

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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PROLOGUE

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 II.

(MORE)

OLDER MARIE-LOUISE (CONT'D)
 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 Compiegne, located north of Paris, to meet her betrothed Emperor of France.

This ceremonial site consists of three buildings, interconnected by adjoining doors. The westernmost structure is to house the Austrian delegation. The easternmost, 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, but
 suddenly pausing)
 What does she look like?

DE BAUSSET
 Well, to begin with, she is tall.
 (turning to look at
 Princess Caroline)
 The Emperor will have to get taller
 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 lower)
 I bored that one especially for
 you.
 (stepping aside)

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!
 (pointing to the Countess)

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.

(trying 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.

(minutes pass)

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,
looking up from the hole
and laughing)

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...

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 eyes to the Count, who approaches Monsieur de Bausset. He soon gains access to the doctored door.

Where exactly is the dog again?
(peeking into the center
hall)

PRINCESS CAROLINE
On her lap, Count!
(impatiently)

COUNT OF SEYSEL
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 SEYSEL
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. The
Archduchess can take nothing with
her from Austria. That's the French
royal tradition for foreign brides.
That goes for clothing, shoes,
jewelry, furniture, luggage,
everything! Besides, my brother
hates dogs, especially Pauline's.

(she bends to take another
look)

An Austrian dignitary is now walking towards the French door.
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.
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 East 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
Compiegne.

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 redress 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 circle around Princess Caroline)

PRINCESS CAROLINE

How nice.
(pausing)
May we sit somewhere?

MARIE-LOUISE

Oh, 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.

(staring at the floor)
She has been with me since I was a child!

PRINCESS CAROLINE
I understand, Empress, but...

MARIE-LOUISE
(lowering her voice and speaking slowly)
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 dazzling 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...

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!
(pausing)
(MORE)

PRINCESS CAROLINE (CONT'D)
Risk a bad first impression?
Empress...?

Countess Lazansky gently knocks on the door.

COUNTESS LAZANSKY
I'm sorry to interrupt you,
Empress, but the carriages will be
ready to leave in one hour.

MARIE-LOUISE
Very well.
(waiting for the countess
to close the door)
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 familial
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.
(pausing)
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.

MARIE-LOUISE
(stopping a lady-in
waiting)
I'll get this. Yes, what is it?

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

MARIE-LOUISE
(addressing the lady-in-
waiting across the room)
That will be all. You may go now.

The lady-in-waiting obediently departs the suite through a servant's door.

Come in.

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

MARIE-LOUISE
To stand watch?

MARGUERITE
(nervously darting her
eyes down both ends of
the hallway)
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.
 (smiling while closing the
 door)

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 in through the
 secret entryway)
 Thank you, Jeanne. That will be
 all.
 (taking Jeanne's hand, and
 smiling)

JEANNE
 I shall return in fifteen minutes,
 madame.

COUNTESS LAZANSKY
 Very well.
 (looking at Marie Louise)
 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
 Countess Lazansky's arms,
 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 eyed)

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 as a toddler?

MARIE-LOUISE

Marchenbuch!

COUNTESS LAZANSKY

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

MARIE-LOUISE

And the book of games, later on.
(looking at her confused
governess, giggling)
Allerhand Kinderspielund!

COUNTESS LAZANSKY

Oh, yes, now I remember. What a
good memory you have...
(raising Marie Louise's
hand to her cheek)

MARIE-LOUISE

Then there was, oh, let me see,
(pausing to think)
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!

(sighing, as she looks
deeply into the Countess
Lazansky's eyes)
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, little girl. 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, whispering)
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!

(crying out louder)

Schatzen!

(now pounding on the wood
panel behind her)

Stop the carriage! Stop this
carriage now!

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

(pointing to the carriages
up ahead)

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

DRIVER

As you wish!

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

(observing the Empress
closely)

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 her absence)

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 Chateau 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 complies)
Nice, now the left.

(standing back to survey
his work)

Magnifique! You may step down,
Emperor.

Napoleon steps off the stool and attempts to remove the coat.
Allow me, Your Highness.

(MORE)

LEGER (CONT'D)
(gently removing the
diamond-studded garment)
There! I'll be back tomorrow for
your final fitting. I assure you,
Your Highness, this manteau will
fit you like a glove.

NAPOLEON
I'll be here...
(flashing a rare smile at
Claude-Francois)
You may go now, Leger.

