montroy,  
the Empress's Grand Mistress.

Marguerite quickly walks through the rooms and out into the hallway. However, before going to find Jeanne, she searches the wheelchair, only to find even more jewelry stowed in a side pocket. Minutes go by. Jeanne eventually arrives with Marguerite outside their Empress's apartments. There, they discover that not only is the wheelchair missing, but Maria Ludovika is no where to be found.

INT. ROYAL PALACE APARTMENTS, DRESDEN - LATER

Having received an official notice days ago from the King of Prussia requesting a last minute meeting, Napoleon grants him an audience, receiving him into his royal apartments.

CHAMBERLAIN

Your Highness, may I present the  
King of Prussia, Frederic William.

Now crossing the room to embrace Napoleon.

NAPOLEON

Brother Fredric, welcome! How good  
of you to finally decide to come to  
Dresden and join the rest of the  
Coalition here.

FREDERIC WILLIAM

The pleasure is entirely mine, and  
my apologies if I'm the reason for  
delaying your departure.

NAPOLEON

I assure you, Frederic William,  
that this delay pleases my wife  
alone, save the Duke of Bassano.

(MORE)

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)  
 For this, I thank you.  
 (feigning praise)

FREDERIC WILLIAM  
 Yes, Foreign Minister Maret would  
 approve of our meeting, however  
 late!

NAPOLEON  
 Indeed. Besides, an additional week  
 assures me of a far more favorable  
 road to the Niemen. You're a  
 military man, surely you know how a  
 wet Spring can slow an army down.

Leveling his eyes with the King.  
 Enough of that, please sit, Prince.

FREDERIC WILLIAM  
 Thank you, Emperor.

Napoleon leads the King over to a pair of Bergère Chairs set  
 on each side of the fireplace.

NAPOLEON  
 Now, tell me, what's on your mind?

FREDERIC WILLIAM  
 Well, my son, Crown Prince Frederic  
 William, is of age and desires to  
 accompany my forces to Russia, with  
 a formal Commission from you, of  
 course.

NAPOLEON  
 Granted.

FREDERIC WILLIAM  
 With the understanding that he  
 serve in the allied forces, and  
 that he will be treated with the  
 upmost respect by the rest of the  
 officers.

NAPOLEON  
 But, of course, of course!

FREDERIC WILLIAM  
 Now, regarding your plans to take  
 Moscow, please, enlighten me  
 Napoleon.

INT. EMPEROR FRANCIS' SUITE, ROYAL PALACE, DRESDEN - MOMENTS  
LATER

The Empress sends Jeanne to Maria Ludovika's suite to collect the purloined jewelry. Knocking on the door, a chambermaid admits her into the royal residence.

JEANNE

I am Grand Mistress to the Empress Marie Louise. I've been sent to have a word with Empress Maria Ludovika.

CHAMBERMAID

She's uh, currently...indisposed!

JEANNE

Very well, I shall wait until she receives me. Do you have a sitting room?

CHAMBERMAID

This way.

Jeanne follows the Chambermaid into a nearby anteroom and sits down on one of its chairs.

I will convey your request to the Empress now.

JEANNE

Thank you. I shall wait.

Upon hearing the Chambermaid's message, Maria Ludovika charges into the sitting room to confront Jeanne.

MARIA LUDOVIKA

What do you want!

JEANNE

The Empress requests the return of her missing jewelry.  
(sternly)

MARIA LUDOVIKA

What? My daughter-in-law is making me out to be some kind of thief? Why, I demand an apology!  
(vociferously)

JEANNE

That's the message you want me to convey to the Empress?

MARIA LUDOVICA  
That's right. Consider it conveyed!

Emperor Francis now enters the sitting room.

FRANCIS  
What's this all about, and who's  
doing all the shouting?

MARIA LUDOVICA  
Your daughter, Marie Louise, has  
accused me of stealing! Who exactly  
does she think she is? Doesn't she  
know she married a ruthless  
murderer? A man who single-handedly  
destroyed my family? My own flesh  
and blood?

Francis moves to subdue his wife.  
I want Vengeance. Do you  
understand? Vengeance!

Falling to the floor, Francis attempts to restrain her  
further.

FRANCIS  
Will you excuse us? Kindly inform  
the Empress that I shall have the  
jewelry, along with anything else  
my wife has taken, returned to her  
Royal Apartments forthwith.

JEANNE  
Very well, Your Highness. Consider  
it done.

Jeanne immediately exits the suite.

