

ACT ONE

A SPOTLIGHT rises ever so slightly on the darkened stage. Downstage off to the side is the silhouette of a YOUNG GIRL - about 15 or so - or passable for the age - dressed in a pleasant, dainty, flowing frock. The gown itself is light and airy, radiating a somewhat sunny quality, quite at variance with the empty darkness surrounding HER, as if SHE were the sun itself suspended alone in the universe, surrounded not even by stars to guide the way. HER name is BETSY BALCOMBE.

BETSY

(To us.)

When I was older than I am now - which isn't particularly hard to be - I came to the shores of Plymouth and stared out at the bobbing waters of the English Channel, as I imagine the people did so many years before, back when there was something fit to see. By the time I gave the sea a glance, the ship those people spied was long gone - as were all the men onboard - although for only one of them did a memory survive. Be that memory one of infamy or not depends on which side of the Channel you call home. I lived on the side with a distinctly more negative opinion, but I can't say I shared it... not entirely... or maybe not at all. I'm not sure I have ever decided, or ever will, either - for he was to me like so many other realities of life, neither this or that and seldom still the other.

The LIGHTS rise at the back of the stage and reveal the SILHOUETTE of A GRAND FRIGATE bobbing in a sea. BETSY stares out at us intently. We can tell SHE is really staring out at the ship from the coastline of Plymouth.

BETSY

(To us.)

All those years later, I questioned people in Plymouth who remembered that day when the *Bellerophon* arrived off the shores of Britain. A hungry mass of people surged down to the coastline, expecting the famous man on board that ship to come ashore - be it to ridicule or to study or even to cheer, it all depended... for believe it or not, some did want to cheer. For good or ill - or both - all those people would be disappointed, for the man did not land. Instead, he was left stranded on that

BETSY (CONT)

ship off the coast, as if living some great purgatory of Neptune's - until, rather than he coming to Britain, Britain finally came to him.

A DRUM ROLL sounds. A serious-looking man about 30-40, straight as a reed and almost as charming - CAPTAIN THOMAS POPPLETON of the 53rd Regiment of Foot in the British Army - grandly enters from the back of the stage and steps in front of the FRIGATE. HE whips out a rolled piece of parchment with crisp, starchy precision, unravels the parchment, and, in a commanding voice that could echo through the ages, proceeds to read.

POPPLETON

(Reading.)

Napoleon Bonaparte, so-called "Emperor" of the French, purveyor of untold toil and bloodshed, I bring you a message from His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, Regent of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

A DRUM ROLL sounds again.

POPPLETON

(Reading.)

For well-nigh twenty years, you have visited war and devastation upon the people of this country and this continent. Now you come to us, defeated not once, but twice, to throw yourself at the mercy of our fair and just nation. It shall nonetheless please the ears of God and all humanity that your request for asylum in the British Isles is... denied.

Some LIGHT GASPS from an unseen CROWD.

POPPLETON

(Reading.)

Nevertheless, as His Royal Highness, the Prince Regent, is just and good, he will not see ill become of you in defeat - and yet, to ensure no further ill becomes also of the world, you will be exiled forthwith to the outer reaches of our empire. In a few hours hence, you will be transferred to our great ship, the *Northumberland*. From here, you will sail to the west coast of Africa, to the island of Saint Helena, where you shall henceforth be imprisoned, there to spend the remainder of your days.

Thunderingly, the mighty chords of "VIVE HENRY QUARTRE" sound from all

sides of the stage.* The LIGHTS immediately fall on POPPLETON and rise with greater intensity on the SILHOUETTE of the FRIGATE. The FRIGATE begins to move up and down, up and down, indicating passage across the sea, as the powerful chords of the song continue - a de facto overture of sorts. Eventually, the SONG recedes into the darkness. A SPOTLIGHT rises again downstage. BETSY enters, now livelier and younger of bearing.

BETSY

(To us.)

When I first saw the Emperor, I, too, stared out at the sea, like those people in Plymouth, except I stared out from the shore of Saint Helena, where I lived with my family. Later in life, far from the island itself, I found Plymouth to be the only spot in Britain where there was any drop of Napoleon left. Perhaps I thought that by coming to that spot and looking for a ship that was no longer there, I would unearth some memories in the back of my mind to help me make sense of... of him... of me... of everything... like a judge surveying the evidence of a decades-old case, hoping something new or sparkling would greet his eye. Indeed, the memories began to come very thick and very fast after that - not unlike a fog off the coast, except bestowing clarity rather than clutter - clarity of the man Napoleon who was sent off into exile. I remembered my time with him as if it were fresh of the age and not more than a moment or two gone. It started with that day in October, 1815 when the *Northumberland* was spotted off Saint Helena.