LEGER
(nodding his head)
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
(looking at the clock)
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!
(shaking his head before
pacing once again)
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.

(throwing his hands in the
air)

What if she's...

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

An ugly duckling?

(chuckling)

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

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 to himself, but
now more serious)

You'll be the teacher of
Mademoiselle Marie Louise, unlike
your early 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,

(raising his voice higher)

'My only job is to please you!'

(returning to his normal
voice)

Did she not?

NAPOLEON

She did...

(firmly)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Well, remember not to stand 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 again)
You're a good friend!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS
Touché, 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 desktop 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.

(suddenly forgetting his prior apprehensions)
Men will be even more restricted! Marie Louise's world will be limited to me; her art and music teachers, who will be carefully chaperoned, 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 precisely why I keep you around, Claude-Francois...
(MORE)

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)
 (suddenly dropping himself
 into a nearby chair)
 Oh, will she ever arrive...?
 (stewing)

Napoleon once again stands 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 Chateau de Compiègne.

JEANNE
 Monsieur de Saint Aignan!
 (lifting her dress while
 running down the garden
 path)
 Monsieur Saint Aignan, please wait!
 (waiving her arm)

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

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN
 Why, Jeanne, what is it?
 (waiting for her to catch
 her breath)
 I'm sorry, I never thought to ask
 you how your husband is, 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...
 (rubbing his chin)
 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!
 (MORE)

MONSIEUR DE SAINT AIGNAN (CONT'D)
He was sighting cannons all day,
too.

JEANNE
I know...
(her eyes widening in
realization)

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...
(suddenly choked up with
tears)

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,
(now more determined)
and replacing them with everything
French, Princess Caroline saw to it
to send her Grand Mistress as well
as her little dog back to Vienna!

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.

(waiting for the strolling couple to advance)

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

(MORE)

JEANNE (CONT'D)
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 an
angry 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 Chateau de Compiegne?

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 Jeanne the inside
of his large currier 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...
(rubbing his chin and
thinking)
Believe it or not, I'm familiar
with that breed.
(surprised with himself)
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 her dark
brown eyes, sincerely)
I'll be sure to tell Napoleon when
I return to Compiègne.

JEANNE
Oh, you've made me so happy,
Monsieur!
(touching his wrist)

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.
(pausing)
Goodnight, Jeanne!

JEANNE
Goodnight, Monsieur...
(curtsying slightly)

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 almost to the floorboards)

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!

(giggling nervously)

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

(MORE)

MAÎTRE D' (CONT'D)
 Bordeaux, Burgundy?
 (studying the Empress)
 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.
 (now bending down towards
 Marie Louise)
 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.
(feeling 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.

PRINCESS CAROLINE
(waiving off Marcel)
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.
Word will get around 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 in such a
way. Besides, you look like you
could skip a few meals...

MARIE-LOUISE
I, I don't know what to say...
(caught off guard)

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

MARIE-LOUISE
 I...
 (pressing her lips
 together, she remains
 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 the
 Princess)
 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)
 What will it be, Empress, red or
 white?
 (suddenly more animated)

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

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

MARIE-LOUISE

You know,
 (addressing both the
 Maître d' and others
 around her 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, a ray of sun in a crystal
 jar!

MAÎTRE D'

Oui, oui, I learned that in school,
 growing up here!

(pausing)

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
 Princess)

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!

(MORE)

PRINCESS CAROLINE (CONT'D)
(tossing her head back
with a laugh)

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...
(holding out her palm)
That is all! And not another word from you until we reach Compiegne.

Comfortably composed on the Princess's onetime carriage settee, are Ladies-in-Waiting, Jeanne and Marguerite, who are now happily tasked with accompanying the Empress to the Chateau de Compiegne.

Meanwhile, an entirely satisfied Marie Louise now saunters back to her liberated coach, enters it, 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.
(showing 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.
(MORE)

MURAT (CONT'D)
The Empress's anticipation grows,
as does yours...
(grinning broadly)

NAPOLÉON
Never mind that!
(barks Napoleon)
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.

NAPOLÉON
Right! And Murat...

MURAT
Yes...?

NAPOLÉON
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 Gate.

MURAT
Two horses, Napoleon?

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

MURAT
Perfectly!

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

NAPOLÉON
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
 (suddenly wary of
 Napoleon's shifting
 demeanor)
 Twenty minutes, then...