EXT. BALCONY, ROYAL PALACE APARTMENTS, DRESDEN - EVENING

On the eve of Napoleon's departure, the Emperor and Empress,  
having decided days ago to forego any formal send-off, enjoy  
dinner alone on the balcony of their royal apartments. While  
the air outside is cool, they compensate by wearing warmer  
garments. A Chamberlain in a topcoat waits on them.

NAPOLEON  
I must say, this Rhine Wine is  
better served cold!

MARIE-LOUISE  
Indeed. That's how many people here  
prefer it.

(MORE)

MARIE-LOUISE (CONT'D)  
 It really brings out the attar of  
 the white grapes that grow along  
 the Rhine. Thus, its name.

NAPOLEON  
 (a bit perturbed)  
 Alright, schicke Hose!

MARIE-LOUISE  
 Why, husband, you haven't called me  
 that in over a year. I believe it  
 was at the Orangery outside the  
 Laeken Palace.

NAPOLEON  
 Well, it still fits!  
 (laughing)

Toasting his wife with the sumptuous wine, as she raises her  
 glass in turn. All the while, a pair of floor-length  
 translucent sheers flutter aimlessly out the balcony door.

MARIE-LOUISE  
 I've asked the head chef to prepare  
 your favorite meal tonight. The  
 wine will go just perfect with it!  
 (excited)

NAPOLEON  
 Let me guess. Well, we're in  
 Saxony, so I'd say...Sunday roast!

MARIE-LOUISE  
 No.

NAPOLEON  
 Trout, it must be Trout!

Rapping the table.

MARIE-LOUISE  
 (laughing)  
 No!

NAPOLEON  
 You're enjoying this.

MARIE-LOUISE  
 Yes, I am!  
 (sprightly)

NAPOLEON  
 Let's see now. You know me best.  
 The simpler the meal, the better.

MARIE-LOUISE

Uh hmm.

NAPOLEON

I give up!

MARIE-LOUISE

You're giving up so easily? That's not like you! I'll give you a hint. It's Italian...

NAPOLEON

That doesn't exactly minimize my choices!

(ruminating)

Maccaronaro!

MARIE-LOUISE

No.

NAPOLEON

Louise, I'm simply out of guesses!

MARIE-LOUISE

Chicken Marengo!

NAPOLEON

You didn't?

Rising to his feet.

MARIE-LOUISE

Uh hmm. Are you surprised?

NAPOLEON

Surprised? Why, I'd cross the Alps for it every time! It's my lucky meal, you know.

MARIE-LOUISE

Yes, I know! It should be out any moment.

NAPOLEON

Hot, I hope.

MARIE-LOUISE

Piping!

Napoleon pours himself another glass of wine, anticipating the meal.

NAPOLEON

Shall I tell you about the Battle  
of Marengo?

MARIE-LOUISE

I've already read numerous  
accounts, some from the Austrian  
perspective, I might add.

NAPOLEON

A defeated perspective, I might  
add!

(tauntingly)

The Chamberlain wheels a dining cart out onto the balcony.  
Two ornate plate-covers are removed and the Chicken Marengo  
is served to the ravenous couple.

Do you have any French bread?

CHAMBERLAIN

No, I'm sorry, Your Highness. We  
have an excellent selection of  
German bread, as well as Italian.

NAPOLEON

Italian is perfect!

Touching his fingers to his lips in affirmation.

CHAMBERLAIN

Very well, Your Highness. Italian  
bread it is!

The Chamberlain departs the balcony, taking the cart with  
him.

MARIE-LOUISE

How is it?

NAPOLEON

It's as good as my company chef  
prepared for me after the victory!

Napoleon proceeds to eat very rapidly, as is his custom. The  
Chamberlain soon appears with the Italian Bread, which has  
been sliced for them.

MARIE-LOUISE

Is it true your chef actually used  
a Sabre to prepare the chicken for  
this dish?

NAPOLEON

I'll never tell. That, my wife, is  
the stuff of legend!

The Emperor finishes his meal, but not before reaching for a  
slice of bread to mop the gravy up on his plate. Marie  
Louise, meanwhile, isn't even halfway done with her dinner.

On a more serious note, I heard  
about the Empress Maria Ludovika.

MARIE-LOUISE

It's shocking, I tell you. Who  
would have ever believed such  
purloining. From me, no less. So  
bold of her! I'm letting my father  
handle this. I can only suspect  
that she's jealous of me.

NAPOLEON

I would have to agree. She's young,  
like you, and an Empress as well.  
My guess is, she couldn't come to  
grips with the splendor that  
accompanies you. Imagine what she'd  
do if she saw the palaces we reside  
in.

MARIE-LOUISE

I simply cannot, husband.

