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THE EAGLE BOUND



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THE EAGLE BOUND

A DRAMA

IN TWO SCENES

BY

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"Myrrha," etc., etc.



DRAMATIC ARTS COMPANY

BOSTON

LC19223

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*To My Daughters
Eugenia and Margaret
I dedicate this
little book*

DEC -7 1922

CHARACTERS OF THE POEM

Napoleon Bonaparte, Ex-Emperor of France

Josephine, Ex-Empress of France and Divorced Wife of Napoleon

Lucian, an Apprentice, surnamed "The Truant Minstrel"

THE EAGLE BOUND

Time: A. D. 1820

Place: Island of St. Helena

Scene I

The Emperor's library in his hut at Longwood.

It is late at night. Outside, a tropical storm is raging and through two windows at back are seen great intermittent flashes of lightning made more ghastly by the moaning of winds and followed by rolling thunder.

The room is feebly lighted by two lamps, one distinguished on a mantel above a fireplace to the right, and the other on a table near the center of the room.

Adjacent to the mantel is a sofa covered with calico. The other appointments consist of a small table, several guns and in contrast to the general squalor of the place, a

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magnificent chest of drawers. Prominent in the foreground center is an old armchair. On the wall is a portrait of Marie Louise, another of the King of Rome and a small picture of Josephine.

To the left at back a door leads to another room. This is concealed by an old screen.

The curtain rising discloses a young apprentice poorly clad sitting on a cushion near the armchair. He is tuning the strings of a guitar, talking all the while to the instrument.

Lucian

At St. Denis my playmates called me "Lucien, the Truant Minstrel," because on the doorsteps after school I fretted you while they danced. How? Know you not afterwards I ran away and became a drummer boy? O, our corps flew over the fields like grasshoppers among the warriors and steeds, while the dead were gathering fast to the music of clashing steel.

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I was wounded at Leipsic and returned to Paris. During the Hundred Days I played you among the servants in the Tuilleries. Then on an evening when I was invited to jangle your strings among the lace knee-ruffles and grand dames at Court I won a touch of kindness from his Majesty. How now, old impudence! Your cleft is in the wrong place and so it has been ever since Waterloo.

Blown by sadness seaward we crossed the Equator to this mournful island. Tut, tut, could it be otherwise? My blood is alive and my heart bursts for the Emperor. What a great eagle is caged in this rotting hut, while that goggling frog Louis sputters in the Tuilleries and cries for perfumery. 'Twas shameful—'tis pitiful! O most lamentable Time!

To the subversion of every right held sacred between nations, Napoleon asked for protection—chains are what he receives upon this dreary rock. The simplest family communications never before denied

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anyone have been refused him. So, in the open sky hangs his *Star of Destiny* dripping tears of red reflection—fiery petals falling from a name at which, not many moons past, the world trembled. By the bones of all the French Kings stolen from the crypt of St. Denis this deed stains a black hand across the pages of history.

O, I am out of humour with everything, and you are out of tune. Why do you fret beneath the touch of my fingers? What is it that disturbs you? The storm? Everything I see, everything I hear is sad.
(*Rolling thunder.*)

What a night! But my muse is my taste. The Emperor has sent for us to play for him. Hark—he comes! Promise now to do your best and that's the most the best of us can do.

(*Enter Napoleon from behind the screen. The Emperor's step is feeble but still precise. His hands are clenched tightly behind his back.*)

THE EAGLE BOUND

Napoleon (*approaching the center of the room.*)

Well, all is done; I'm simply free to breathe.

"And, Captain! guard him well"—is all I hear.

St. James decrees me "General Bonaparte;"

Napoleon chosen Emperor of the French
Who made kings and unmade them twenty
years,

Bequeaths his sovereignty to balladists.

Well, call me what they please, they cannot take

From me the fact of being I—myself.

(Sounds of moaning winds, a flash of lightning, followed by rolling thunder.)

O life, thou hast a jangling ring; go on!
Thy slave capitulates,—for Hope lies dead!

(Sighs deeply.)

Accursed is he who strives for noble ends
For he falls oft to basest injuries.

THE EAGLE BOUND

(Seats himself dejectedly in the arm-chair)

Thus here I rest me in this cushioned chair
Mere ghost of man that looks upon his past
As on the stage and what is acted there.

Lucien

Sent you for me, your Majesty?

Napoleon

Yes, lad.

Lucien *(to himself)*

O that I could play here some harmonies
That would uncage this noble bird. Alas!