A CANNON fires in the distance. The SILHOUETTE of the FRIGATE stops moving and grows still. It has clearly stopped its voyage upon the seas.

BETSY

(To us.)

When the cannons fired, announcing the Emperor's arrival, I'm not sure if they were a salute to him or a warning to us - or perhaps a smidgen of both. At that time, I had lived on Saint Helena for quite a few years. My father, a fine, good man, was Superintendent of Public Sales for the East India Company. Alongside him, there was my dear mother, whose health was growing evermore fragile, and my sister Jane and my two younger brothers. When we first heard the Emperor Napoleon was coming to our island, we could hardly believe it. We had only recently heard of his last and final defeat at Waterloo. One moment, he

*A traditional French song from 1590, which became a de facto national anthem of France and a favorite song of Napoleon's.

BETSY (CONT)

was leading great armies, slaughtering our soldiers. The next moment, he was living right up the street. In my family's case, the proximity was more than literal.

The LIGHTS rise vaguely on the front of a little house - The Briars. The Briars is a quaint, dainty cottage on the grounds of the Balcombe family's home, with a pathway connecting one to the other. The cottage is situated in the more pleasant, less humid elevations of Saint Helena, evidenced by a colorful garden of flowers growing out front, some displayed in large urns. BETSY turns and looks at The Briars with clear fondness in HER eyes.

BETSY

(To us.)

Across from my parents' house, there was a lovely cottage we owned, dubbed "The Briars." It was empty, unused, and convenient. The residence intended for the Emperor further up the mountains - Longwood House - was still being renovated. As a result, the Governor, Colonel Wilks, needed a temporary spot for the Emperor to live. My father offered our little cottage - and so the Emperor came to live next to us.

POPPLETON emerges from behind The Briars, bayonet in hand. HE looks as lacking in charm as HE did previously, if that's at all possible. HE stands in front of The Briars, doing HIS best to appear mighty and menacing.

BETSY

(To us.)

When the Emperor came to live at The Briars, I was too scared to go out and see him. We children had heard such ghastly things about him, after all. My brothers' tutor, Mr. Hudd, told us he was a huge ogre, with one large flaming red eye in the middle of his forehead and long teeth protruding from his mouth, with which he tore to pieces and devoured naughty little girls, especially those who did not know their lessons.

BETSY turns and stares again at The Briars.

BETSY

Still... I had never seen an ogre with one eye before.

The LIGHTS rise further, as POPPLETON catches sight of BETSY.

POPPLETON

Good morning, Miss Balcombe.

BETSY

Good morning, Captain Poppleton.

POPPLETON

Will today be the day, then?

BETSY

That is a question only God can answer.

POPPLETON

Not if you go up and knock on the door.

BETSY

Oh, no, that would be much too forward... for a lady.

POPPLETON

Well, then, milady, you come by here every day hoping to catch a glimpse of our French captive - without him catching a glimpse of you, that is - and yet every day you run away and then come back in the morning, a little bit closer.

BETSY

I might be a scientist, studying a subject.

POPPLETON

Girls should be pretty, not curious.

BETSY

Well, you see, I am pretty... curious.

POPPLETON

Then say hello to the man. You have nothing to fear, for he is, after all, just that - a man...

(Brandishing HIS bayonet.)

...and a well-protected one, at that.

BETSY looks around the stage at an unseen dispersal of guards in the distance. The LIGHT raises faintly on a MAN[†] at the very back of the stage - apart from the action, yet still a part of it. We can't make out who HE is - or, indeed, much anything about HIM - but HIS darkened frame is eerily visible and looms pendulously like a raincloud. BETSY glances up and out at us, clearly looking at the MAN, whose

[†]In time, we will discover this man is Captain James Wallis.

figure resides for HER in the far distance.

BETSY

(Pointing out at the audience.)
Is that one of you also... over there?

POPPLETON

No, just another gawker - one of a thousand tourists.

BETSY

I suppose it's an honor to have an emperor in my backyard.

POPPLETON

(Scornfully, a nerve hit.)
He's not an "emperor," he's a prisoner - and believe me, there's no honor in that.

Some LOUD SHOUTS emerge from The Briars.

POPPLETON

Now's your chance... to knock.

BETSY shakes HER head.

POPPLETON

The mind is willing, but the flesh is weak.