NAPOLEON
 Twenty minutes!
 (leading Murat to the
 study door)
 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...
 (moving closer to the
 entranceway)

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
 (she moves the drape
 aside)
 Oh, my Lord, yes! There's two men.
 (MORE)

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)
They look to be bandits de grands
chamin!
(covering her eyes)

Jeanne quickly pushes Marguerite down to the other end of the settee, and takes her place next to the window. The door handle begins to move.

JEANNE
Cover up and prepare yourself,
Empress! I'm going to open the door
now 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 through the
door)

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

Why, it is you, Jeanne!
(surprised to find her in
the carriage)

JEANNE
Your Imperial Highness!
(bending low in the coach)

NAPOLEON
Whatever are you doing in here?

Jeanne turns her head towards the Empress.

JEANNE
Empress Marie Louise,
(breathing deeply)
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 Jeanne passes 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 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
hat)

How I have waited for you these
many days.

(taking her hand and
kissing it)

Napoleon, admiring her beauty at last, gently 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...

(nodding her head)

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

Alright, I'm ready.

NAPOLEON

Here goes. Du hast eine schone
Weinhaut.

(proud of his
accomplishment)

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

What is it? Didn't I pronounce that
correctly?

(making a stern face)

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.

(suddenly touched by
Napoleon's sincerity)

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?

(waiving her forefinger)

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)

(MORE)

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)
C'est plutot bein, ma nouvelle
epouse!

The Empress begins to blush again, holding her hands to her overheated 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...
(pausing)
I was born in Hofburg Palace in
1791, making me eighteen years-old.
(lifting her fair Austrian
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.
(recollecting her
pedigree)
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 of my mother's?

NAPOLÉON

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?

NAPOLÉON

I know enough to know, mademoiselle, oh..., 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 its 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?

NAPOLÉON

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

MARIE-LOUISE

(looking surprised)

But why?

NAPOLÉON

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.

(MORE)

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)

I'm going to have a private little talk with her tomorrow, behind closed doors!

(hearing the team of horses being replaced)

They're changing the horses now.

MARIE-LOUISE

Well then, I guess it's off to the Chateau de Compiegne...

(suddenly sounding more somber)

I am...

(pausing, while gazing into Napoleon's trustful eyes)

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?

(moving her fingers over to his)

NAPOLEON

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

MARIE-LOUISE

I remember, Napoleon...

(gently leaning her head on his shoulder)

NAPOLEON

Well then, shall I kiss the bride?

(coming closer to her lips)

Marie Louise now offers up her chaste lips to an eager, and much older, Napoleon, as they ride together to nearby Soissons. From there, it's on to the Chateau de Compiegne.

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

A driving rain failed to deter the faithful subjects of the Empire from gathering at a stone bridge near the Chateau de Compiegne, 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 Chateau'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 sheepish Marie Louise quickly flips the covers over her head.

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

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: Schatzen.

NAPOLEON
Empress, are you awake?

MARIE-LOUISE
Yes...
(sitting up in bed)

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!
(clutching the dog to her
nightgown)
How in Heaven's name did she get
here?
(inquiring of her beaming
husband)

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

Napoleon closes the Empress's bedroom 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?

NAPOLÉON
Caroline took it hard, but she
deserves it!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS
So, you're good with my approaching
Jeanne.

NAPOLÉON
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!

(still pleased with
himself)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS
May I share that with Jeanne during
our private meeting?

NAPOLÉON
By all means.
(pausing to check the
clock)
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?

NAPOLÉON
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.
And not one blemish appears on that
bright alpine flower. Not one!
(musing out loud)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS
Don't forget about your breakfast,
Napoleon.

NAPOLEON
Oh! Right.
(checking the clock)
I could go on, Claude-Francois, but
my bride awaits.
(gleefully)

They exit the study and depart to different parts 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 Chateau. They meet moments later.

JEANNE
Monsieur Meneval.
(half curtsying)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS
Jeanne. I hope you had an agreeable
trip.
(casting his eyes on the
water)

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.

(pausing)

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 above
her head)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Calm yourself, Jeanne.

JEANNE

I'm sorry, Monsieur.

(suddenly 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

(thoroughly 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
(trying to recall the
name)
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
bridge railing)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS
I tell you, I haven't seen him that
satisfied with himself in years.
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!
(straitening herself up)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS
Certainly not, but you're the
person who was there, who acted
upon her instincts to help the
young Empress!
(turning away from the
railing to face Jeanne)
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. 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!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

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

I see.