Napoleon *(seriously)*

Lucien, man is only a fringe in the world,
whether on the crowded battlefields or
these craggy cliffs of solitude. He is
sewn together by prerogative and torn
asunder by privilege. Therefore, what's
all to the purpose? Should the whole of
creation become uneasy because the merit
of mankind was bestowed upon one sin-
gle person? If war is an effected con-
vulsion against Nature, why then there

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is no proceeding on earth that can prove
man brave.

Lucien

But France has lost her Emperor through
war.

Napoleon

Nay, she's decayed in power, not in glory.
*(Reaching to the table he picks up
a parchment map and looks over it
sadly)*

Ah, Jena, Wagram, Egypt, Austerlitz—
(flash of lightning)

O cherish each of these my victories!

Ah, Lucien—could men but see my soul!

I am so hurt, I feel as if all Hell

Were in my heart. Play me some music,
boy:

Surely that is the half of ministering,

But you so young know not what music
brings

To those in misery.

Lucien

My Emperor.

THE EAGLE BOUND

I at your call have come; let's not be sad.

Napoleon

In many, gay demeanor hides their woe.

Lucien

And I will not let you be sorrowful.

Napoleon

No hope for that, for I am woe itself.

Lucien

O Sire you are the noblest man that
breathed

Beneath the sun-illumined domes of
France.

Napoleon

From your averted cheeks the colour's
fled

And are those eyelids moist for me?

Lucien (*trying to hide his tears*)

Alas,

Alas, I cannot help it, Emperor.

Here is it stamped in black on England's
soul

That you are on this desert rocky isle
(*moaning winds*)

THE EAGLE BOUND

And must endure the dreadful sweep of
storms,

These weary leagues from nearest human-
kind.

Napoleon

Have I related with unconscious tongue
Mine own afflictions and calamities?

Lucien

Ah wherefore not? O France should
witness this!

Napoleon

Grieving we should not multiply the griefs
Of others; rather cheer or give them hope.

Lucien

But greatness has been wronged—here's
foul abuse—

Napoleon (*interrupting*)

'Tis not so much th' abuse of greatness,
lad,

As that of trust which makes men sor-
rowful;

The heart grows hard in Nature, when is
lost

The confidence of human fellowship;

THE EAGLE BOUND

To feed upon the winter crumbs of Fate
While Europe shrugs and smiles on my
estate.

(with agitation)

The devil's foot is in ambition; true,—
But his whole body's in ingratitude;
That ugly shadow creeps across the soul
In utter scorn of all that once appeared
Respect for honest obligations.

True then on reaching life's last battle-
field

'Tis scarcely strange when viewing our
career

That sovereign Reason grows ashamed of
this

Poor frame and system of stupidity.

So is the struggle past, and here I stand
Befooled by juggling arts of pain well
met

With me — Imperial nothingness, — no
more!

Lucien

Your Majesty, shall I play more?

THE EAGLE BOUND

Napoleon (*gazing out of the window at the storm?*)

Yes, lad,
For we can batter any storm with song,
Because it's nigh to heaven. (*to himself*)
Soon he will sleep.

How kind in all! God makes provision
wise:

The fickle temper of the young needs
sleep,

But older souls must be resolved in thought
And dull attendance on their consciences.

*(The boy attempts to play but
quickly falls asleep. Napoleon gazes
tenderly at the lad for a moment,
then suddenly up to the portrait of
his son.)*

Sweet boy, O my own son! I'd give my
throne

And all the wonders of the wide-spread
world

For just the touch of your dear baby
hands;

To see you as you nestled in my arms,

THE EAGLE BOUND

O, and so winsome! on your mother's
breast;

But I've no throne to give and it has cost
Me you. You were so precious to my
France

(Looking sadly at the picture of Josephine)

That her, most precious to my heart, I
wronged.

(Pause)

How populous the mind when it's alone,
Housing the ghosts of past companionship
Or imps unparadised from memory,
That sting us with remorse and vain re-
grets

For treatment of the ones we loved, now
gone:

That we would treat them kindlier if they
Returned, soothes not the sting, for self-
reproach

But holds remorse more surely in its fangs.

(bitterly)

This rocky isle has poured into my veins
The dregs of its own bleak sterility.

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O God, what after all are glory, fame,
Mine elevated aims, accomplishments
When Nature's circle clouds the stars with
grief!

I see no light, grief has so closed mine
eyes. *(Pause)*

Ah well! now am I nothing. Naught
can do?

Grow old perhaps, and dream—and then
—must die.

(with agitation)

Win all the lands and seas beneath the
skies

Bright gemmed with beauteous stars, our
world is scarce

Worth taking leave of, holding it without
The trust of man. So: have I done my
part?

(Seating himself again in the chair)

The doctor claims my end is near. If true
Where then will history's censure fall?