BETSY senses a certain mischievousness in POPPLETON's tone and starts to back away. POPPLETON raises HIS hand and knocks loudly on the front door of The Briars. A mortified BETSY squeaks in protest and dives behind a large urn of flowers. The front door of The Briars flies open. A tall, dignified, unfathomably good-looking man stands in the doorway - CHARLES TRISTAN DE MONTHOLON. He is around 40, but looks much younger and wrinkle-free - rather like a fine velvet - with mannerism to match, although HIS dress is secretarial and bland. A LOUD VOICE bellows through the front door.

NAPOLEON'S VOICE

Damn it all! I almost had the villain!

MONTHOLON

(To POPPLETON.)
You knocked, Captain.

POPPLETON

(Pointing at the urn.)
Not I, monsieur.

MONTHOLON slowly approaches the urn and peers over it at BETSY.

BETSY

(Uncertainly.)
Bonjour.

MONTHOLON

(Mildly amused.)
Bonjour.

BETSY

Mister Napoleon?

MONTHOLON

Not I, mademoiselle.

BETSY

Oh? You rather look like you would be an emperor.

MONTHOLON

I would suggest you keep that opinion to yourself.

NAPOLEON'S VOICE

Montholon! Montholon!

MONTHOLON

I'm here, my emperor.

A stout, but mighty little man with a furrowed face and a booming voice bursts out of the house like a tornado. It's NAPOLEON BONAPARTE. HE is aged a powerful 45ish, still vibrant like a volcano, even though the fire is slowly running out. HE is, in one simple word, "intense," to a point of both intimidation and mockery, and sometimes both - though it's impossible not to take HIM seriously. HE currently stands before us, splayed like the Colossus of Rhodes, brandishing a nasty-looking baton, which one can imagine HIM wielding rather dangerously.

NAPOLEON

I was so close and then - the knock!

MONTHOLON

Yes, I fear the timing was most poor.

NAPOLEON

Did you find him? Did you?!

MONTHOLON

No, my emperor - but I did find something much more charming.

MONTHOLON extends HIS hand down to
BETSY, who takes it and rises.

NAPOLEON

(Unamused, to BETSY.)
You're not a rat.

BETSY

(A bit taken aback.)
No, I'm certainly not.

NAPOLEON

(To MONTHOLON.)
You didn't see Alexander?

MONTHOLON

Alas, no, my emperor.

NAPOLEON

(Pointing at BETSY.)
You! Did you see him?

BETSY

Well, I... I...

NAPOLEON

Yes, you, you.

BETSY

Well, I... no.

NAPOLEON

You know what?

BETSY

No, I mean... no. I haven't seen any Alexander - but I can look
for him, if you like...

(Responding to NAPOLEON's blank glare, "maybe this will
help.")
...sire?

NAPOLEON smiles with grudging,
understated delight. POPPLETON coughs
loudly and disgruntledly at the use of

the royal term. BETSY gestures at HIM to "shut up."

BETSY

(Still to NAPOLEON.)
What does Alexander look like?

NAPOLEON snaps HIS fingers at MONTHOLON - "tell her!" HE then begins to thrash around the garden flowers with HIS baton, looking for something. The poor flowers are slaughtered in the process.

MONTHOLON

(To BETSY.)
He is dark... very dark... with black eyes and gray ears... quite big for his type...
(Putting HIS hands apart about 10 inches)
...about this long...
(Putting HIS hands apart about 20 inches)
...this, with his tail.

BETSY

His tail?

NAPOLEON

(Looking up momentarily from HIS thrashing.)
I would have named him "Wellington," but he's not as foul as Alexander.

NAPOLEON continues HIS thrashing - thrash, thrash, thrash! A confounded BETSY looks helplessly at MONTHOLON. HE smiles gently back at HER - "don't worry" - and pats HER hand for comfort.

MONTHOLON

Speaking of names, mademoiselle - what is yours?

BETSY

(Eyeing NAPOLEON uncertainly.)
Oh, well, I'm... I'm...

NAPOLEON

(Suddenly looking up at HER.)
For God's sake, spit it out!

BETSY

(Annoyed, spitting it out.)
I'm Betsy, Mr. Balcombe's daughter.

NAPOLEON

Ah, yes - the daughter! I remember your little face peeping out from the window when I arrived a few weeks ago as if I were Beelzebub himself. Tell me, Mademoiselle Balcombe - am I as terrifying as all that?

BETSY

No, sire.

NAPOLEON

Pity.

A TABLE BELL rings from inside The Briars.

NAPOLEON

Ah, the creams!

NAPOLEON pivots and shoots for the front door of The Briars.

NAPOLEON

(To MONTHOLON, pointing at BETSY.)
Bring her! I have questions.

