

"The Devil's Delight"

written by

Matthew Buchwald

October 2005

Matthew Buchwald
47-52 44th St., #D3
Woodside, NY 11377
(718) 433-3890

EXT. BATTLEFIELD (SHMECKHEIM) - DAY

A squadron of British cavalry hastily form ranks and check their guns as a military band plays. The cavalrymen wait tensely until the music ends, then spur their horses prancing ahead.

At the base of a fortified hill TORN by enemy fire, the horsemen halt behind a nervous company of British infantry.

In the last rank of the cavalry, CORPORAL NATE MACMURDO, a rakish but common-sensical Scot, turns to the camera and GRIMACES as if to say "this is pure INSANITY."

JUMP CUT:

The company of infantry bravely CHARGE at the hilltop French position, where a battery of artillery waits behind a rampart.

Suddenly, the French guns FIRE, sending dozens of foot soldiers SCREAMING to the ground.

NATE (V.O.)

To those who have never fought in battle or seen at first hand the unfathomable horror of senseless slaughter, the waging of war must seem like a glorious thing. But to those who have served, war is unrivaled for its brutality and cruelty by any other of mankind's pursuits.

MONTAGE of the burnt and blackened battlefield, of the dead and dying on both sides.

NATE (V.O.)

(with gallows irony)

In the history books, the Battle of Shmeckheim is recorded as a great and glorious victory of the Duke of Hardwicke, but, oh, at what a cost in brave men dead!

Nate roughly pulls his gelding about, causing the horse to WHINNEY and REAR.

Nate's spurs draw blood and the gelding springs to the gallop, headed for the rear.

NATE (V.O.)

Many others were glad to lay down their lives for Queen and country, but I saw no purpose to it, neither being vainglorious nor an Englishman, but a soldier of fortune.

Nate and horse leap a hedgerow into a field with no enemy in sight. Staying close to the tree line they rapidly gallop away.

NATE (V.O.)

I freely own that I deserted to save my life, but I leave it to you to judge whether I am not as much deserving of your pity as your scorn.

LIEUTENANT EDWARD DOUGLAS sees Nate flee and curses him for a coward. A blood and thunder martinet, he thinks of chasing after his subordinate, but, hearing the enemy guns FIRE again, instead he rallies his men with a fierce yell and a flourish of the saber.

DOUGLAS

Dismount!

The cavalrymen dismount, armed with muskets.

JUMP CUT:

Leaving their horses behind, the squadron CHARGES up the hill, the French guns FIRE and many men are cut down.

CLOSE UP: Douglas lies wounded beneath a dead comrade, with a hole torn in his shoulder. His lips form a silent oath.

INT. CHATEAU HALL - DAY

Beneath the grand staircase, MADAME MACMURDO, a vulgarly beautiful Frenchwoman, and her three small children cling to Nate miserably, weeping and pleading with him while a pair of guards coldly look on.

Nate KISSES his wife long and affectionately pets his three children.

NATE

(whispering
to his wife)

The banknotes are in a sack
under the floorboards beneath
the bed. Afterwards, take
the children and move far
away from here.

Mme. MacMurdo suddenly BURSTS into tears and so do the children. Mme. MacMurdo EMBRACES Nate tightly and KISSES him again.

The guards force Nate away from his wife and march him to a doorway, where BARON BELLWETHER, diplomat and decadent man of pleasure, has been watching with much interest. He steps out of the way as the guards escort Nate through the door.

The Baron continues to watch the Madame and she returns his gaze with a forlorn hope tinged by despair. He smiles reassuringly and exits through the door.

INT. CHATEAU BALLROOM - DAY

The Baron closes the door behind him.

A summary court martial has convened amid the splendor where once Louis XIV visited and held court.

The commission of officers, including Lieutenant Douglas in bandages and with a crutch, sit at a large gilded secretary to judge and sentence MacMurdo (to death).

A few spectators - aristocrats by their dress - somberly watch the proceedings from the back of the room.

Nate stands at attention staring straight ahead while answering the commission's questions. Douglas dissects him with his acid eyes and tongue.

DOUGLAS

Did I give any bloody order
to retreat?

NATE

No, Lieutenant.

DOUGLAS

Then you must explain to my
fellow officers why you
shamed me by abandoning your
bloody duty!

NATE

How many British soldiers had
already fallen before the
French guns?

DOUGLAS

(hotly)

I will ask the questions.
Answer straightforwardly.

NATE

I did not wish to sacrifice
my life.

DOUGLAS

Better to sacrifice yourself
than to show yourself a
bloody coward in the face of
the bloody enemy! Was the
blood of your comrades shed
in vain?

Douglas waits for an answer but Nate hasn't got one.

DOUGLAS

Is there nothing you can say
to mitigate the offense? You
stand in peril for your life!

NATE

I throw myself upon the mercy
of this court, Lieutenant
Douglas. I have a wife and
three children and am their
only support.

DOUGLAS

My Lord, the Duke of
Hardwicke, has a family, as
does every one of my fellow
officers here. But none of
us has failed so miserably in
his duty to the Queen!