(trying to make sense of it)

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

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Be her friend.

JEANNE

I see!

(nodding her head)

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...
(pausing)

JEANNE

Marguerite...

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

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

JEANNE

True.

(pondering his words)

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

Did you amuse her?

JEANNE

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

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 tell him once I
brief him on the outcome of our
discussion. Come on, we can walk
back together. It's no longer a
secret what your new role is.

Jeanne and Claude-Francois step off the tiny bridge and head
back to the Chateau 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 fine news it is.

As Jeanne walks along the flora, she ponders 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 specially composed for the occasion by Napoleon's Chapel Master, who has taken a position close by. The marital rite is now spoken in a voiceover by the Grand Almoner of Paris.

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, standing 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 Tuilleries, 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.

INTERMISSION

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!
(rolling her eyes)
The Austrian Empress is only a few years older than our new Sovereign, who is also a girl!
(sternly)

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!
(pausing)
(MORE)

PRINCESS CAROLINE (CONT'D)
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, and
speaking more slowly)
Let the Austrian Emperor and my
brother play their father-son-in-
law tennis match, at will.

HENRI
Very well.

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

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

PRINCESS CAROLINE
I'll bet she is!
(making a mock frown)
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!
(shaking his head)
(MORE)

HENRI (CONT'D)
Marguerite would be dismissed from
the Court on the spot!

PRINCESS CAROLINE
You're very, how do you 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 LUDOVIIKA
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.

(MORE)

MARIA LUDOVIIKA (CONT'D)

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 LUDOVIIKA

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. 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!
(keeping her voice down)

MARIA LUDOVIIKA

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;

(MORE)

MARIA LUDOVIIKA (CONT'D)
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 LUDOVIIKA
But I perceive that I am wearying
Your Majesty with this long letter.

Princess Caroline rolls her eyes and yawns.

MARIA LUDOVIIKA (CONT'D)
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. 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
Empress of Austria

Princess Caroline smiles, while reading the letter 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 one day visit Amsterdam.

NAPOLEON

Amsterdam!

(pushing himself back from
the table)

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
inspecting defensive
fortifications...

MARIE-LOUISE

Sometimes?
(smiling)

NAPOLEON

We men can be testy fellows when it
comes to battle preparations.

(grinning right back)
I'll tell you what,
(wiping his face with a
napkin)
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 wet! Why April?

MARIE-LOUISE
Why, that's when the flowers are in
bloom, of course. Very romantic!
(blushing at such talk)

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.
(giving a funny pout)

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 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 in deeply)
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
(offering a half smile)
Well, I haven't taken my army that
far East, yet.

MARIE-LOUISE
Elizabeth I took a liking to
oranges and had these
conservatories built on her royal
estates.

(lifting her hand towards
the ceiling)
Long after the French, I might add!
She savored their strong bouquet
and the health benefits they
provided.

(pausing)
Did you know, it was the Romans who
introduced oranges to Britain?

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

Is something wrong, dear?
(stopping to address him)

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

MARIE-LOUISE
Very well...
(resuming her stroll)
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.

NAPOLÉON
Um hmm.

MARIE-LOUISE
And another thing...

NAPOLÉON
(rolling his eyes)
By all means, Louise!
(prompting further
commentary with his
raised hand)

MARIE-LOUISE
Thank you, husband.
(finding a marble bench to
rest upon)
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.

NAPOLÉON
Is there any subject you haven't
mastered?

MARIE-LOUISE
(her mouth agape)
Why, Napoleon, you're jealous! I
simply cannot believe my ears.

NAPOLÉON
(nervously laughing)
Well, you have to admit...

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

Marie Louise places both hands on her hips.
 Tell me, husband, are all
 Bonapartes easily threatened when
 faced by those who appear more
 scholarly than themselves?
 (waiting for a reply)

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

Napoleon makes for the nearest exit.

MARIE-LOUISE
 Eierkopf! Why you... come back
 here.

Marie Louise quickly gets off the bench and playfully chases her husband out the door.

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

In a tiny hamlet, on the last stop before Paris, inhabitants 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 presents wildflowers to the beautiful young bride. All of this serves to give the Empress 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.
 (MORE)

JEANNE (CONT'D)
 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.

(MORE)

JAVIER (CONT'D)
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
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 at Notre Dame
Cathedral, 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 all 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.