NAPOLEON bounds through the front door. MONTHOLON gently extends HIS arm to BETSY, who takes it and walks with HIM towards the cottage. As SHE passes POPPLETON, BETSY sticks out HER tongue at HIM and enters the house. POPPLETON huffs and exits with a sneer.

The front of The Briars parts, revealing the interior within. The surroundings are sparse - a table surrounded by some chairs and an interior door at the back. An elegant-looking sword in a sheath is displayed forlornly on the wall - the only decoration. The floor is littered with long expanses of paper - gargantuan maps, in fact - on which are arrayed strategically placed household crockery.

Upon entering, NAPOLEON rushes over to the table and sits, not unlike a tornado coming to rest. A beautiful, Circe-like woman enters so wistfully and delicately that SHE could be a phantom. SHE is ALBINE DE MONTHOLON, wife of MONTHOLON. Sensual, suave, but

also cold in heart, SHE carries a tray decorated with pastries as delicate and fine as the woman who carries them. A pronounced bump in HER belly indicates an advanced pregnancy.

ALBINE

Your creams, my emperor.

ALBINE puts the pastries - the "creams" - down on the table. NAPOLEON reaches over and begins to consume them like a bottomless black hole. BETSY and MONTHOLON have entered by now. Not looking where SHE is going, BETSY knocks down one of the pieces of crockery - a vase, perhaps - which falls to the floor.

NAPOLEON

(Pointing at HER accusingly.)
You're stepping on Austerlitz!

BETSY

Oh, dear, I'm... I'm sorry...

NAPOLEON

If you need step on anything, step on a defeat.
(Pointing to another piece of crockery.)
Leipzig!
(Pointing to another.)
Laon!

MONTHOLON

(To BETSY, explaining.)
The Emperor is dictating his memoirs.

ALBINE

They read beautifully, my emperor.

ALBINE smiles seductively at NAPOLEON, who returns this smile in kind.

MONTHOLON

(Still to BETSY.)
The maps help the Emperor reenact troop movements in his mind.

MONTHOLON bends down and resets the vase. BETSY considers ALBINE oddly, perplexed, even perhaps scared, of this sphinx of a woman. ALBINE stares back at HER ambiguously.

ALBINE

Bonjour, mademoiselle.

MONTHOLON

(To BETSY.)

This is my wife, Albine.

BETSY nods uncomfortably in ALBINE's direction. ALBINE smiles tautly at BETSY with disdain dripping from HER face. BETSY's eyes wander to the woman's extended stomach.

NAPOLEON

Madame Montholon is expecting.

BETSY

Congratulations, Madame.

ALBINE barely nods in reply.

NAPOLEON

Do you like creams, mademoiselle?

BETSY

Creams?

NAPOLEON gestures to the pastries.

BETSY

No, sire... I do not like pastries.

NAPOLEON

Good, as I had no desire to offer you one.

NAPOLEON stuffs a pastry in HIS mouth.

ALBINE

Did you catch Alexander?

MONTHOLON

Alas, no - he made his escape.

NAPOLEON

(To BETSY.)

What sort of a place is this hellish little island of yours?

BETSY

Sire?

NAPOLEON

It is infested with rats!

BETSY

(A little annoyed.)
Oh, I see - so there are no rats in France.

NAPOLEON

There are, mademoiselle - mostly now in government - thanks to you and your ships.

NAPOLEON grimaces and shoves another pastry in HIS mouth - chew, chew, chew.

BETSY

You should be careful when you chew.

NAPOLEON

I am careful with nothing and proud of it.

BETSY

A friend of my father's choked to death on a plumstone.

NAPOLEON

When you have spent your life marching from battle to battle, Mademoiselle Balcombe, there is no time to sit at a table, pick at dessert, and engage in banter - and if there were, it would only create mischief - and so...

NAPOLEON grabs two creams and shoves them both in HIS mouth. HE chews exaggeratedly at BETSY in evident delight. SHE frowns at this childishness, but bites HER tongue.

NAPOLEON

I can only hope, having been isolated on this wretched little rock, that your knowledge of the world extends past the art of chewing?

BETSY

(Bristling, showing some spirit.)
My brothers and I, sire, have quite a good tutor.

NAPOLEON

Do you now?

BETSY

Yes, we do now.

NAPOLEON

Very well! What's the capital of France?

BETSY

Paris.

NAPOLEON

Why?

BETSY

(A bit cuttingly.)
Because you didn't ask me about London.