Douglas waves to Baron Bellwether in the back of the
room. The Baron steps forward.

BARON BELLWETHER

May I address the court?

OFFICER NO. 1

Of course, Baron Bellwether,
please come join us.

Bellwether joins the officers, and they all turn away
from the accused to parlay in whispers. There is some
confusion and some consternation, but then nodding of
heads and agreement. Douglas unhappily turns to Nate.

DOUGLAS

I deeply regret to say that the Baron has persuaded the court to be lenient with you, Corporal MacMurdo.

(choking)

You are to treat him as your benefactor.

Nate breathes an immense sigh of relief.

EXT. CHATEAU - DAY

With Douglas and another officer at his side, Nate sadly embraces his tearful wife and children good-bye.

MME. MACMURDO

Oh, Nate!

Nate gives his wife one last kiss, then stands rigidly at attention as she and the children quickly join Baron Bellwether by his coach.

The impatient Baron helps Mme. MacMurdo and her children into the coach.

NATE (V.O.)

At first blush, it seemed like an incredible stroke of luck!

Still in tears, Mme. MacMurdo and her children wave to Nate from the coach windows.

MME. MACMURDO

Good-bye, Nate!

LITTLE GIRL

Come and see us soon, Daddy!

His eyes brimming with lust, Bellwether turns back to look at Nate, then quickly withdraws from his pocket a purse, which he throws to him.

Lieutenant Douglas takes the bag from Nate and opens it and sees that it is filled with gold guineas. He hands it back and whispers in Nate's ear.

Nate calls out as the Baron boards his coach.

NATE
(reluctantly)
God bless Baron Bellwether!

The coach quickly circles an ornamental garden, then exits up a long colonnade of trees.

NATE (V.O.)
The reason of my escape from the gallows was that Baron Bellwether had suddenly conceived a deep admiration for Mme. MacMurdo, my wife, and he had agreed to pay a ransom for my life in exchange for taking her as his mistress.

Lieutenant Douglas takes a tight grip on Nate's arm and spits angrily.

NATE (V.O.)
I have much reason to suspect that Lieutenant Douglas may have suggested the idea to the Baron and that he also profited personally from the arrangement.

DOUGLAS
You are a very lucky man to have so attractive a wife! She has saved your bloody arse, she has! But you're not out of the bloody fire yet! No, I'm not bloody done with you yet, MacMurdo!

INT. BARON'S COACH - DAY

Mme. MacMurdo affects a coy smile as the florid faced Baron edges closer to her, laughing lecherously.

She puts up a hand and lightly tries to ward him away.

MME. MACMURDO

You must know how grateful I am to you for saving my husband's life, Baron Bellwether, yet as a married woman there are limits to what gratitude I may show you.

BARON BELLWETHER

Come come, my dear, what loyalty do you owe to a man whose cowardice very nearly exposed you and your children to the misery and uncertainty of a life without a protector?

In spite of herself, Mme. MacMurdo blushes; she can't help but feel the justice of such a question.

MME. MACMURDO

You put me in a very difficult position.

The Baron takes her hand and places it upon his chest.

BARON BELLWETHER

Do you feel it? My heart is pounding!

The two little girls seem wide-eyed with wonder, while their brother, TIM, is on the verge of tears.

TIM

Mummy, stop him!

Mme. MacMurdo leans forward, and wipes Tim's face with a hanky.

MME. MACMURDO

There.

The Baron cups her breast and forces her back upon the bench.

BARON BELLWETHER

Hah! This is mete revenge
for your cowardly husband's
thoughtlessness!

He continues to fondle her, causing the Madame to
MOAN, while little Tim BURSTS into tears.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The coach bounces heavily as the driver whips the team
into a canter.

NATE (V.O.)

Grateful to have found so
beautiful a mistress, the
Baron was to show me his
generosity again and again,
making me wealthy in spite of
my misfortune - still, I soon
became miserable thinking of
my wife in the arms of
another man. I desperately
wanted to take her back.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD (RAMBOVILLE) - DAY

The British are preparing a cavalry charge at the
French guns.

NATE (V.O.)

But first, I had to come to
terms with the arrogant
Lieutenant Douglas. The
opportunity soon presented
itself, at the famous Battle
of Ramboville.

Douglas, one arm still in a bandage, and Nate are in
front of the other riders.

DOUGLAS

You will prove yourself
today, MacMurdo, or I will
have your guts for garters!

Douglas slaps the flat of his saber on the rump of MacMurdo's horse and the gelding leaps ahead.

DOUGLAS
(to all the men)
Charge!!

With Nate in the lead, the entire squadron recklessly RACES forward.

The French guns FIRE, and cannon shells EXPLODE everywhere around the British cavalrymen.

Douglas sees it is hopeless and HALTS the advance with a YELL.

DOUGLAS
(to all the men)
Retreat!!

All the men save one obey: Nate GALLOPS straight at a French gun, FIRING his musket.

A French artilleryman is HIT and falls.

Nate drops his musket on its sling, and DRAWS his saber.

The French gun FIRES again, too late to stop Nate as his horse LEAPS the barricade into the artillery pit.