(changing the subject)

I understand you're of Austrian descent, but, born in Parma.

MAESTRO PAER

Yes, Marie Louise.

MARIE-LOUISE

Thank you.

(setting her eyes on him)

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 gaze to the floor)

MARIE-LOUISE

I was sixteen...
(somberly)

MAESTRO PAER

(pausing respectfully)

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...

(pausing)

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 more than just teaching the Empress of France...

Ever the student, Marie Louise waits for her teacher to continue. She 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 very responsive, and the sound most pleasing, especially in my wood-paneled, spacious concert room.
(looking around)

MAESTRO PAER

Tell me, what do you enjoy playing?

MARIE-LOUISE

What do I enjoy playing?
(thinking to herself)
Well, given that I'm Austrian, I prefer... German composers!
(leaning in his 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

(taking a moment)

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.

(peering over at Jeanne)

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 most frightening virtuosity. Jeanne's eyes are as large as Twenty-Franc coins.

MAESTRO PAER

Very good, Marie Louise. Very good!
(sitting back)
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.

(rising)
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 out loud)
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 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 and takes another look.

JEANNE

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

MARIE-LOUISE

(somewhat embarrassed)

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.

(beginning to brush the
Empress's hair)

Tell me what happened at the
Military School last night after 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

(opening it slowly)

May I come in?

JEANNE

Certainly... uh, uh...

Napoleon joins the pair.

NAPOLÉON

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...

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...

(still hesitant)

NAPOLÉON

I'll count to three.

(grinning)

MARIE-LOUISE

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

JEANNE

Ok...

NAPOLÉON

One, two, three!

JEANNE

(joined by the Empress)

NAPOLÉON.

Returning to her brushing.

Seventy-nine, eighty, eighty-one...

NAPOLÉON

(laughing, he soon addresses his wife)

And how did you sleep last night, Louise?

Placing his hands on her shoulders.

MARIE-LOUISE

Fine.

(darting her eyes back and forth)

Uh, Jeanne believes that I am... 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.

(making a face)

MARIE-LOUISE

Well, you best sit down!

(looking up at her husband)

NAPOLEON

Is it serious?

Napoleon sits down next to her on the vanity couch.

MARIE-LOUISE

It's serious alright!

NAPOLEON

Tell me, please.

(putting his arm around the Empress)

MARIE-LOUISE

Well...

(turning her head towards Jeanne)

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...uh,
pregnant.

Napoleon looks back and forth at the two women.

NAPOLEON
Pregnant? For real? Jeanne?

JEANNE
(bending down to look into
the mirror)
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.
(pausing to look at
Jeanne)
And thank you, Jeanne.

JEANNE
You're welcome, Napoleon. Ninety-
eight, ninety-nine, one-hundred!
(out of breath)

Witnessing this stirring moment firsthand, Jeanne treasures 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!
(waiving her arm)

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

JAVIER
Welcome home, Jeanne Montroy!
(climbing off the rickety carriage)
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?
(leaning Javier's way)

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 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?

(convincingly)

JEANNE

(leaning back)

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 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

The story goes, that 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
(pausing)
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.
(looking over at Javier)
That's the Ruisseau divise 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, where 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
(moving her head up and
down)
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 important 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
(raising his brows)
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 from her directly.

NAPOLEON
Did she identify the chambermaid in
question?

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS
So far, she's refusing! I
threatened her with dismissal, but,
to no avail.
(glancing across the desk)
Unless...

NAPOLEON
Unless what?

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS
Unless you would prefer to question
her, Napoleon!

NAPOLEON

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

(pointing his finger at
Claude-Francois)

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 who?

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

NAPOLEON

Jeanne!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Jeanne?

(puzzled)

NAPOLEON

Jeanne!

(sitting back, satisfied
with his plan)

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Jeanne Montroy?

NAPOLEON

Yes!

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

(quickly standing up to
walk around)

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...

NAPOLÉON

I fully agree. Consider yourself relieved of this responsibility.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Thank you, Napoleon.
(nodding his head)

NAPOLÉON

However, I do have another assignment for you.

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Nothing too difficult, I hope.

NAPOLÉON

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

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

(suddenly pivoting)

Now?

NAPOLÉON

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

CLAUDE-FRANCOIS

Shall I secure a carriage for her return journey?

NAPOLÉON

No. Jeanne is to return to the Tuilleries 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 observed, and she is an excellent judge of character!