Dead silence descends as NAPOLEON stares back blandly at this little jibe - game, set, match. HE eventually gives a loud "Hmph!" and shoves another cream in HIS mouth. A rather pleased BETSY turns and notices that MONTHOLON has sat down and is scribbling on a piece of paper in the corner of the room. NAPOLEON notices BETSY's curiosity and decides to cut out the middleman.

NAPOLEON

He is writing down what we say.

BETSY

I didn't know I was that interesting.

NAPOLEON

You're not, mademoiselle, but I am - with or without a throne. Montholon already told you I was dictating memoirs. Well, he is the one tasked with writing them down - up to this very moment of time, in fact - scratching every conversation into history. He provides me - and posterity - with a most worthy service. Besides, when I need to forget something, it's less tasteless to have someone else there to make it up.

BETSY

(To MONTHOLON.)
You are a scribe by trade, monsieur?

MONTHOLON

(With a gentle smile.)
Not particularly, mademoiselle.

NAPOLEON

It's better to be a great man's servant than a common man's friend.

NAPOLEON suddenly turns to MONTHOLON and points at HIM eagerly.

NAPOLEON

That's a good one... write that!

MONTHOLON nods and continues to scribble. Another man enters - BARRY

EDWARD O'MEARA. Aged ambiguously, HE wears plain attire and speaks with a slight, charming Irish brogue, but one hidden (unconvincingly) under a British accent. HE is gentle-looking, but also gently sincere, commonly seen brandishing a small medical bag and a careful eye trained on NAPOLEON. Upon entering, DR. O'MEARA notices the creams - or, more accurately, the lack of them, with so many having been eaten - and loudly tsks.

DR. O'MEARA

I hope, my emperor, you did not eat the plate unaided.

NAPOLEON

Not at all! I had two aids...

(Brandishing HIS left hand.)

...here...

(Brandishing HIS right hand.)

... and here.

DR. O'MEARA

If you will never listen to my advice, I do not understand why I have come along.

NAPOLEON

Because, by your very presence, I at least have the illusion of good health.

DR. O'MEARA

Soon, indeed, it will be just that.

DR. O'MEARA exits out the front door, but keeps it open.

NAPOLEON

(To BETSY.)

He is my personal physician.

BETSY

Yes, but... he is not French.

NAPOLEON

No, unfortunately - otherwise he'd understand that gluttony is good for your health.

ALBINE

Fabulous, even.

ALBINE playfully plops another cream in NAPOLEON's mouth.

NAPOLEON
 Aside from capitals, mademoiselle, what else do you know?

BETSY
 I know music, sire.

NAPOLEON
 Then sing something.

BETSY
 Sire?

NAPOLEON
 I said sing something.

BETSY is rather put off by this command and hides it not well at all. SHE shyly looks around the room, as MONTHOLON, ALBINE, and NAPOLEON stare expectantly at HER. BETSY thinks for a moment and then starts singing - uncertainly.

BETSY
 (Singing.)
 Ye banks and braes o'...

NAPOLEON
 (Gesturing imperiously.)
 Stand up! It's better for the lungs!

BETSY sighs in annoyance and stands up.

BETSY
 (Singing.†)
 Ye banks and braes o' bonnie doon
 How can ye bloom sae fresh and fair?
 How can ye chant ye little birds
 And I sae weary full o' care?

Ye'll break my heart ye warbling birds
 That wanton through the flowery thorn
 Ye 'mind me o' departed joys
 Departed never to return.

BETSY looks at NAPOLEON for a verdict:
 "Well?" NAPOLEON seems sincerely
 touched by the song.

NAPOLEON
 Very pretty.

†Betsy sings "Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon" - a traditional Scottish
 aire.

BETSY

Thank you, sire.

NAPOLEON

Is it English?

BETSY

No, sire - Scottish.

NAPOLEON

Ah, it is as I thought! It is far too pretty to be English. I would not expect such sentimentality from a nation of shopkeepers. Your race makes poor lovers and even poorer composers.

(Leaning forward, like an eager boy.)

Now, would you like to hear a good, French song?

BETSY

(Quite miffed by HIS English put-downs.)

No, sire.

NAPOLEON ignores HER and begins to drum on the table and stomp HIS feet. HE eventually rises and marches about.

NAPOLEON

(Singing.[§])

Vive Henri Quatre
 Vive ce Roi vaillant
 Ce diable à quatre
 A le triple talent:
 De boire et de battre,
 Et d'être un vert galant.
 De boire et de battre,
 Et d'être un vert galant.

Au diable guerres,
 Rancunes et partis!
 Comme nos pères
 Chantons en vrais amis,
 Au choc des verres,
 Les roses et les lys.
 Au choc des verres,
 Les roses et les lys.

