

The Egyptian Campaign

by  
John Schoneboom

For  
Mark Adamsbaum and Tinamarie Panyard

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*Characters:*

*Napoleon Bonaparte, a French leader  
Madame Neige, his press secretary*

*Setting:*

*Napoleon Bonaparte paces the room uneasily while his press secretary, Madame Neige, sits calmly in a chair with a pad of paper and a pencil, poised to take notes. Napoleon has a great deal of difficulty saying what he must say.*

NAPOLEON

The thing is....

Madame Neige leans forward attentively, pencil poised for action. Napoleon looks at her and hesitates. He frowns, and starts again.

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)

The thing is...

He can't quite bring himself to say it. Madame Neige adopts an encouraging pose, nodding, smiling, and so forth, all of which causes Napoleon to frown all the more. She decides to help him out a bit.

MADAME NEIGE

The thing is...

This is more than the proud man can bear. He stiffens his resolve and spits it out.

NAPOLEON

This is the thing. We didn't actually technically perhaps win.

MADAME NEIGE

But Monsieur Napoleon, surely we didn't...

NAPOLEON

Lose? I'm afraid so, Madame Neige.

MADAME NEIGE

But your triumphant return! The people are outside in the square demanding a victory speech!

NAPOLEON

I know. But the truth is, the Egyptian campaign was a disaster. We were completely destroyed.

MADAME NEIGE

Oh dear.

NAPOLEON

Yes, and in less than five minutes I have to go out there and tell everyone that we went on an unnecessary imperialist adventure that turned into a total quagmire and thousands of our finest men died for no reason! I mean there's just no getting around it.

MADAME NEIGE

Well, you may be wrong there.

NAPOLEON

Wrong? *Moi?! Non! C'est impossible!* I am never wrong. *Jamais!*

MADAME NEIGE

Don't get excited. I'm your press secretary, I'm on your side. There's got to be a way to spin this. Now why don't you tell me exactly what happened. Why'd you go to Egypt in the first place?

NAPOLEON

For the glory!

MADAME NEIGE

Right. I'll just put that it was necessary for French national security to wrest control of the Ottoman Empire in Africa from British hands.

NAPOLEON

Yes, yes, that's quite good.

MADAME NEIGE

*Merci beaucoup.* So what happened next?

NAPOLEON

It started out so well. The Mamelukes had ruled Egypt in the name of the Turkish sultan for seven centuries. Think of that, seven centuries! Think of it, you're not imagining it!

MADAME NEIGE

I am! I am!

NAPOLEON  
I ended their rule in a single day  
of combat.

MADAME NEIGE  
Not bad!

NAPOLEON  
*Naturellement.* I developed a  
brilliant strategy called a "box  
formation."

MADAME NEIGE  
A box formation?

NAPOLEON  
Genius. Now, I want you to picture  
this. I had our men arranged --  
picture this now -- in the shape  
of...a box.

MADAME NEIGE  
I see.

NAPOLEON  
I don't think you do. You must  
really picture it. A box has how  
many sides?

MADAME NEIGE  
Six.

NAPOLEON  
Four.

MADAME NEIGE  
Don't forget top and bottom.

NAPOLEON  
There is no top and bottom in war!

MADAME NEIGE  
Four.

NAPOLEON  
Exactly so. Four sides. North  
south east west. So anyone  
attacking from any direction...

MADAME NEIGE  
You would see them coming.

NAPOLEON

Yes! Yes!

MADAME NEIGE

A brilliant strategy, Monsieur Bonaparte.

NAPOLEON

Of course, Madame Neige. We had some good success.

MADAME NEIGE

Fantastic.

NAPOLEON

But there was a problem. We were sort of -- how can I say this -- boxed in. We had no cavalry. We could not capture. The Mamelukes escaped, our supplies began to dwindle, and the British arrived.

MADAME NEIGE

Unfortunate.

NAPOLEON

But it was still a brilliant idea.

MADAME NEIGE

For another context perhaps.

NAPOLEON

Precisely. Anyway, the battle against the British on the sea did not go exactly according to plan, although the plan itself was once again brilliant.

MADAME NEIGE

Describe it.

NAPOLEON

I shall. We had our ships arranged -- and you really must picture this vividly -- *in a line*. Picture it.

MADAME NEIGE

A line of ships.

NAPOLEON

Exactly. A beautiful curved line, close to the shore. A sort of crescent.

(MORE)

NAPOLEON (CONT'D)  
A croissant, if you will, an impenetrable croissant. All our mighty cannons facing seaward. Are you picturing this?

MADAME NEIGE  
Yes!

NAPOLEON  
You're glazing over here.

MADAME NEIGE  
No! I can picture it!

NAPOLEON  
Because you have to picture it to see the beauty of this. Anybody comes to attack by sea...

MADAME NEIGE  
You see them coming.

NAPOLEON  
Bingo.

MADAME NEIGE  
It's fantastic.

NAPOLEON  
Genius. But there was a problem. The English and their puny ships, they can sail in much shallower water than our majestic French vessels. Are you following me?

MADAME NEIGE  
Yes!

NAPOLEON  
They slip in between our ships and the shore. I mean, do you see the problem? Are you with me here? Our cannons, all facing the sea? The attack, coming from the other side?

MADAME NEIGE  
Yuck.

NAPOLEON  
Carnage. Disaster. Long story short, I personally bolted. I ran away. I fled.

MADAME NEIGE  
You strategically withdrew.

NAPOLEON  
In some haste. Without my army.

MADAME NEIGE  
Still.

NAPOLEON  
This is humiliation. Abject  
humiliation. What am I going to  
tell the French people?!

Madame Neige finishes up her notes with a flourish and stands  
up dramatically.

MADAME NEIGE  
I'll tell you what you're going to  
tell them. First of all, you're  
going to tell them you won.

NAPOLEON  
Just like that? Alakazam, we won?

MADAME NEIGE  
How are they going to know? It's  
1801. This happened in Egypt.

NAPOLEON  
I like it.

MADAME NEIGE  
Next, you declare yourself Emperor.

NAPOLEON  
You're on a roll.

MADAME NEIGE  
Issue some special coins  
commemorating the grand victory,  
describe your next great adventure  
in terms of some new threat, and  
ride the patriotic wave...

NAPOLEON  
To more glory?

MADAME NEIGE  
More glory!

NAPOLEON

Hurrah! Madame Neige, you are *trop fantastique!*

MADAME NEIGE

All right, all right. It's time for your speech now, tiger. Go on out there and get 'em.

Madame Neige hands him her notes and exits. Napoleon turns to face the audience, straightens himself up proudly, brushing imaginary crumbs off his shirt and clearing his throat.

NAPOLEON

Ladies and gentlemen, masses of French people, I am pleased to stand before you this evening with some *excellent* news...

THE END