Nate's saber CUTS right and left; a FRENCH SERGEANT holds up his sword and Nate SLICES his arm right off. The sergeant tries to grab Nate with his good hand, and Nate SLICES the other arm off too.

The horrified sergeant falls to the ground.

Fleeing with the rest of his squadron, Lieutenant Douglas for an instant turns and regards Nate with envy verging on outrage.

NATE (V.O.)

Lieutenant Douglas had meant to sacrifice my life to the honor of the regiment. He was shocked to find instead that I had single-handedly dealt the French artillery their first deadly blow of the day!

Emboldened by Nate's bravery, Lieutenant Douglas HALTS the squadron's retreat.

Meanwhile, a squad of French foot soldiers CHASE after Nate.

Nate's horse LEAPS the French barricade again, and he RACES away with the bewildered Frenchmen uselessly FIRING their weapons after him.

Nate rejoins his squadron just ahead of a deadly SALVO of French cannon fire.

He prances his horse over to Lieutenant Douglas and leers at him vindictively.

DOUGLAS

Damn your eyes!

JUMP CUT:

Nate's squadron has regrouped with the other squadrons of cavalry in the regiment, all of them GALLOPING toward the French guns together.

The gallant leader on a tall white charger, is the DUKE OF HARDWICKE, with his flashing saber blazing the way.

Lieutenant Douglas rides next to Nate, a hand on one of the reins to Nate's horse.

DOUGLAS

Try to restrain yourself this time! Make damned well sure that you stay behind both me and the Duke.

Suddenly the French guns FIRE and the Duke RACES ahead.

Excited, Douglas drops the rein to Nate's horse.

Nate draws his saber and digs in his spurs, making his horse FLY forward.

He RACES past Lieutenant Douglas, then RACES past the Duke.

Far ahead of all the others, Nate LEAPS the French barricades again; he nearly FALLS as he CUTS DOWN a pair of French Guards.

Nate's comrades, including the Duke, LEAP the barricades after him.

The British fight SAVAGELY, putting most of the enemy to rout.

For an instant, Lieutenant Douglas regards Nate with grudging admiration, then he YELLS with rage.

DOUGLAS

MacMurdo!!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CHATEAU - DAY

Lieutenant Douglas and two other officers wait irritably.

DOUGLAS

Damn that bugger, MacMurdo,
isn't he a great hero to make
me wait for him like a fool?
Bloody hell, I'll be lucky if
the Duke doesn't punish me
for what I do to him now!

Nate arrives on foot in civilian dress carrying a military portmanteau, which he drops at the feet of the officers.

NATE

My uniforms, decorations and personal arms.

DOUGLAS

Surely you had no thought that I would change my mind and let you remain with the Regiment?

NATE

Yes, I had every hope that my valorous actions upon the battlefield might restore your good opinion of me.

The Lieutenant appeals to his fellow officers with a sardonic grin.

DOUGLAS

Think you're a gallant daredevil now don't you? And think I should forget how you shamed me before?

NATE (V.O.)

In spite of my ferocity, for which some have credited the victory of that day, my standing with the Lieutenant was irreparably damaged. Perhaps it was jealousy on his part, but he could no more forgive me my present courage than he could excuse my former cowardice.

DOUGLAS

It would take more than a single stroke of compelled valor to erase the black stain upon your name! Do you care to know how much more?

NATE

(exasperated)

What more can I do than I have already done?

DOUGLAS

(enraged)

Impudent -

NATE

(interrupting)

I am content to leave the service since that is obviously the only thing that will satisfy you.

DOUGLAS

(satisfied)

You bloody hypocrite! You are still a coward!

As if nauseated, Douglas scrapes the sole of his foot against Nate's portmanteau and curls his lip into a sneer.

DOUGLAS

Deliver this thing to the quartermaster and he will sign your release; you are dishonorably discharged from the Queen's service by order of the court martial. Any other soldier under my command would have received an award for bravery and a promotion. But not unrepentant scum like you.

NATE

Am I dismissed?

DOUGLAS

Not yet, there is one thing more. In the future, I counsel you not to represent yourself to anyone as a member of this Regiment, whether past or present. It will save us both a great deal of pain - or, if I should hear of it, I shall be most aggrieved.

DOUGLAS
(threatening)

You may go.

Nate shoulders his portmanteau and walks off, with the officers watching him contemptuously.

As Nate walks along, the Baron's coach passes by. He hallos and jogs after.

The Baron's VALET is sitting by the coach window, and when he sees Nate, he calls to the driver.

VALET
Halt the coach!

As Nate comes puffing up to the window, the valet leans out of the coach and hands Nate a wax-sealed letter and a bag of coins, then calls again to the driver.

VALET
Drive -

NATE
But the Baron, may I not
speak to him?

VALET
He could not come himself, he
has important business to
attend to.

NATE
Still, I must have news of my
wife and children. Are they
safe, are they well?

VALET
It is all in the letter.
(to driver)
Drive on!

NATE
Can't you wait?

It's too late, as the coach horses canter away.

Nate drops his portmanteau and rips open the letter, reading it with anxiety.

NATE (V.O.)

