

ART HOPPE



SFChronicle
The Exile AUG 31 1975

THE LONELY FIGURE stood on the sands staring out over the endless gray sea.

It had been more than a year now since he had been forced to resign his high office, yet he still wore its symbol over his breast.

Once he had been the most powerful man in the world, his every word, gesture, expression and tone a subject for intense discussion by the high and the mighty. No man had been more hated and feared by his enemies, nor more fawned on and admired by his allies and followers.

He had dwelt amidst the panoplies of power and ordered kings about. But he had left office in humiliation and defeat, delivering one last sentimental speech to his staff. There had been talk of bringing him to trial. The government had intervened. He was free to leave his house and grounds, but he seldom did.

He had been ill. His once-large fortune was all but gone. His aides had deserted him one by one. It seemed the end. And yet . . .

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HIS ENEMIES still feared him. They had written him off before as a broken, hopeless man. He had stunned them by rising out of political exile and once again seizing the reigns of power with the brilliantly pragmatic tactics that marked his career.

They knew and dreaded this Phoenix-like quality. They watched him closely. At any hint he still thirsted for a role in world affairs, their outrage knew no bounds.

So he dwelt quietly in his estate by the sea, virtually a recluse in this prison without bars. On rare occasions old friends would visit to reminisce about past campaigns and the dead victories.

He fell into a routine. The one task he placed above all others was writing his memoirs. He may have made a few errors in judgment. He admitted that. But if there was one thing he had made perfectly clear it was that he would appeal over the heads of his enemies to history.

These memoirs would be his appeal. In them, he would recount the alliances he had forged, the treaties he had signed, the glorious central role he had played upon the stage of mankind. Passions would cool, scorn would fade and history would absolve him. Eventually, he would take his rightful place among the great leaders of the past.

To all appearances he seemed to be living in the dusty yesteryears, his only possible future a generation away. And yet . . .

And yet those who have once tasted power dream strange dreams. Some said he was merely biding his time. Somehow, some day, his enemies still feared, this all-but-penniless, all-but-friendless, broken, defeated, humiliated, physically ill, closely-watched man might yet in some superhuman fashion rise once again out of political exile to cut his swath across the world.

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AND SO IT WAS on that afternoon in 1817 that Napoleon Bonaparte stood on the sands of Saint Helena staring out over the endless gray Atlantic — dreaming who knows what strange dreams of glory.