NAPOLEON

Enough of that. What's for dessert?

MARIE-LOUISE

Ring the bell and you'll find out!  
Go ahead, I'll catch up...

Ringing the bell, the Chamberlain soon reenters the balcony.

NAPOLEON

We'll have our dessert now.

CHAMBERLAIN

It's all ready, Your Highness. I'll  
bring it right out.

The Chamberlain appears with the dining cart and sets the  
dessert plates before them.

NAPOLEON

It's Dolce del Principe!  
(gleefully)

MARIE-LOUISE  
The Prince's Dessert.

They proceed to finish their meal, and soon retire into the apartments. Later, next to the Empress's bed, a discarded nightshirt and silk chemise lay side by side on the floor.

EXT. BALCONY, ROYAL PALACE APARTMENTS, DRESDEN - DAWN

Having risen, shaved, and dressed in battle garb, Napoleon stands near the apron of the balcony watching the coal-laden barges slowly make their way up the Elbe for Cuxhaven. Marie Louise soon climbs out of bed, slips on her chemise, and walks out towards the balcony. On the way, she grabs her husband's petit Grenadier's jacket, complete with gold-bullion epaulets, and places it over her shoulders to avoid the early morning cold. Stepping out onto the balcony, the Empress passionately embraces her husband from behind, laying her head on his shoulder.

Moments later, Napoleon departs the Royal Palace, leaving his wife behind. She watches from the balcony, as his Imperial carriage slowly disappears into the forbidding East.

INT. KONIGLICHES PALAIS, BERLIN, BRANDENBURG - MORNING

A duplicitous Frederic William, back in his library at the Royal Palace in Berlin, is writing to Emperor Alexander, providing him with vital information regarding Napoleon's plans to invade Russia. At the same time, he provides some advise of his own as to how to effectively destroy Napoleon on the Czar's very soil.

FREDERIC WILLIAM

SECRET

May 31, 1812

Royal Palace

Berlin

Emperor Alexander,

Having recently met with the Emperor Napoleon in Dresden, I feel it necessary to report on his top secret plans to invade your Empire. With over six-hundred thousand French and coalition troops at his disposal, the main army, under Napoleon's command, left Dresden two days ago, headed for the Niemen, where they will make their drive to Vitebsk. From there, he will race to the Capital, making it his Winter Quarters, if need be.

(MORE)

FREDERIC WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Once entrenched in Moscow, he plans to remain there until you accept his proposed terms and join the other European powers in a grand coalition.

Now, for some sound advice, especially where our common foe is concerned. Napoleon's hubris will certainly be his demise. One French loss on the battlefield will be all it takes to send France reeling. Then, a new coalition will arise with Mother Russia in the vanguard! From the Rhine to the Niemen, there will be a shout of joy the likes the World has never heard before. Therefore, in order to achieve this just end, it is imperative that you strike no initial blow against Napoleon. Rather, draw him and his Grande Armee' into the very heart of Russia. Then, let weather, fatigue, and famine do its work. I assure you, Alexander Pavlovich, that this strategy will result in the French Emperor's sound defeat. Until then, I remain your vigilant friend and admirer,  
Fredric William Hohenzollern, King  
of Prussia

EXT. FRENCH ENCAMPMENT, VITEBSK, RUSSIAN EMPIRE - CONTINUOUS

Two months later, in an encampment some five-hundred miles east of the Niemen, Napoleon writes yet another letter to Marie Louise, while his equerry waits outside.

NAPOLEON

July 26, 1812  
Headquarters  
Vitebsk, Russia  
My Dearest Louise,  
I'm happy to report that the Russian Army is in full retreat! As I write this letter, our soldiers are preparing to attack their rearguard at first light. I want the people of Europe to understand that my goal is not to conquer Russia, rather it is to defeat their army and force the Czar to rejoin the grand coalition.

(MORE)

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)

The World will be a safer place  
once the Russians are back in the  
fold, on the same side as the  
French.

I am also happy to report that my  
sister, Caroline, has been forced  
to live in Normandy, indefinitely!  
She now reluctantly resides at the  
Chateau de Carrouges in the Orne  
department. Alexis Le Veneur,  
vicomte de Tillieres, whose family  
owns the Chateau and have granted  
me use of the estate, is the same  
person that I made Count of the  
Empire two years ago. Justice  
delayed is justice denied, and I  
acted as soon as adequate living  
arrangements could be made. It is  
done, Louise, and it's entirely my  
decision as punishment for her  
highly criminal activities. As for  
her palace accomplices, they have  
been duly pardoned!

