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Leonie and the last Napoleon

by Tony Boullemier

Excerpts from the book

Excerpt 3

On New Year's Eve, the cream of society filled the Tuileries for a splendid masked ball. In the Galerie de la Paix, dancers and singers from a leading Paris theatre provided the entertainment and among them was Erica von Hertz, Friant's partner in the notorious Champs-Elysees carriage ride.

Erotica had moved on after the collapse of the Paradis Martinique and risen to the comparative respectability of leading singer at the Théâtre des Variétés. Its manager maintained her nearby in the traditional style horizontale and when she appeared on stage, Louis was immensely impressed. She was tall and Germanically blonde with spectacular breasts. The neckline of her red dress was the lowest on view, a major achievement on a night of Parisian abandon. She was singing only a dozen paces away and Louis couldn't keep his eyes off her. He even ignored the gyrating can-can dancers who were flashing their long shapely legs and providing male guests with inviting visions of garter and soft white thigh. Louis fixed his drowsy eyes on Erica and motioned Bacciochi to his side.

'Felix. I rather fancy seeing in the New Year with the charming creature who is nearly wearing that red dress. Please arrange it, mon vieux.'

Ten minutes later, Erica was being escorted up a rear staircase by Bacchiochi. He opened a door on the first floor and took her inside. Turning the gaslights low, he backed out, locking the door and pocketing the key. Erica had just begun to explore the warm, richly furnished room when the bookcase in the opposite wall swung silently backwards. It was a secret door and through it came the Emperor of France. It seemed so comical that Erica had to repress the urge to laugh as Louis approached, holding out his hands.

'My dear lady, we have only a little time together so let's not waste a moment,' he said, his hands going at once to the hooks which held the front of her dress together.