On me,

As Folly looks on greatness, babbling out

THE EAGLE BOUND

The dead's shortcomings to posterity.

(Pause)

Go kind solicitude! I've no remorse
Nor am I filled with self-disgusts and vain
Regrets that mount the terrace steps of
Death.

(with increasing agitation)

O Death, a word I never feared, and yet
Last of myself—I feel 'tis hard to die:
Oft kind to die but not a kindliness
That I should not have died at Waterloo;
Nor left Life's battlements and stormy seas
Before the waves of mine Imperial Guard
Whose crests were broken, roaring for
their prey.

The sum of Fate's unmerciful if now
I pass without my legions to the stars;
I've stood so often on the brink of death
I've felt my soul belch fire, while angry
blasts
Lashed loud-lamenting waves of memory
'Til they rose up like ghosts in horrid fear
And charged upon the sands of Con-
science

THE EAGLE BOUND

O unsubstantial universe! Tell me
What recompense have I for having made
The law of nations? Having washed the
 eyes
Of kings to clearer insight in the *Codes*
Of war? The sole return disgraceful ease
In banishment. How cowardly their
 guile
To trap by fraud an honourable foe!
This deed brands England's brow with
 perfidy
And history shall ring out against her
 crime.
See then men's judgments and their qual-
 ity!
It fits not that conditions care for us
Nor value what is best when shorn of
 power;
Thus in adversity I stand defamed.
 (*A loud peal of thunder*)
O God, who hold'st this eagle's body
 bound
Within the circle of the turgid sea,

THE EAGLE BOUND

Have pity, Thou, upon my soul's distress.

(more calmly)

This drowsiness! it must be midnight, now,
That hour when silence takes on strangest shapes

'Twixt unpropitious winds and skyey
darks.

(head falls forward on his breast)

Sadness with wreathed arms oft brings on
sleep

Which saves us by its sweet encouragements.

(He falls asleep. There is a vivid flash of lightning followed by a deafening crash of thunder, then all is thrown in utter darkness.)

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Scene 2

One hour later

Same setting as Scene 1

The sound of moaning winds continues, though the thunder and lightning have seemingly abated. The light grows gradually stronger.

Napoleon is discovered still sleeping in the armchair. His companion also sleeps.

Suddenly from behind the screen a figure appears. In the dim light it is distinguished, clad in white and veiled. Slowly it glides up to where the Emperor rests. It stoops, touches Napoleon gently, then walks some distance away from him appearing to have turned facing the point where it had entered. The Figure (standing half-way between the screen and chair in which the Emperor is sleeping.)

THE EAGLE BOUND

Napoleon!

Napoleon (*opening and rubbing his eyes like one awakening from a trance.*)

Whichever way, 'tis war.

I tell you France is stirred at last—'tis war.

The Figure (*gliding closer*)

Napoleon! Still dreaming? Bonaparte!

Napoleon (*striking his head several times with clenched fist*)

What new ill now comes in this prison house

To plague its feeble and unresting cells?

The Figure (*still louder*)

Napoleon!

Napoleon (*rising up in sudden terror*)

What voice is calling me?

See, see, there goes my soul, as if to fly

On wings from these clay bars!

The Figure (*tenderly*)

How he has aged!

Almost an old, old man, and yet so young!

THE EAGLE BOUND

Napoleon

O everlasting wrath! the battle's lost!

What bloody work is here? All's quiet
now

'Mid broken spears, bent guns and with-
ing forms.

*(He starts and again gazes wildly
at the phantom)*

What means this shape, this vision in the
dark?

Look now it moves. Avaunt, and fade,
for thou

Canst vex no more! Art thou St. Helena,

The guardian-saint of this volcanic isle

From ocean's floor upcast to be my doom?

Come down ye saints above, give me a
torch!

I'll not be roofed and walled in hideous
gloom.

The Figure

He raves—O what a grief is this! To see
The tides of life tear mind so from its base.

THE EAGLE BOUND

Napoleon (*excitedly*)

I who have grinned when thousands went
to doom,

Now gasp for air. The very elements
Are strangling me. What is that misty
form?

(Rushing towards the phantom)

Hither with aid of lightning I will see!

*(Gazing at it intently, then begin-
ning to recover and realize.)*

'Tis not a sky-dropped shield, nor citadel.
It fills the dark—the spray forms here a
cloud

Of twisted gold and chequered plaids that
hide

Some chaste nymph in a cushioned chariot.

(With affected tenderness)

Speak, thou bewildered little ghost! Dost
like

The realms of earth? An exiled Em-
peror's cage?

The Figure (*turning about and facing the
Emperor*)

THE EAGLE BOUND

Napoleon! Come face to face, behold
Your wife.