The letter was signed by my wife in her own hand.

CLOSE UP: the letterhead of the Baron

CLOSE UP: Nate, upset

INTERCUT: Mme. MacMurdo in the Baron's study writing at a desk, while the Baron uses a gold telescope to spy at her opulent curves.

MME. MACMURDO (V.O.)

Nathanael, dearest, the Baron has been so kind as to send our children away to Holland, where I hope they will forget the shame of your disgrace. The Baron assures me they will be much safer there than here where all the fighting is!

INTERCUT: MacMurdo children on the deck of a packet boat in a rough sea. Little Tim is still crying miserably.

INTERCUT: Mme. MacMurdo and Nate.

MME. MACMURDO (V.O.)

In the mean time, I am to accompany milord as his maidservant on a secret embassy to our allies. He has promised to reward me handsomely. Be patient, and you may be sure that I will return home to you the wealthier, your devoted wife, Marie.

The Baron SNEAKS up behind Mme. MacMurdo and SHOCKS her by suddenly running his finger up her spine.

Nate drops the letter in disgust, for the first time showing that he is jealous.

He hefts the bag of coins with an air of philosophical resignation and puts them in his pocket, then picks up the portmanteau and continues trudging along.

INT. HOTEL PARLOR - NIGHT

A footman of the Baron plays at the spinnet, while Mme. MacMurdo reclines on a couch in the odalisque position, naked except for a mask covering her face and a hand covering her privates.

The Baron, also masked and wearing only his undergarments and a peruke, performs an exaggerated dance step solo, caressing the Madame with an ostrich feather as he slowly circles around her.

JUMP CUT:

INT. HOTEL BEDROOM - NIGHT

Writhing in the throes of orgasm on top of Mme. MacMurdo, the Baron yells out painfully and rolls over on his back, clutching at his chest.

BARON BELLWETHER

Your embrace is so enthralling
it is deadly, Mme.
MacMurdo!

The Madame sits up hugging her bedclothes.

MME. MACMURDO

(concerned)

Is the Baron displeased with
me?

In answer, he claps his hands together, and a pair of turbaned negro manservants with gold earrings enter and bow.

BARON

Show the Madame her gifts.

Each servant opens a case containing glittering diamonds set in gold.

Mme. MacMurdo GASPS astonished, and allows her bedclothes to fall away as she grabs the jewelry and eagerly tries it on.

She ogles herself in a mirror across the room.

MME. MACMURDO

I have never seen such
splendid things in all my
life before!

BARON BELLWETHER

Mere baubles that pale beside
your own beauty!

She turns to show a servant and he bows his head in approval.

She tugs at the Baron's arm, moaning huskily.

MME. MACMURDO

Make love to me again!

BARON BELLWETHER

(groaning helplessly)

I am only made of flesh, my
nymph! It would take a god
to satisfy a passion such as
yours!

(painfully to a servant)

I need physick. Go and fetch
me a surgeon.

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

A rustic alehouse filled with carousing soldiers and buxom serving wenches.

Nate wanders about with a bottle in his hand. A drunk staggers into him, then makes as if it is Nate's fault; Nate roughly pushes the drunk aside and he stumbles to the floor.

Nate finds a seat at a table in the corner by NELL, a beautiful round-heeled barmaid. She ogles the bottle but he pours only one cup.

NATE (V.O.)

No matter that fortune had
snatched me back from the
jaws of death and filled my
pockets with gold, my mind
began to fill with thoughts
of revenge toward those who
had stripped me of my rank
and ravished my wife.

NELL

Come on, love, won't you
share a cup of ale with me?

The drunk staggers over to the table and tries to
argue with Nate.

Nate stands, grabs the drunk by the scruff of the neck
and throws him sprawling against a wall, where he
collapses unconscious.

Nell regards Nate with fear, then with admiration.

NATE (V.O.)

Out of frustration, I vented
my bitterness upon any
stranger foolish enough to
cross my path.

Nell suddenly throws her arms around Nate's neck and
kisses him sloppily until he roughly pushes her away.

NELL

You are a mean hearted wretch
to treat me so!

NATE

And if you had a husband, I'm
sure he'd treat you worse to
find you in the arms of
another man.

NELL

God rest his soul, my
husband's dead, and he died
in the service of the Queen;
but he never would begrudge
me a kiss or a few kind
words. You are not a
gentleman.

NATE

(enraged)

I was a gentleman, and I
shall be one again!

Nate momentarily quells his anger with a deep draft of
ale.

He pulls a gold guinea from his pocket and shows it to
Nell, making her eyes open wide.

NELL

Ooh lord, a gold guinea for
me? An apology would be
enough.

NATE

There is something I want you
to do for it.

NELL

What would that be, I wonder?

Nate growls angrily, then points at a fat lecherous
MERCHANT drinking at the counter. The merchant slaps
another barmaid upon the behind and she wags her
finger under his nose.

NATE

Not for me. For him!

NELL

'oo?

NATE

'im! I want you to drink
with him the way you did with
me, and when he becomes too
familiar, I want you to yell
for me to come over!

NELL

But why?