NAPOLEON turns expectantly to BETSY for a reaction.

BETSY

I don't like it.

[§]Napoleon sings "Vive Henri Quatre" - the same song that played earlier in the play.

NAPOLEON

I didn't ask you to like it.

BETSY

I cannot sense the melody.

NAPOLEON

You're not supposed to sense it, mademoiselle! It's all about the beats, you see - the beats - like any martial air. I shouldn't have expected someone who's English to understand. Aside from Wellington, your greatest generals are Generals Water and Wind. If not for that muddy little moat you call a "channel," I would have led my troops into Whitehall and burned the whole place down... like I did Moscow.

BETSY

(Raising HER voice - "I've had enough.")
The people of Moscow are the ones who burnt their city, sire - and in defiance of you!

NAPOLEON

(A great, dismissive flourish of HIS hand.)
Details! At any rate, I was the cause.

ALBINE suddenly screams.

ALBINE

(Pointing madly at something.)
My emperor! My emperor!

NAPOLEON

Alexander! That hairy swine!

NAPOLEON grabs the sword off the wall.

MONTHOLON

Where did he go?

ALBINE points towards the front door.

NAPOLEON

That damn doctor left the door open!

BETSY

This is quite a lot of fuss for a rat!

NAPOLEON

If you, mademoiselle, were sitting there, tormented by incessant squeaking night and day, as well as nibbling of your creams, I dare say you would have as much of a drive to end the scourge as any of us!

BETSY

But a sword?

NAPOLEON

This sword has slain many an enemy - and so it shall slay more.
In fact...

NAPOLEON cheekily smiles and points the sword under BETSY's noise.

NAPOLEON

Look at that stain there on the end.

BETSY, despite HERSELF, can't help but look at the spot on the sword.

NAPOLEON

That is the blood of Englishmen.

BETSY glares back sullenly.

BETSY

You lie.

NAPOLEON

It's true! You can tell because it is uncommonly thin.

NAPOLEON smiles down at BETSY tauntingly. SHE just continues to glare back, seething inside. NAPOLEON scoffs and lays the sword down on the table. HE turns to ALBINE and takes HER hand.

NAPOLEON

Ah, my dear Albine...

BETSY takes this opportunity to jump up from the chair and grab the sword on the table. SHE points it boldly at NAPOLEON with playful relish.

BETSY

One more word about the English, sire, and I'll run you through!

Dumbfounded, but admiringly, NAPOLEON stares back at BETSY. POPPLETON hears the commotion from outside and rushes in through the front door.

POPPLETON

Miss Balcombe!

ALBINE

She's a murderer!

MONTHOLON

Mademoiselle, please!

POPPLETON

Your father will never forgive you!

NAPOLEON

Stop!

NAPOLEON has raised HIS hands in mighty command for silence. HE turns to BETSY with gentle amusement, clearly delighted by all this.

NAPOLEON

That is a foolish thing you have done, mademoiselle - but most deserving. Perhaps I was... rude.

NAPOLEON extends HIS hand for the sword - "may I?" BETSY hesitates a bit and then hands HIM the sword. NAPOLEON takes it and puts it back in the sheath on the wall.

POPPLETON

Come, Miss Balcombe - you should go.

BETSY

Oh, Captain, I wasn't really going to stab him.

NAPOLEON

Don't listen to her, Captain! This was an assassination attempt of the vilest evil!

BETSY

You do like to cause trouble, don't you?

NAPOLEON

You should talk, you agile little thing! You leapt up from that table like a rabid little monkey! You're the only sign of life I've been able to get out of your kind, on this island or off of it. If my men at Waterloo were anything like you, I may not be here right now.

BETSY

That would be just as well, sire.

POPPLETON

(Commandingly - "come now.")
Miss Balcombe.

BETSY heads for the door.

NAPOLEON

Goodbye, Little Monkey!

BETSY

Good riddance, sire.

The LIGHTS fall on The Briars as BETSY stomps off. A SPOTLIGHT rises and catches HER on the opposite side of the stage.

BETSY

(To us.)

When my father heard I pointed a sword at the Emperor Napoleon, he was none too pleased about it, seeing as how the Emperor's safety was his responsibility. As punishment, my father made me spend the night in our wine cellar, because he knew I hated it so. It was so dark and silent and lonely, but I could not fight a sentence so justly deserved. I had behaved rather badly, but then so had the Emperor. For that, I ended up in jail overnight, and he ended up in jail for the rest of his life. Perhaps my punishment was not so terrible.

