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Leonie and the last Napoleon

by Tony Boullemier

Excerpts from the book

Excerpt 5

Louis, who was being treated with vast doses of laudanum, waved his hand dismissively. 'It's only pain. I will find a way.'

No one could ever accuse him of lacking courage and when the pride of his army marched symbolically through the city to board its troop trains, Louis was at its head. Their route took them along the Rue de la Paix, lined with cheering crowds. As they approached Frederick's house, Paulette was with Leonie in her first floor bedroom, helping to fix flowers in her hair. Through the tall windows, the noise of the great procession and the smell of horses and leather filled the room as the Emperor jingled by below. His pale face was grimacing with pain and a step or two behind him, the Prince Imperial looked downcast. Then came the sky blue tunics of the Cent-Gardes, their tall brass helmets topped with red and white crests. Bobbing along behind them were the black plumes and double red cockades of the Imperial Guard, the pride of the army. The boulevard was a sea of dark blue jackets and red trousers when suddenly everything came to a halt. The front of the procession was having difficulty getting through the crowds. It was then that Leonie saw him. There, in the second rank of the Guard, sword in hand, was Philippe Nivet.

The young capitaine who had so desperately wanted to marry her stopped directly beneath her window. He looked casually up and their eyes met. His look of joy suddenly turned to anguish when he realised she was wearing a wedding dress. Leonie felt faint. As she gripped the balcony rail to steady herself, the white flower she was holding slipped out of her hand. It fluttered straight down to Philippe who deftly caught it and pushed it inside his tunic. Moments later the procession moved off again and Leonie's lost love vanished from view. She was in a quandary. Was this an omen? Should she be marrying Anton? Was she still in love with Philippe? She felt hot and faint and collapsed on the bed.