NATE

Yell for help, and I'll take
care of the rest.

NELL

You'll not kill him?

NATE

What do you care?

Nate adds a second guinea to the bribe. Nell grabs
for them, but Nate holds them out of reach.

NATE

Do you agree? And when I
come to your rescue, make
certain that he believes I'm
your husband.

NELL

For two gold guineas?! I'll
do it!

He hands her the guineas, and she hides them under her
apron, then crosses the room and sidles up to the
merchant, who grabs her by the buttock.

NATE (V.O.)

I readily found a substitute
victim upon whom I could
exercise my desire for
revenge.

Nell whispers seductively in the merchant's ear and he
laughs lustily, then nuzzles against her throat.

MERCHANT

(pointing in back
of the tavern)

Come drink with me where we
can share some privacy, Nell!

He grabs a jug of ale off the counter, and with his arm about Nell's waist, drags her to a secluded corner of the room.

As Nell sits flirtatiously upon the merchant's lap, she looks back meaningfully at Nate.

The merchant guzzles a mouthful of ale and then pours the contents of the jug down the barmaid's throat until it overflows, spilling down her blouse.

JUMP CUT:

The merchant paws hungrily at the half-clothed barmaid, while she rubs his shoulders lasciviously and he MOANS with pleasure.

Suddenly Nell YELLS to Nate across the room.

NELL

(falsely)

Help me! The brute! Rape!
Rape!!

Nate quickly commandeers a short sword from a snoring soldier, then RACES across the room.

The merchant fumbles awkwardly as he tries to struggle free of the barmaid's embrace. She stays on top of him no matter which way he turns.

Nate slides to a halt and suddenly THRUSTS the tip of the sword blade under the merchant's throat; the terrified merchant stops squirming.

MERCHANT

(shouting)

Murder!

The other patrons of the tavern are too busy about their own vices to care.

Nate nicks the merchant's double chin, drawing a trickle of BLOOD.

The merchant SHRIEKS.

NATE

You'd make me father to a bastard, would you? Then I ought to slit your throat!

MERCHANT

Nell's your wife?!

The merchant's eyes bulge as he stares at the barmaid horrified.

NATE

And I wish to God I'd never met her!

MERCHANT

I swear I had no idea!

Nell SOBS with feigned injury, as she gets up from the terrified merchant's lap, then buttons up her blouse and smooths her apron.

NELL

(feigned horror)

Spare his life, Nate, or the devil will get ya!

All oblivious, Nate draws back the sword to deliver the DEATH BLOW.

NATE

The devil be damned! I'd rather burn in hell than let another man make love to my wife in front of my very eyes!

The merchant SCREAMS.

MERCHANT

I've twenty gold guineas in my purse, and they are yours if you let me live!

NATE

A pimp's wages for the
services of his wife, a
whore?

Nate threatens with his sword again.

MERCHANT

(stuttering)

Not for her s-services, for
your honor, b-because you are
a g-gentleman!

NATE

And a married one, sirrah!

MERCHANT

I beg your forgiveness, I am
myself a married man and a
merchant of some considerable
means!

NATE

For shame!

Nate lowers the sword a little, and the merchant pulls
out his purse and quickly counts out twenty gold
guineas, which, trembling, he hands to Nate.

Nate threatens with the sword again and the merchant
BURSTS into tears.

Nate relents and counts out five of the twenty
guineas, which he hands back to the merchant.

NATE

There, sir, put money in your
purse. And never trifle with
another man's wife again as
long as you shall live!

The merchant bows his head and nervously hides his
purse.

NATE

Apologize to Nell!

The merchant timidly stands and sidles away from Nate's blade, while blubbering at the barmaid, who pretends still to be crying.

MERCHANT

P-p-pardon, M-Madame!

When Nate lets his sword-hand drop, the merchant quickly STUMBLES across the barroom and hastily out the door.

The pair of thieves CACKLE. Nate hands Nell her share of the take and she plants a kiss on his chin, which he wipes off. For an instant, he looks toward the door guiltily.

NATE (V.O.)

I do not know what demon from the bottomless pit had possessed my soul to make me treat a brother Christian in so evil a way! My heart had hardened against my fellow man so much that I could have sent him straight to hell! Immediately, my conscience began to bother me.

Nell tries to kiss Nate, but this time he angrily pushes her away.

NATE

No! Get away from me, harlot. 'Tis a very evil thing that we have done!

She is dismayed, but he won't pay her any attention as he steps over to the bar and slaps some coin down on the counter.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

Carrying a keg of ale and a lantern, Nate wanders by moonlight, whistling a mournful tune. He stops to stare at a headstone decorated with a sword and the regimental colors.

NATE (V.O.)

A brave man suffers gallantly
for his honor, and at last he
finds peace.

He nearly falls over a tree root before he finds a
little clearing filled with moonlight.

NATE (V.O.)

While a coward must stumble
after his fate wherever it
leads him. Filled with self-
loathing and with unhappy
thoughts of my ravished wife
urging me on, I decided to
take my own life. I took my
courage from a keg of ale.