I will write you tomorrow,  
hopefully with a battle victory to  
report! When you lay your sweet  
head on your pillow tonight,  
pretend that I am there beside you.  
That's all I truly long for,  
Louise. Until then, I remain your  
devoted husband,

N

EXT. MONTROY FARMHOUSE, AVIGNON, PROVENCE, FRANCE - MORNING

Of all the obstacles Gilbert has successfully overcome during  
the past two years, the ability to drive blind is perhaps his  
greatest achievement. With the benefit of his four trained  
horses and highly peaked senses, he has managed to master the  
round trip to Avignon unassisted. For the past three months,  
through all kinds of weather, Gilbert has diligently made  
this trek, memorizing the sensation of each and every bump,  
rut, and stone along the way. What's more, the sounds,  
tastes, and scents permeating the air around him have served  
as a steady guide. Even the warmth and direction of the Sun  
work to assure him of his whereabouts! As for negotiating the  
curvatures in the road, his horses are equally attuned.

INT. MARIE LOUISE'S IMPERIAL APARTMENTS, TUILERIES PALACE,  
PARIS - DUSK

Marie Louise has written to her husband every day since his departure. Already briefed about his entry into Moscow and the windswept, intense blazes set there by Russian operatives, effectively denying him and his army the shelter that only a winter quarters provides, the Empress now fears for Napoleon's very survival. For its part, the citizenry of Paris shares this fear, not only for the Emperor, but its beloved sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers, throwing the entire Capital into turmoil.

MARIE-LOUISE

October 21, 1812

Tuileries Palace

Paris

Dearest Husband,

By now, you're likely on the road back home. My gain, for better or for worse, is your loss. My only wish, selfishly on my part, I know, is your safe return! So, take care of yourself and keep me informed as best you can while you make your way back to dear France. The whole of Paris knows about your withdrawal and are on the edge of their seats waiting for the casualty reports.

There's been hostility in the city since this news arrived, and I'm afraid that massive unrest will be the likely result! As such, I am paring down my personal staff and sending them home. Jeanne is already on her way back to Avignon. We shall meet again one day under happier circumstances, pray God. Until then, she belongs with her dear Gilbert. Were you here, I'm sure you'd agree with my prudent action.

Your son continues to thrive, Napoleon. I visit him at least three times a day. He looks more and more like you and will be filled with happiness upon your return! As for me, I'll be shedding tears of joy.

Mein warm, weich wittthaut awaits you.

Vive la France!

Vive la Republique!

(MORE)

MARIE-LOUISE (CONT'D)  
 Vive l'Empereur!  
 Your loving wife, Louise

EXT. BEREZINA RIVER, MINSK REGION, RUSSIA - AFTERNOON

Safely on the western side of the Berezina River, across from Borisov, some fifty-miles northeast of Minsk, Napoleon, fearful of reported unrest and a possible coup back home, leaves his Grande Armee' behind and heads off to Paris by horse-sleigh. But not before ordering his two pontoon bridges to be set ablaze, stranding thousands of his troops in Russian Territory. After losing as many as forty-five thousand men during his successful fight to cross the river, Marie Louise, sitting at her pianoforte, accompanies scenes from this heroic battle and her husband's bitter journey home, playing Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, a piece she has recently mastered and committed to memory.

EXT. POSTING STATION, AVIGNON, PROVENCE, FRANCE

Gilbert pulls into the posting station lot and waits for Jeanne to approach. Hearing the rush of her dress along the side of the wagon, he climbs off to meet her. Taking his hand, Jeanne leaps up and hugs Gilbert around the neck, passionately kissing his cheeks over and over.

JEANNE

Where's Javier? Is he following you? Did you drop him off somewhere?

GILBERT

Let's just say I rely on my trusty horses and the keen senses I have left.

JEANNE

I don't believe it!

Shaking her head.

Why, its miraculous what you've done. Are people in town aware of this?

GILBERT

Oh, yes, I hear them pass by me every day! I'm not exactly sure if they wave, but I certainly do!  
 (laughing)

A thoroughly perplexed Jeanne soon places her luggage behind the driver's bench and climbs up the side, as does Gilbert.

JEANNE

I can drive now, husband.

GILBERT

No, no. I've got this. Watch,  
you'll see.

Snapping the reins, the horses wheel the wagon around and proceed home.

JEANNE

I still don't believe it!

GILBERT

What's so hard to believe? That I've memorized every dip and bump along this road? Every hole and stone? Now that's hard to believe! Besides, I've learned that being blind has heightened my senses.

JEANNE

I've heard that said by others.  
(musing)

GILBERT

Well, it's true, in my case  
anyways. How is the Empress?

