

A poetic meditation at Napoleon's tomb by one of America's most famous travelers, Archy the cockroach.

Don Marquis

archy at the tomb of napoleon

paris france
i went over to
the hotel des invalides
today and gazed on
the sarcophagus of the
great napoleon
and the thought came
to me as i looked
down indeed it
is true napoleon
that the best goods
come in the smallest
packages here are
you napoleon with
your glorious course
run and here is
archy just in the
prime of his career
with his greatest
triumphs still before
him neither one of us
had a happy youth

neither one of us
was welcomed socially at
the beginning of his
career neither one of
us was considered much
to look at
and in ten thousand years from
now perhaps what you said and did
napoleon will be
confused with what
archy said and did
and perhaps the burial
place of neither will be
known napoleon looking
down upon you
I wish to ask you now
frankly as one famous
person to another
has it been worth
all the energy
that we expended all the
toil and trouble and
turmoil that it cost us
if you had your life
to live over
again bonaparte would
you pursue the star
of ambition
i tell you frankly
bonaparte that i myself

would choose the
humbler part
i would put the temptation
of greatness aside
and remain an ordinary
cockroach simple
and obscure but alas
there is a destiny that
pushes one forward
no matter how hard
one may try to resist it
i do not need to
tell you about that
bonaparte you know as
much about it as i do
yes looking at it in
the broader way neither
one of us has been to blame
for what he has done
neither for his great
successes nor his great mistakes
both of us napoleon
were impelled by some
mighty force external to
ourselves we are both to
be judged as great forces of
nature as tools in the
hand of fate rather than as
individuals who willed to
do what we have done

we must be forgiven
napoleon
you and i
when we have been
different from the common
run of creatures
i forgive you as i know
that you would forgive
me could you speak to me
and if you and i
napoleon forgive and
understand each other
what matters it if all
the world else find
things in both of us that
they find it hard
to forgive and understand
we have been
what we have been
napoleon and let them laugh that off
well after an hour or so of
meditation there i left
actually feeling that i
had been in communion
with that great spirit and
that for once in my
life i had understood and been
understood
and i went away feeling
solemn but likewise

uplifted mehitabel the
cat is missing

archy