We hear the sound of A DOOR CLOSING SHUT. The LIGHTS darken on BETSY as if to show HER imprisoned in the wine cellar. Some LIGHTS from a small, unseen window play ominously behind HER. BETSY sits down on some crates of wine nearby and looks about here and there in fear.

BETSY

(To us.)

As I sat there in the darkness, at first afraid and then gradually not so, I had a lot of time to think about the events of the day. He wasn't that bad after all, the Emperor, despite the tales I had heard about him. He reminded me of a child more than he did of an ogre. He was a boy, like my very annoying brothers, except bigger - constantly showing off and wanting to impress - and not particularly scary at all, no matter how loud he might bellow. What a funny man - and all that fuss over a silly little rat, I thought... until...

SQUEAK! SQUEAK! BETSY turns HER head. In the dim LIGHTS at the back of the stage the SILHOUETTE of A RAT's NOSE sniffs into view. SQUEAK! SQUEAK! BETSY sees the SILHOUETTE of the RAT and gasps in fear. SQUEAK! SQUEAK! The

SQUEAKING of the RAT seems to get more high-pitched in reply.

BETSY

(At us - but at the RAT, pointing into the darkness.)
You! You! Get back... back!

SQUEAK! SQUEAK! The SILHOUETTE of the RAT moves a little bit closer. The SQUEAKING gets a little bit louder. BETSY reaches into the crate on which SHE sits and removes a bottle of wine from it. SHE wields it like an Amazonian queen.

BETSY

I warn you! Don't come any closer!

SQUEAK! SQUEAK! The SILHOUETTE of the RAT edges closer. BETSY raises the wine above HER head, as if to throw it.

BETSY

I'm serious! Don't make me do it!

SQUEAK! SQUEAK! BETSY hurls the wine off into the darkness - CRASH! The SILHOUETTE of the RAT scampers away.

BETSY

There! Now go away... Alexander!

For a moment, there is silence - no more squeaking. BETSY breathes a sigh of relief and sits back down on the wine crate, but then... SQUEAK! SQUEAK! The SILHOUETTE of the RAT returns to invade the LIGHT at the back.

BETSY

Oh, no... no, no, no!

SQUEAK! SQUEAK! BETSY reaches into the crate and takes out two bottles of wine.

BETSY

Go away, Alexander! Go!

SQUEAK! SQUEAK! BETSY hurls both wine bottles into the dark... CRASH!

BETSY

Take that!

SQUEAK! SQUEAK! BETSY yelps, grabs two more wine bottles out of the crate, and hurls them again into the darkness... CRASH! SQUEAK! SQUEAK! BETSY reaches into the crate again, takes two more bottles, and hurls them into the darkness. SQUEAK! SQUEAK! BETSY reaches in... takes two more... hurls... reaches in... two more... faster and faster... more and more desperate.

BETSY

Papa!!!

Suddenly, we hear the sound of A DOOR OPENING and a RECTANGLE of LIGHT blares on BETSY. HER father has come to rescue HER. The SQUEAKING dies and, with it, the SILHOUETTE of the RAT. Exhausted, out of breath, BETSY sits down on the (now much depleted) crate of wine. It takes HER a while to catch HER breath before SHE addresses us again.

BETSY

(To us.)

Fortunately, my father heard my screams and rescued me from the cellar. He felt terrible about my ordeal and went down to hunt the rat - Alexander - but never did find him. I ended up sleeping that night in my own bed, but, even so, I slept not well at all. My father insisted I go the next morning and apologize to the Emperor for training a sword on him. I did not much want to do that, anymore than I would want to apologize to my brothers for their acting silly and childish - but then I had no desire to go back to the wine cellar.

The LIGHTS rise again on the interior of The Briars. NAPOLEON is pacing about ferociously in deep thought. MONTHOLON is seated and scribbling obediently on a piece of paper. DR. O'MEARA is preparing some healthy drink concoction for NAPOLEON with some sprigs of fauna.

NAPOLEON

Come the twentieth of December, I saw the heathen approaching - those damned Turks, covered in their decadent finery, but seething inside with savagery so violent and prime-... prime-...

NAPOLEON stops, thinks, and then impatiently snaps at MONTHOLON - "word, word!"

MONTHOLON

Primeval?

NAPOLEON

(Gesturing "yes!")

...that the world shudders at their name! Alas, before leaving Jaffa and when many of my sick soldiers had been embarked, I was informed there were some in the hospital wounded beyond recovery, ill with plague and unfit to be moved at any risk. I desired my medical men to hold a consultation as to what steps had best be taken with regard to the unfortunate sufferers and to send in their opinions to me so that I might consider and contemplate this most tragic... eh..."

NAPOLEON snaps at MONTHOLON again.