JEANNE

Oh, she's in a frightful state! All  
of Paris, as well.

GILBERT

I've heard. The Emperor fleeing  
Moscow and returning to France  
ahead of his troops is alarming, to  
be sure. Why, there was a rally in  
Avignon just last night!

Going over a big bump.

There should be a big gully coming  
up right about...now!

The wagon slowly lists to the right, then corrects itself.

JEANNE

A rally? For the Emperor, I hope...

Gilbert remains silent.

That poor girl, the Empress has  
enough on her plate without that!

GILBERT

Indeed. She'll need all the advise she can get until Napoleon returns home.

JEANNE

Well, she's already made a command decision by sending most of her domestic staff home, including me. That took guts.

GILBERT

Its only going to get worse.

JEANNE

How do you mean?

The wagon approaches a hayfield up ahead, on the left.

GILBERT

Jeanne, is there anyone coming towards us? The horses like to nibble hay up here along the side of the road. Watch, they'll stop on their own until I give them permission to eat.

The horses stop on cue, as Gilbert gives the word.  
Let me know if anyone approaches.

JEANNE

I will, you're alright...

Now reaching into her bag.

I've been saving these pears.  
They're from the Tuileries root cellar!

GILBERT

You don't say. Well, ask me if I feel honored!  
(irreverently)

Nudging the leather reins to coax his horses back into the road, he returns to the right side, as they enter the final stretch home.

JEANNE

Speaking of being honored, I have an important letter for you.

Plunging her hand into the bag once more.

GILBERT

Go on...

Jeanne has a difficult time getting her words out.  
Why Jeanne, what is it?

Stopping the wagon.

JEANNE

Do you mind if I open this sealed envelope, it's addressed to you.

GILBERT

Go right ahead, Javier does it for me all the time!

JEANNE

It's from Napoleon.

GILBERT

(swallowing)  
Go ahead...

Jeanne now opens the contents of the envelope. Unfolding the document, she begins.

JEANNE

By proclamation as Emperor of France and Italy, I, Napoleon Bonaparte, do hereby declare on this, the Thirtieth day of November, in the year of our Devine Savior, Eighteen-Hundred and Twelve, that Gilbert Michel Montroy, is made...is made...

(tearfully)

Forgive me, Gilbert, is made a Count of the Empire for his exceptional bravery under fire during the Battle of Abensberg on the Twentieth day of April, Eighteen-Hundred and Nine, as well as for his generous contribution to the Republic.

I set my hand and seal below.  
Signed at Posen, Duchy of Warsaw, this day.  
Napoleon

A wagon now approaches from behind. Gilbert hears its horses snorting and moves on.

A Count...

Rubbing her thumb over the Emperor's seal.

GILBERT

I'm speechless, Jeanne. Absolutely speechless!

(reminiscing)

The Montroy name is restored once again.

JEANNE

Such a great honor, and to think I'm a Countess!

(breathless)

GILBERT

That's right...! But, Jeanne, what do you make of the Emperor also crediting me with, what was it?

JEANNE

Your generous contribution to the Republic.

GILBERT

I fail to understand...

JEANNE

I see the Empress's hand in this.  
(smiling)

GILBERT

And a blessed hand it is...

Gilbert stops the wagon on the simple wooden bridge spanning the rapidly flowing brook, just before their illustrious farmhouse.

Ruisseau divise'.

JEANNE

Yes, Gilbert, the Divided Brook.  
Divided no longer!

They now turn into the driveway, its guide rope and iron stakes long since removed. Gilbert parks the rig even with the manor, as Jeanne jumps down from the side. She soon grabs her luggage and enters the fine stone farmhouse. Following behind, a jubilant Gilbert sings bars from *La Marseillaise*, while advancing up the slate walkway and quietly locking the freshly painted door behind him.

THE END

EPILOGUE

On January 25, 1814, Napoleon kissed his wife and son goodbye, this time to defend Paris against the hostile forces of Imperial Russia, the Kingdom of Prussia, and the Austrian Empire. He never saw them again.

Less than three months later, while Marie Louise and her son were safely in Blois, Napoleon was deposed by the French Senate and forced to abdicate his title. Soon after, he was sent into exile on the island of Elba.

Stripped of her French title and ultimately bending to her father's will, Marie Louise, along with her son, Napoleon the Second, returned to the seclusion of the Schönbrunn Palace.

At the age of 56, Marie Louise took ill, lost consciousness, and never woke up again. She died on December 17, 1847, at Colorno Palace in the Duchy of Parma. Her body was later interred in Vienna's Imperial Crypt, where she lies today.