He sits at the base of a large oak tree, holds the tap
hole of the keg to his lips, quickly drains a quart
down his throat and wipes his mouth on his sleeve.

He BELCHES, then takes another deep draught of ale and
listens to the woods nearby. All is silent except for
the murmuring sound of the cicadas.

JUMP CUT:

The keg lies empty on its side beside Nate. He has a
pistol in his hand and sings an old martial song off
key.

NATE

He marched ahead so gallantly
His heart was filled with joy
He beat his drum so loud and strong
The little drummer boy!

CLOSE UP: Tears of self-pity pour from Nate's eyes.

NATE

The cannons fired, men began to fall
But his drum beat loud and strong
He never heard the bugle call retreat
He kept marching on and on!

Nate holds the pistol up to his head and pulls back
the hammer.

Just then, he hears a whisper: PSSSTTT!

He lowers the pistol and quickly looks around. There seems to be nobody so he brings the pistol back up to his temple and closes his tear-filled eyes.

Then there is another whisper: PSSSTTT!

Nate opens his eyes and stares into the center of the clearing. He is shocked to see a French artillery sergeant standing there.

NATE

Want to kill me, eh Frenchy?
Well, you're too late, I've
already decided to do it
myself!

FRENCH SERGEANT

But why?

NATE

I'm just a worthless sod!

He is about to pull the trigger when the Frenchman speaks.

FRENCH SERGEANT

Wait, mon amis, don't you
recognize me?

Without dropping the pistol, Nate rubs his bleary eyes.

NATE

Bloody Frenchy, how would I
recognize you?!

FRENCH SERGEANT

Here, I'll show you!

He steps forward, and suddenly his arms separate from his shoulders and hover in the air about two yards from him in either direction.

NATE (V.O.)

With my mind filled by vapors
and worrisome thoughts, I had
a fantastic vision. Whether
it was real or not I cannot
say.

The sergeant turns first one way, then the other,
showing the empty bone sockets where his arms ought to
be.

FRENCH SERGEANT

See, they are not attached.

Nate stares uncomprehendingly at the arms, which
remain hovering in the air, then looks back up at the
sergeant.

The sergeant's arms begin to circle about him, slowly
at first and then quicker until Nate becomes DIZZY.
Suddenly they stop and Nate WOOZILY tries to recover
his balance.

FRENCH SERGEANT

Now do you know me?

NATE

You? From the battle of
Ramboville? I cut off both
of your arms with my sword?

FRENCH SERGEANT

Oui!

NATE

Well, you ought to have bled
to death by now.

FRENCH SERGEANT

I am dead!

NATE

A bloody ghoul! And what the
hell do you want with me?

FRENCH SERGEANT

To talk!

NATE

Can't you see I'm about to
become a ghost myself?

FRENCH SERGEANT

Why should you kill yourself
when it is others who have
made you angry?

Nate STAGGERS to his feet and out into the clearing.
He takes a POKE at the sergeant, but the sergeant
quickly backs away, leaving his arms HOVERING in the
air.

Nate tries to HIT him again and the sergeant SCURRIES
away, with his arms quickly GLIDING after him.

FRENCH SERGEANT

Mais c'est inutile!

NATE

You're just in me head.
You're not there at all.

One of the arms suddenly SLAPS Nate hard in the face.
He rubs his sore jaw.

NATE

I was a fool to get so drunk.

FRENCH SERGEANT

Oh! You had reasons enough.

NATE

You're taunting me!

Suddenly, Nate CHASES after the sergeant's arms, but
they manage to stay out of his reach. No matter how
quickly he circles the clearing, the arms seem to MOCK
him by getting away. One of them SLAPS him in the
face, then the other until Nate's face turns a bright
beet red. Finally, he drops down in a heap.

FRENCH SERGEANT

I assure you, I don't care at
all about my own misfortunes,
it is your problems that
command one's sympathy.

NATE

(rubs his jaw)

Why should you care about me?

FRENCH SERGEANT

It distresses me greatly to see you in such misery. Won't you take a dear friend's advice?

NATE

Dear friend? Why you French are the queerest lot on earth!

Nate SPITS and FLOPS down on his back and stares up at the moon. The armless sergeant looks down at him pityingly.

FRENCH SERGEANT

How did you feel when Madame MacMurdo was stolen away from you by the Baron and that arrogant Lieutenant?

NATE

Now how did you know about that?

FRENCH SERGEANT

Well?

NATE

Like a godforsaken capon!
Like a coward and a castrato.
There, that ought to make you feel happy!

FRENCH SERGEANT

It only makes me feel sad. What would you do to repair the harm?

NATE

Blow me own brains out!

The sergeant smiles, disappears and then reappears hanging upside down by his legs from the limb of a tree, with his arms lying on the ground beneath him.

FRENCH SERGEANT

See? No hands!

He swings back and forth. Nate looks at him cross-eyed and there appear to be two sergeants instead of one. The sergeant somersaults back down to the ground.

FRENCH SERGEANT

Do you love your wife?

NATE

Now that I've lost her, more than anything else in the world!

FRENCH SERGEANT

Even though she is at this moment in the arms of another man?