(at once 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!

NAPOLÉON

Thank you, Claude-Francois. You're
already ensuring 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...!

(still 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...

(pausing)
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? That's a capital
crime!

(half swallowing)

PRINCESS CAROLINE
Not the Emperor!

HENRI
(probing)
Then who...?

PRINCESS CAROLINE
Why, the girl!
(raising her eyebrows)

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
Empress'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 Tuilleries 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 the 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 Tuilleries 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

Astonished by the high regard with which the Emperor holds the Montroys, he gingerly places the letter back into its accompanying envelope.

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

One week later, a perturbed Maria Ludovika appears at Emperor Francis's front door in Schonbrunn Palace. Admitted into the Royal Apartments 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 LUDOVIIKA

I'm speechless!

(handing over the letter)

(MORE)

MARIA LUDOVIIKA (CONT'D)
 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
 (taking her hand)
 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
 her and Napoleon, possibly next
 year, in Dresden.

MARIA LUDOVIIKA
 Next year!

FRANCIS
 Yes, next year.
 (firmly)
 Until then, I'll gleam as much
 information about Marie Louise as
 necessary 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 in the suite.

MARIE-LOUISE
 Maestro.

MAESTRO PAER
 Marie Louise.
 (bowing his head)

She starts for the piano.

As promised last month, I brought with me 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.

MARIE-LOUISE
 (sifting through the pile)
 Oh, here's a piece written by Beethoven. You remembered!
 (elated)
 Hummm. 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 containing 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's 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 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.

(pointing to the tempo
marking at the top)

I say almost, because in this sonata, I believe that Beethoven is searching for something, but hasn't quite found it yet.

(pausing)

Ready?

MARIE-LOUISE

I am... Please.

(patting him on the back)

Maestro Paer plays this slow, haunting piece, later known as Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. Marie Louise is already sold on it, 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.

(laughing)

JEANNE

I should say not!

(poignantly)

MAESTRO PAER
I value my profession, and, dare I
say, life, too much.
(rubbing his neck)

The Empress begins to play this alluring dirge, soon to become a constant companion to her while Napoleon is away on future campaigns.

Eight months later.

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

Beginning with a single bell from Notre Dame Cathedral, followed by church belfries throughout Paris, citizens of the city are summoned at 9 o'clock on the evening of March 19, 1811, to pray for their Empress, and her expected child, as she goes into labor. By this time, Dr. Dubois has already been living in the Tuilleries for an entire month, awaiting this impending event.

For his part, a fidgety 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 and trembling)
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.

(running into the room by
 her side)

My sweet Louise.

He kneels at her side, drying her tears with the back of his hand. Hearing no cries from the baby, he assumes the worst. Not caring, and at once, resolved, he again directs his attention to his ailing wife.

Heaven forbid anything should
 happen to you. I simply couldn't
 bear it...

(whispering softly)
 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
 gaff)

NAPOLEON

It's alright.
 (winking at the others)
 She's used to calling me that when
 we're with the Empress in private.
 In fact, I insist on it.

(pausing)
 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, observing 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 Compiegne with his family.

JEANNE

I'm told by the head chamberlain
that everything is ready for
tomorrow. 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!
(reminding her husband)
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.
(getting up)
(MORE)

JEANNE (CONT'D)
Any ideas yet of what you want to
do in Amsterdam?
(laying the blanket on the
grass)

Jeanne returns to her chaise.

MARIE-LOUISE
Well, the tulips are out of the
question. I told my husband that
April is the optimum month to
visit, but he said he forgot.

JEANNE
Typical man.
(sarcastically)

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

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

MARIE-LOUISE
I know... But, 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.
(turning back to Jeanne)
Still, there are plenty of other
attractions to see. The canals, for
instance. I also want to shop in
Delft.

Jeanne and Marie Louise watch for the baby to roll.

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!

(holding her nose)

They look at each other and laugh.

Though, I hear that under no circumstance is that kind of living arrangement permitted in Amsterdam.

JEANNE

Too cleanly for that!

MARIE-LOUISE

Jawohl...

(now studying her husband)

Wait a minute,

(sitting up)

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 child.

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 a nearby 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!

(returning to their table)

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...

NAPOLEON

(pouring himself another cup of coffee)

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

MARIE-LOUISE

(sitting back)

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,

(taking his hand)

you know that leaving always causes me great distress. But, it's only three days.