Napoleon (*reeling backwards*)
O God, my Josephine!

Josephine

'Tis she.

Napoleon

What now? is this the spirit world?
Comes this
Release, expecting but a hurl of bolts?
My wife, my wife!

Josephine

Are you so sure, your "wife?"

Napoleon

Can you forgive, for 'twas—

Josephine

O spare excuse!

Napoleon (*dreamily*)

She has her ways and all her sweetest
smiles,

In every gesture dignity and grace.

(*seizing her arm*)

And you—you live? or have eternities
Come down to mock me?

THE EAGLE BOUND

Josephine

No, 'tis not amiss
That I've returned.

Napoleon

Nay, sweet the joy. O faith
Of days gone by: 'twas your soul
haunting me
That turned my conquests to defeat, and
drove
Me to this desert rock. Ah Josephine!
Into what deep and secret clefts have I
Been thrown to hear the tones of your
sweet voice?

Josephine (*sadly*)

I please you dead, more than I pleased
in life.

Napoleon

O why say this to one who has lost all?

Josephine

Still your affections turn to war and fame!

Napoleon

False destiny! No, take me from it now,

THE EAGLE BOUND

My Josephine! Sweet breath of tenderness,

Most precious passion I have ever known!

My love! O how may I—

Josephine

Look back—

Napoleon

Dear heart!

Though I was weak I loved you. Love's strength lies

Oft in the fervor of its worshippers,

More often in its own divinity.

I can recall the loneliness that filled

My tent in Egypt as I wrote to you

Amidst the shades of night, ere coming dawn

Had spread its warmth across the desert sands.

Burned not the fire of love in every line

In passion rising to the Lybian stars?

Ah Josephine—

Josephine (*dreamily*)

Again I read those lines;

THE EAGLE BOUND

How much was real, how much was
merely writ,
You, only you can tell.

Napoleon

They made the Sphinx
Shed tears. O let me pause! Is this you?
No!

She died at Malmaison.

Josephine

Perhaps.

Napoleon

Yet such
Appealing eyes come not in dreams, nor
such
A touch of graceful sweetness from a
ghost;
But still she's dead.

Josephine

Dead only to the sight
(looking into his face)
Ah, how my heart has grieved!

Napoleon

O, pardon me
That I have made a grave deep in your
heart.

THE EAGLE BOUND

Josephine

Napoleon, my spirit is content ;
The pain was that I could not comfort
you.

Napoleon

You were my jewel—life's foundation
stone,
While all this sorrow weighed upon my
heart.

Josephine

I know the bitter pains you have endured,
The curse that burdened you.

Napoleon

Yes, I have changed.

(seizing and embracing her passionately)

O eyes, O you twin stars, serene and calm,
Open the treasure of your spirit light!
And lips, O warm rose petals you, of
Love

Breathe here upon my cheek.

Josephine *(kissing him tenderly)*

I so love you!

THE EAGLE BOUND

Napoleon

Richest and best of women to my arms;
Something is truer in that kiss of soul,
Softer and purer than the fragrant morn.

Josephine

And from the first I loved you—that
you know;
Now crushed love rises strong again, and
lives.

Napoleon

How could I other? O 'twas horrible!
(moving suddenly away from her)
Does jest hold here? Is this a dream out-
dreamt?

Josephine *(drawing him back to her)*

Nay feel my heart—you are, I am,

Napoleon

Enough!

If true, then surely what the will desires
Must through its pain again return to life
In surges of some stranger consciousness.

Josephine

So whom we love is but a part of us;

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The law that cast me off broke not the
bond,
Thus I've returned.

Napoleon

Nay, you were never gone.
My Star's decree was stronger than my
will;
Go blood-besprent Ambition, go with all
Thy shifting wars—go sink thee in th'
abyss
Of Hell!

Josephine

Forswear, forswear it, Bonaparte,
That you yourself may triumph o'er your-
self.

Napoleon

I swear; and had I here a sword I'd burst
The firmament and seize Fate cowering
there.

Josephine

And even to the end?

Napoleon

The end.

THE EAGLE BOUND

Josephine (*pointing to her wedding ring*)

'Tis there

Upon my finger still,—thy vow, to cherish still.

Napoleon (*stooping and kissing the ring*)

Indeed I swear.

Josephine

Unto eternity?

Napoleon (*solemnly*)

'Tis sworn.

(The stage grows very dark. Her figure is now discovered moving backwards towards the screen)

She fades!

(Distant music and singing is heard)

Josephine

I feel the Peace of God!

And Heaven calls me home!