NATE

(sits up)

Bugger you, bloody sod!

FRENCH SERGEANT

(backs away)

Some things it is necessary to say.

NATE

Think I was the first man she ever had?

FRENCH SERGEANT

How did you meet?

NATE

She was one of the spoils of war! I took her by force during a raid upon her village.

FRENCH SERGEANT

Not the most approved way to
make a marriage.

NATE

No, but I fell in love with
her instantly and she forgave
me. We were joined by the
church before my eldest child
was born. I've been good to
her as any husband who ever
lived.

FRENCH SERGEANT

This is true?

NATE

Yes!

FRENCH SERGEANT

And you expect your wife to
remain loyal to you?

NATE

Only so far. She is a
practically minded woman.
She gave me back my life!

FRENCH SERGEANT

I see that you are a man of
the world and understand that
there is always a price we
must pay for our sins.

NATE

You sound like a bloody
priest.

FRENCH SERGEANT

That is much too kind. What
would you give to be reunited
with your wife?

NATE

Sell my soul to the devil, I
would!

FRENCH SERGEANT
(doubtful)
There may be another way.

NATE
Eh?

FRENCH SERGEANT
Stand up. I have decided you
are deserving of my assistance.

Nate tries to stand and can't until one of the
sergeant's arms offers a helping hand.

NATE (V.O.)
It was the drink that loosened
my tongue but how to
explain what happened next?

Nate dusts himself off, and he sees that he is now
dressed in the uniform of a French soldier.

NATE
What's this? You've got me
dressed up like a French
bugger now? Ain't you the
Devil and a trickster too?
But how, I mean, why?

FRENCH SERGEANT
You must wear that costume if
our little ruse is going to
succeed.

NATE
Ruse?

FRENCH SERGEANT
Not half a league away from
here is a squad of French
foot soldiers on patrol.

NATE
So? I don't care any more
what those buggers do! I'm
on me way to the bone
orchard!

FRENCH SERGEANT

Wait! My comrades have learned that a coach carrying dispatches of the greatest strategic importance - describing the plan of attack of the British Army - will pass this way before the night is through. By force of arms, my men will stop the coach and relieve its occupants of their dispatches, so that the French command may counter the British attack with a deadly surprise attack of their own.

NATE

You're an enemy spy!

FRENCH SERGEANT

Precisely, and you are going to assist me!

NATE

Hold on there, Gaston! I may be a coward and I may be a pimp, but I am not a bloody traitor!

FRENCH SERGEANT

Don't you want to get your wife back from those lechers?

NATE

I'd do anything to see her again. And my children too!

FRENCH SERGEANT

Who knows what will happen to them without you? You have no choice but to follow me!

NATE

Wait -

Suddenly, the sergeant disappears into the woods. Nate looks all about and can see only one of the disembodied arms, beckoning him with a curled finger.

Nate LUNGES after and the arm GLIDES away, leading him stumbling through the woods.

He TRIPS over a root and stops, catching his breath while holding himself up with a hand on the trunk of a tree.

He hears a whisper: PSSSTTT! The arm points a finger deeper into the woods.

He RUNS after it and soon gets lost.

The arms, attached to a tree trunk, wave up and down like those of an exotic dancer.

Nate stops, bewildered and burning slowly.

Then he ROARS and CHARGES at the tree, which stops him cold, KNOCKING him to the ground. The arms disappear.

Nate stands, rubbing his sore head. He shuffles along.

Nate STUMBLES about. Then he sees the sergeant among a group of gravestones and RUNS after him.

The sergeant SKIPS herky jerky among the gravestones, with his various body parts detaching and going their separate ways.

His head flies off in one direction, while his torso flips over a gravestone and his legs run side to side as if on an obstacle course.

Nate stops and RASPS breathlessly; he leans down with his hands upon his knees.

PSSSTTT!

The finger of a disembodied arm points at four French SOLDIERS hunkered down behind gravestones near the edge of a road.

Nate FREEZES.

NATE (V.O.)

It was neither drink nor desperation that made me see four of the enemy ready for ambush - not phantasms but flesh and blood soldiers armed to the teeth and waiting to spring their deadly trap upon my own countrymen, who at that very instant were approaching with their filthy hands pawing at my wife!

INT. COACH - NIGHT

The Baron and Lieutenant Douglas TEAR at Mme. MacMurdo's clothes, while she anxiously tries to fend them off.

MME. MACMURDO

I beg of you, not like this!

She PUSHES them away with all her might but they won't take no for an answer.

The Baron TEARS at her petticoat while Douglas buries his hawk nose in the soft flesh of her neck. She SCREAMS.

Suddenly the coach stops and JERKS violently; there are the sounds of men ARGUING and a body FALLS to the ground; a man GROANS loudly.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

The four French soldiers have stopped the coach and killed a footman, who lies face down at their feet.

Further down the road, Nate watches quietly from the shadows.

Back at the coach, one soldier holds his musket on the frightened driver, while the three others cover the coach door. Their leader, a LIEUTENANT, YELLS inside.

FRENCH LIEUTENANT

Your footman is dead! I will
kill the driver too unless
you come out with your hands
up! And bring the
dispatches!

