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Leonie and the last Napoleon

by Tony Boullemier

Excerpts from the book

Excerpt 4

As 1865 wore on, another health problem surfaced for the Emperor. He became aware of a troubling problem behind his left ear. It was a small lump that appeared without warning and his physician, Dr Conneau, did not like the look of it. It appeared to be growing and Conneau brought experts to the palace to inspect it. In their opinion it would have to be cut out, using scalpels or curettage, then cauterised in the normal way. Conneau was reluctant to give permission.

'Let us wait and see what happens over the next month or two,' he suggested. And the Emperor agreed.

Two weeks later an English visitor was shown into Louis' morning room. He was Colonel Lionel Trotter, an old friend and neighbour from the Emperor's days as an exile in King Street. They had caroused around London from embassy banquets to casinos and beyond and Trotter, who had now left the army, had lunch with Louis whenever he visited Paris.

'It's wonderful to see you again,' Louis told him. 'Without you I could never keep up with the London gossip. So many old friends and foes. And those are just the ladies!'

When Trotter inquired after Louis' health, the Emperor mentioned the troublesome lump. Trotter, a tall ex-Guardsman with thick grey hair, an enormous hooked nose and elegant side-whiskers, rubbed his hands together in glee.

'I may have the answer, Louis. And it doesn't involve surgeons cutting you about with scalpels. No it does not, by God.'

Louis looked puzzled. 'Are we now in the age of miracles, Lionel?'

'No,' said Trotter. 'We are talking about alternative medicine. Back in London I have a sister-in-law. The poor gel had a tumour and the doctors were going to operate. But we looked for a second opinion. And we got it from someone who said an operation would just prolong her agony. He treated her in his own way and cured her in three months. She's now resumed her position as one of Queen Victoria's maids of honour. So what do you think of that, Louis?'

'And where,' asked the Emperor, 'do we find this miracle worker?'

'Right here in Paris,' replied Trotter happily. 'He lives in the Rue Martin and his name is Leon Michel.'