MONTHOLON

Conundrum?

NAPOLEON gestures - "good one!"

NAPOLEON

(Slowly growing less theatrical and evermore sincere and serious as HE relives the incident in HIS mind.)

The result of this consultation was that seven-eighths of the soldiers were considered past recovery and that in all probability few would be alive at the expiration of twenty-four hours. To carry them onward in their plague-infested state would only threaten the whole army with infection and spread death wherever they appeared, for recovery was hopeless. Still, I could not leave those sick men behind, for to do so would be to abandon them to the cruelty of the Turks, who always made it a rule to murder their prisoners with protracted torture. In this emergency, I prepared to end the misery of these victims by a heavy dose of opium. I would have desired such a relief for myself under the same circumstances. I considered it would be an act of mercy to anticipate their fate by only a few hours, ensuring them an end free from pain and oblivious of the horrors which surrounded and threatened them rather than a death of dreadful torture. Such are the decisions of war... so correct and so true and yet so... so...

BETSY

Cruel?

Surprised, NAPOLEON turns to find BETSY having entered. SHE has listened to HIM feelingly, surprised by HIS tenderness. HE immediately changes HIS tune and

snaps out of HIS thoughtful melancholia.

NAPOLEON

Ah, it's the little monkey!

BETSY

I am not your "little monkey."

NAPOLEON

You are at that. I even heard you howling like one last night from your wine cellar.

BETSY

If you must know, I was cornered by your "Alexander."

NAPOLEON

(Perking up.)
Alexander!?

BETSY

He found his way into our cellar and tried to attack me.

NAPOLEON

Were you hurt?

BETSY

Fortunately, no, for my father came and rescued me.

NAPOLEON

And the rat?

BETSY

He got away.

NAPOLEON

Not for long! I am determined to capture the villain!

BETSY

I think you're being rather silly about all of this.

NAPOLEON

I think you're rather silly to be prancing in a wine cellar.

BETSY

It was my punishment for training a sword on you.

NAPOLEON

In that case, Little Monkey, I am sorry to have been the indirect cause of your struggle. I would not have treated so worthy an adversary in such a manner. At any rate, it's good training for life - tough, hard!

BETSY
(Referencing NAPOLEON.)
Loud.

NAPOLEON
As I am partly a cause, how can I make it up to you?

BETSY
You can stop calling me "Little Monkey."

NAPOLEON
Ah! Don't be stupid - I'm being sincere.

BETSY
("Stupid?!")
Oh, well, then...

NAPOLEON
For what do you have a true, great desire?

BETSY
(Unsure if SHE should say something.)
Well, I...

NAPOLEON
Come along!

BETSY
If you must know, I want to go to the regimental ball.

NAPOLEON
The regimental ball?

BETSY
Yes, the 66th Regiment is giving a ball - and do, a few times a year - and my father is not letting me go. He says I am too young - but I most certainly am not! I am quite old for my age and it's only right that I should go to the ball. As you say, back in France, sire - *liberté, égalité, fraternité!* How can I *fraternité* without *liberté*?

NAPOLEON
It is difficult, Little Monkey.

KNOCK, KNOCK!

NAPOLEON
Enter!

POPPLETON opens the front door, out of breath and red of face.

POPPLETON

I have brought your delivery, monsieur.

NAPOLEON

Good - bring it in.

POPPLETON

My part here is done.

POPPLETON exits, pointedly not prepared for anymore work. NAPOLEON points MONTHOLON to the door - "fetch the delivery!" MONTHOLON rises and exits through the door. NAPOLEON turns to DR. O'MEARA and finds that HE is extending the prepared concoction in NAPOLEON's direction. NAPOLEON grabs the drink and points after MONTHOLON.

NAPOLEON

Go, doctor - make yourself useful for once!

DR. O'MEARA smiles to HIMSELF and exits through the front door. NAPOLEON hurriedly drinks the concoction prepared for HIM. HIS face immediately contorts into enraged discomfort. HE is about to curse - but, remembering BETSY is present, HE manages to stop HIMSELF and put down the drink.

NAPOLEON

(To BETSY, explaining about POPPLETON.)

To my delight, Little Monkey, that charmless captain of yours is rather upset with me. We went for a walk late yesterday and I managed to scurry away, right under his long, English nose. There he stood, quivering like a jelly, thinking what the Governor would do to him!

NAPOLEON laughs mightily. MONTHOLON and DR O'MEARA enter through the front door. THEY are carrying a large, very heavy crate. THEY barely manage to carry it over to the table and put it down. ALBINE enters from the interior door and spies the crate.