INT. COACH - NIGHT

The three occupants listen with great trepidation.

BARON BELLWETHER

They sound like they mean
business. We'd better do as
they say!

DOUGLAS

Damn you, Bellwether, would
you make me commit treason to
save your miserable life?

BARON BELLWETHER

I don't see that we have any
choice in the matter.

The Baron reaches for a leather case containing the
dispatches and Douglas tries to snatch it out of his
hand. They STRUGGLE violently, while Mme. MacMurdo
SHRINKS away.

BARON BELLWETHER

Give the dispatches to me!

DOUGLAS

Take your hands off them!

They continue to struggle, when suddenly a SHOT is
heard.

FRENCH LIEUTENANT (O.C.)

Come out, immediately!

The Baron stops struggling for an instant.

BARON BELLWETHER

Fool! He's killed our driver
too!

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

The driver is still alive, but trembling fearfully. The French lieutenant jabs his saber at the coach door and one of his men rips it open while the other covers with two pistols.

FRENCH LIEUTENANT

Now come out of there!

The Baron STUMBLES out with his hands thrown up. Douglas steps out in a dignified manner and SNEERS at his captors contemptuously.

The soldier reaches inside and grabs Mme. MacMurdo, roughly pulling her out the door.

FRENCH LIEUTENANT

Where are the dispatches?

He GLARES threateningly from the Baron to Douglas.

Further down the road, in the shadows, Nate watches awestruck.

PSSSTTT!

The head of the French sergeant appears nearby, GRINNING like the cheshire cat.

FRENCH SERGEANT

See, there she is, your wife!
Go and get her!

BACK AT THE COACH:

FRENCH LIEUTENANT

Do I have to find the
dispatches myself?

The French lieutenant climbs into the coach and Douglas takes a step towards him, but a soldier doubles him over with a rifle butt to the rib cage.

The French lieutenant comes out of the coach with the leather case open and sheathes his sword. He quickly examines the dispatches and CURSES disgustedly.

FRENCH LIEUTENANT

These are written in some kind of code. One of you will have to translate for me.

(handing the dispatches to Mme. MacMurdo)

Madame?

BARON BELLWETHER

She knows nothing! I'll do it!

Suddenly, Douglas recovers, PUSHES Bellwether out of the way and LUNGES at Mme. MacMurdo.

In the shadows, Nate is HORRIFIED. He finds his pistol and FIRES it into the air.

Back at the coach, all the soldiers WHIRL about.

In an instant: Douglas GRABS the dispatches and Mme. Macmurdo RACES away; then Douglas RUNS after her. The Baron DROPS to his knees SIMPERING fearfully at his captors.

BARON BELLWETHER

Spare me!

The French lieutenant draws his saber and YELLS at his men.

FRENCH LIEUTENANT

Get back those dispatches!

The three soldiers LEAP the cemetery wall.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

With the sounds of men GRUNTING and SHOUTING not far away, Mme. MacMurdo PANTS frantically as she SPRINTS into a wooded area and RUNS from tree to tree, casting fearful glances back over her shoulders.

Suddenly, she COLLIDES with a man's uniformed chest. Powerful arms restrain her as she PANICS and STRUGGLES. Then she looks up and is AMAZED to see:

MADAME MACMURDO
Nate! And dressed like a
French soldier!

Nate tenderly BUSSES her cheek.

NATE
Say nothing now! This way!

He DRAGS her by the arm. Under the low cover of
evergreens, they RACE away.

In the distance, men SHOUT, then there are the sounds
of guns FIRING, a YELL and a GROAN.

Mme. MacMurdo tries to halt, but Nate won't let her.

NATE
Don't worry about them! Save
yourself!

She FORCES Nate to halt and THROWS her arms about him.

MADAME MACMURDO
You returned to rescue me!

She KISSES him passionately.

NATE
Did you think I had forgotten
that you saved my life?

MADAME MACMURDO
But at what a price. Can you
forgive me?

NATE
I can forgive you anything!

MADAME MACMURDO
And I you!

NATE
What of the children?

MADAME MACMURDO
Safe, though they miss their
daddy terribly!

She KISSES him again, then the sounds of men SHOUTING come closer.

NATE

Quickly, this way!

He GRABS her arm and they RUN away. Another SHOT echoes behind them as they exit the cemetery through an open gate and RACE across a field with haystacks.

NATE (V.O.)

An infernal miracle, but we escaped and our family was soon reunited!

The lovers halt for a long moment, and kiss one another tenderly, for all the world as if nothing else could matter.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

Outside a mausoleum. The French sergeant's torso stands on the ground with his legs positioned upside down on top of it where the arms ought to be. The feet kick his head around and around like a soccer ball.

The various parts rearrange themselves until he looks like a normal human being, minus the arms.

FRENCH SERGEANT

I'm sure those two will be very happy together now that they see how deeply they care for one another!

(looks about anxiously)

But what about - ah, here they come.

His arms glide over to his shoulders and then attach themselves to his ears instead. His head GROWS large until the arms are only as big as horns; then his face transforms into that of the DEVIL.