The Empress lowers her eyes 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 palace dining staff.

NAPOLEON
(squeezing her palm)
No, it's not...
(changing the subject)
Let's talk about your plans! Tell
me, what are they?

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.
Dish-ware, so to speak...

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...!
(reaching up to his wrist
and smiling)
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...

NAPOLEON
Of course you will, Louise!

They both finish their coffee and pass the 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!
(looking up at the
masterpiece)

MARIE-LOUISE
She certainly is!
(setting down her brush)
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, 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.

(MORE)

JEANNE (CONT'D)
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 over a chair and
sitting down)

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!
(leaning back and eying
the canvas)
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.
(pointing to the area)
The workers then 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 pieces cut from this
painting have never been found.

Jeanne stands up, moving 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 the Empress Marie Louise resides!

(curtsying to her)

MARIE-LOUISE

Oui..., so it does!

(acknowledging such privilege)

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.

NAPOLEON

(looking over at his wife reclining on the bed)

Isn't this 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 rolls out of the window to reveal equally joyful households all over Paris, as Notre Dame Cathedral tolls its mighty bell.

Five months pass.

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

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 from out her window, just as she had done two years earlier when leaving her beloved 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
(attempting to contain her flying hair)
How could your sister do such a thing?

NAPOLEON
She will be punished, I assure you!

MARIE-LOUISE
I don't want her punished...

NAPOLEON
Then, what...?

MARIE-LOUISE

I want her stopped from doing any future 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)
 is not only unconscionable, but cruel and mean.

NAPOLEON

(pondering)
 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!

(pausing)

I will let your father know about this immediately. 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

(turning to Napoleon)
 Then let's make them the happiest of days!

(MORE)

MARIE-LOUISE (CONT'D)
(pecking his cheek)
Besides, there'll be plenty of time
to dwell on your absence after you
leave.

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

NAPOLEON
(smiling)
Blonde Haar...

MARIE-LOUISE
Yes...., blonde Haar.
(melancholy, once more)

The couple walk back to the Royal Palace, passing through the parting crowd, who patiently wait to use the bridge.

INT. ROYAL PALACE APARTMENTS, DRESDEN - AFTERNOON

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

MARGUERITE
May I assist you, Empress?

MARIA LUDOVIIKA
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 closet is back here.

Marguerite escorts the Empress through Marie Louise's 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 LUDOVIIKA

Oh! My necklace and earrings seem
to have fallen off.
(panicking, while covering
up her ears)

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

MARGUERITE

Wait right here!
(looking forcefully at the
Empress)
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 the wheelchair is missing and Maria Ludovika, 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.
For this, I thank you.
(feigning commendation)

FREDERIC WILLIAM

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

NAPOLÉON

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.

NAPOLÉON

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.

NAPOLÉON

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.

NAPOLÉON

But, of course!

(pausing)

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 LUDOVIIKA

What do you want!?

JEANNE

(rising to meet her)

The Empress requests the return of
her missing jewelry.

(sternly)

MARIA LUDOVIIKA

What? My daughter-in-law is making
me out to be some kind of thief?

Why, I demand an apology!

(loudly)

JEANNE

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

(firmly)

MARIA LUDOVIIKA
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 LUDOVIIKA
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
(now on the floor looking
up at Jeanne)
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 - instead 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
(examining his wineglass)
I must say, this Rhine Wine is
better served cold!

MARIE-LOUISE

Indeed. That's how many people here prefer it. It really brings out the attar of the white grapes that grow along the Rhine. Thus, the name...

NAPOLÉON

(rolling his eyes)

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.

NAPOLÉON

Well, it still rings true!

(laughing)

Toasting his wife with the sumptuous wine, as she raises her glass in turn. All the while, a pair of floor length curtain sheers billow their way out the door towards the balcony.

MARIE-LOUISE

I've asked the head chef to prepare your favorite meal tonight. The wine will go just perfect with it!

(excited)

NAPOLÉON

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

MARIE-LOUISE

No.

NAPOLÉON

Trout, it must be Trout!

(rapping the table)

MARIE-LOUISE

(laughing)

No.

NAPOLÉON

(sitting back in his chair)

You're enjoying this.

MARIE-LOUISE

Yes, I am!

(smiling brightly)

NAPOLEON

Let's see now. You know me best.
(pulling at his chin)
The simpler the meal, the better...

MARIE-LOUISE

Uh huh.