Napoleon

She seems to rise

Into the crystal battlements of heaven.

(the singing and low music continue)

Josephine

Beloved, you shall be with me anon

THE EAGLE BOUND

In paradise! Upon an emerald hill
Beyond the golden stars, in perfect peace
Eternally. I've watched you tenderly,
My love sunsetting into prayer as hours
Within my soul recalled the perished days
Of life, that sculptured Time in slowest
forms

Of History. Grief's yearning, dear, so
oft

Was answered only by the sighs of stars.

Napoleon

What hear I now? What promise is this
made

By winged words that flow from radiant
Heaven?

Josephine

Time passes swift: behold the growing
shades:

The mystery of the life beyond lies near,
While for those ages that have gone we
will

Not pine. Be brave! Eternal joy is safe
From Death. Fear not these silences in-
walled

THE EAGLE BOUND

Beneath the tapestries and silks of heaven.
Though sweet is oft oblivion of sleep,
Sweeter that sleep beyond oblivion!

Napoleon

Whence falls that shadow? Have I
cause to pray?

To me it seems as if the Hand of Heaven
Were moulded but to plague mankind.

Josephine

O list!

Anon the rumour of your illness cast
Its death-lamp ray e'en into Paradise,
And told its aching agony, as in
The centuries before, the ghosts of kings
Wailed o'er the perished cities of the Nile.

Napoleon

A past bereaved, which should have been
divine

In flames of younger immortalities!

Josephine

Euphrates wandered like a thread of
gold

Across the arid sands, while Babel's kings
Spilled wine from consecrated cups to gods

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Of brass and bronze, of wood and stone,
until

The writing showed upon the palace wall.

Napoleon

'Twill put on me the writ of Destiny!

Josephine

I was confused and strangely sad, yet glad
Amid our colonnades of marble echoing
With high discussions of diviner things.

A moment's wound of piteousness and
then,

I dreamed afar to earth. A song of
dawn

Rose from the prophesying stars, then
Love

Again breathed on my spirit's solitude.

Your eyes were closed in sleep; but like
the shells

Upon the coral reefs that sleep beneath
The depths of moon-stirred tides, they
woke, as dawn

Spreads o'er the sea of immortality.

Then sailed the ship of mine undying love
With mariners of angels for its crew.

THE EAGLE BOUND

So passionately I kissed your dreaming
eyes

As in those desert twilights where the
Sphinx

Caressed by shadows of the pyramids
Sighed jealously above our trysting place.

Soon in the Palace of Eternity

To songs that never knew a chord of pain
Our troth's replighted, which no Death
can part.

Napoleon

Beloved, you pass from me! my love, my
love!

*(He gropes wildly about in a vain
endeavor to take her again in his
arms)*

Have I caressed too much your scented
hair?

Have I too oft slept there upon your
breast

And planned campaigns to overthrow the
world?

Josephine *(almost unseen)*

Farewell, Napoleon, farewell, dear heart!

THE EAGLE BOUND

Remember as I leave 'tis manifest
If not your Empress, I'm in truth your
wife.

Ah what more favor can I do than love?
Napoleon (*pacing about wildly in the dark*)
Stand in the light, why hide in yonder
dark?

I fain would kiss those dewy lips again.
Josephine

We all must one day suffer; all who have
With reason been endowed, both strong
and weak.

Do not complain of God's deserting you,
Nor mine in after woes.

(*again moving behind the screen*)

I leave you now
Alone to read your book of memories.
Such is my charge; whene'er you summon
me

To counsel and to comfort you, I'll come.
Napoleon (*in tones of wild despair*)

O piteous fading—Josephine! oh stay!
Are there no sunbeams that can hold the
sun?

THE EAGLE BOUND

Hold, hold, hold, hold, my love! Where
now am I?

(He gropes about in the semi-darkness. In his wild despair he falls for a moment to his knees, then as if suddenly recovering his strength rises again and stands erect.)

So then all's false but wretched cloys of
life

In which I am the smallest part of nought.

O, O ye phantoms of Ambition's fall

Hold you much longer here this eagle
bound?

(Vivid flash of lightning, followed by a terrible crash of thunder.)

Fair vision in the tempest's womb con-
ceived!

How if, I say that this has been a dream?

Ha, ha! has been a most fantastic dream!

Here in night's crooked characters a fool

Has sworn himself to some ghost's crim-
son soul.

(in calmer tones)

THE EAGLE BOUND

Traitress! no, no, she's not that—no, no,
no!

The voice was Josephine's, my empress
dear.

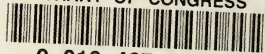
(rushing behind the screen)

I follow to your kingdom, lead me on!

CURTAIN



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