NAPOLEON

I give up!

MARIE-LOUISE

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

NAPOLEON

That doesn't necessarily narrow
down my choices.
(ruminating)
Maccaronaro!

MARIE-LOUISE

No.

NAPOLEON

Louise, I'm out of guesses...
(raising his hands in the
air)

MARIE-LOUISE

Chicken Marengo!

NAPOLEON

You didn't?
(rising to his feet)

MARIE-LOUISE

Uh huh. 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.

NAPOLÉON
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...

NAPOLÉON
A defeated perspective, I might
add!

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?
(addressing the
Chamberlain)

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

NAPOLÉON
Italian is perfect!
(touching his fingers to
his lips)

CHAMBERLAIN
Very well, Your Highness. Italian
Bread it is!

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

MARIE-LOUISE
How is it?

NAPOLÉON
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.
 (pausing)
 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 appears again on the balcony.

NAPOLEON
 We'll have our dessert now.
 (looking over to his wife)

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 pounding the
tabletop)

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 already 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.
(MORE)

FREDERIC WILLIAM (CONT'D)
 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.
 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!
 (MORE)

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)

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. 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 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 to date. 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 feel 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 curves in the road, his horses have become 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 subsequent fires set there by Russian operatives, effectively denying him and his army a winter quarters, the Empress now fears for Napoleon's very life. For its part, the citizenry of Paris shares this fear, not only for the Emperor, but its beloved sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers, filling the entire Capital with doubt.

MARIE-LOUISE

October 21, 1812
Tuilleries 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, do take care of yourself and keep me informed as best you can along the way back to dear France. The whole of Paris knows of your withdrawal and are on the edge of their seats waiting for the casualty reports as you battle your way back through enemy lines.

There's been uneasiness in the city since this news arrived, and I'm afraid that turmoil will be the expected 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. 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 great happiness upon your return. As for me, I'll be shedding tears of joy.

(MORE)

MARIE-LOUISE (CONT'D)

Mein warm, weich witthaut awaits
you.
Vive la France!
Vive la Republique!
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 sleigh. But not before ordering his two pontoon bridges 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 winter journey home, playing Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, a piece she 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 on 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?
(looking both ways along
the road)
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!
(MORE)

GILBERT (CONT'D)
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.
(attempting to take the
reins from him)

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.
(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.

Nudging the leather reins to coax his horses back onto the
road. Returning to the right side, 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
momentarily)

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 remains stopped.

GILBERT

(swallowing)
Go ahead...

Jeanne now opens the contents of the envelope.

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

(setting the proclamation
down on her lap to
collect herself)

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.

(MORE)

JEANNE (CONT'D)
 Signed at Posen, Duchy of Warsaw,
 this day.
 Napoleon

A wagon approaches from behind. Gilbert hears its horses snorting and moves on.

A Count...

(stunned, as she rubs her thumb over the Emperor's seal)

GILBERT

I'm speechless, Jeanne. Absolutely speechless...

(suddenly realizing the title that's been bestowed upon him)

The Montroy name is restored once again.

JEANNE

Such a great honor, and to think I'm a Countess!
 (breathless)

GILBERT

That's right!
 (pausing)
 But, Jeanne, what do you make of the Emperor also crediting me with generosity to the Republic? I fail to understand...

JEANNE

I see the Empress's hand in this...
 (smiling)

GILBERT

And a fine hand it is!

Gilbert stops the wagon on the small wooden bridge spanning the currently flooded brook, just before their illustrious farmhouse.

Ruisseau divise'.

JEANNE

Yes, Gilbert, the Divided Brook...
 (pausing)
 Divided no longer.

They ride up the long driveway; its guide rope and iron stakes long since removed. Gilbert pulls the rig even with the building, as Jeanne jumps down from the wagon. She grabs her luggage and enters the fine stone farmhouse.

Gilbert, following behind, briskly walks up the slate pathway, closing the freshly painted door behind him.

EPILOGUE

On January 25, 1814, Napoleon kissed his wife and son goodbye to defend Paris against the forces of Imperial Russia and his former allies. He was never to see them again.

Less than three months later, while his wife and son were safely in Blois, Napoleon was deposed by the French Senate and forced to abdicate his title.

Bending to her father's will, Marie Louise, along with her son, Napoleon, returned to the Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna.

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 enclosed in Vienna's Imperial Crypt, where she lies today.

THE END