

A NOVEL



*THE*  
EMPEROR'S  
*BODY*



PETER BROOKS

## ***The Emperor's Body***

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# *The Emperor's Body*

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**PETER BROOKS**



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In memory of Polly and Ernest Brooks  
*When to the sessions of sweet silent thought...*

## ***The Emperor's Body***

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*Dawn had broken, a pale, cold, comfortless dawn. The lanterns burned still, with a fitful, sputtering light. The wind swept in rattling gusts from the south. The rain began again, glacial, penetrating. The workers were now two meters below ground level; they swung the pickaxes slower now, thudding them down into the walls of solid masonry. No one spoke, just from time to time a muttered curse in English as a pickax glanced sideways from its target, a brief exchange in French between Philippe and Las Cases. Then a pickax went through; a crack appeared in the masonry. By nine o'clock, two more, and the lantern held close gave a sideways glimpse of wood in the hollow beneath. The coffin itself? The redcoats of the 91st came to attention. Abbé Coquereau, who had gone to the tent to don his surplice, approached with the holy water.*

*The rain now redoubled in violence. The masonry soon was split and fragmented down the sides, revealing the large flat stone that sealed its center. Block and tackle were lowered, ropes made fast to the stone. Slowly it rose, tilting, at a dangerous angle, as if it might crash back on the workers below. A dozen pairs of hands reached to secure it, and topple it onto the wet dirt. The watchers pressed forward. Then, as if spontaneously, all hats—shakos, bicornes, kepis—were off; the knot of Frenchmen and the English soldiers alike stood bareheaded in the pounding rain.*

*There beneath them was the mahogany coffin. The wood was wet, and covered with a light mold here and there, but it appeared entirely intact. In the gleam of the lanterns you could see glints of silver, the heads of the screws holding down the lid. Coquereau moved to the head of the coffin, and began his prayers. Dr. Guillard appeared with a bucket of chloride, to disinfect the crypt. Philippe and Captain Alexander stepped forward, ready to descend into the excavation and fix the ropes to lift the coffin out.*

*The rain and wind covered the sound of the Abbé's prayers. Philippe turned back from the graveside and strode to the nearest tent, beckoning one of the deckhands to follow. He stood at one of the trestles set up to hold the coffin when it came out of the ground, and scribbled a note to be taken in all haste to his commander, Joinville, back on the frigate:*

*Tomb, 10 o'clock*

*My Lord,*

*I hasten to relate to you that after continuous labor, without interruption and with the greatest success since midnight, we have succeeded in lifting off the stone covering the crypt and that the coffin is in a state of perfect conservation.*

*I shall now proceed, in accordance with the orders of His Majesty's government, to the opening of the coffin and then its final sealing. I believe that by 2 o'clock at the latest we will be under way for Jamestown. Everything*

*up till now has gone perfectly.*

*Chabot*

# 1

## *Designs*

SOMEWHERE DOWNSTAIRS a door keeps banging in the wind. It makes it hard to concentrate. But the wind is good. I've been watching for the signs of spring for weeks, hanging out of my third-storey window, summoning it from this long winter. The wind through the open window brings a smell of warming earth. Maybe if I left my desk now I would see buds on the apple trees.

But I have to stick to it. There are so many strands to pick up, to weave together, at the same time to keep separate. I suppose that's the way people are in the time allotted to them—strands that get in one another's way, each one trying to weave its own pattern, becoming twisted, fraying at the ends, snapping even. With no guarantee the picture ever will get woven into the fabric, that anyone will see the sense of it.

I don't know why I use this image in any case—I've never woven anything, I can't even abide needlepoint, I never could sit still and occupy my hands with any sort of knitting or crocheting. I am like my mother in that respect, if in no other. I suppose she would have lived a less anguished life if she could have found pleasure in woman's work. And I might have behaved more in keeping with everyone's expectations of me. Though that would have bored me to tears. I was bored, through and through, which has something to do with what happened, but not everything. In any event, I willed it to happen, at least the part that was at all within my control. But here's the difficult question: Could I have willed it to happen in any other way? I mean, what was it that determined my will, its direction so to speak, its aim? That's less clear. And it would be good to try to gain some greater clarity—just as it would be well to see how these strands should interweave, how persons and events that may appear wholly separate in fact have everything to do with one another.

It's at least clear that I am the only one who can at this point sort it all out, give it shape. In particular, show that what looks like separate stories really are one. No, they aren't one, not to the casual observer, and not in the history books. This is all true history, but only some of it makes its way into official history. The rest makes no difference, really, except to me.

These walls, the window held open with its long forged iron hook, the plain but graceful marble chimneypiece, the faded red Turkey carpet that lies between the divan and the ornate mahogany desk where I sit, in an old Louis XVI bergère I have made comfortable with three cushions (all this furniture inherited from Father), the corner library where the books are ranged two deep and sometimes a double row high on the shelf, the side table piled high with books and papers—everything I see in fact somehow is here in this space, in its relation to me, because of what happened. I live in

a style you might call bourgeois bohemian, comfortable enough, I should think, for any creature seeking shelter, warmth, and calm, yet clearly not of a pomp and elegance acceptable to Louise, or even less grand acquaintances. More to the point, not quite the kind of place or life expected of me.

It is getting close to noon, and soon I shall have to close up my desk—locking it, as I always do, quite unreasonably since no one would think of touching its contents—and walk to the omnibus that will take me into Paris. Lunch with Louise d’Haussonville, still a friend despite my indiscretions, maybe in fact secretly envious of them. Still calls me *ma petite Amélie*. But before I go down into the streets of Passy, I want to at least get straight on the topic headings I need. The rubrics. Thus:

*The Consul*  
*The Diplomat*  
*The Body, of course (if there)*  
*The Voyage Out*  
*The Island, and what happened there*  
*The Return—the Champs-Élysées and after*  
*Me in all this*

No wait. There is more, Daponte and all that. The rendezvous of the portrait, etc. It’s all complicated. There are different demands depending on whose point of view you’re taking. I need to rise to a level of grand, godlike omniscience. But that wouldn’t quite do it, since the different perspectives are everything. It’s only partly a matter of what happened. That’s why I say it doesn’t all fit in the history books. It’s more how to look at what happened.

We are dealing with different minds, walled off from one another. The question is how to get from one to another, when in reality—in history—they couldn’t, though I know that at certain moments, at least, they tried. Beyle wanted to write it all out, make himself the master of all the strands and all the minds, but in the end he couldn’t. My own mind sometimes astonishes me by what it appears able to see, or to invent, to work out in any case, so things appear to take on meaning. This may be a delusion, I suppose. History may be that tale told by an idiot, for all its sound and fury ultimately signifying not a thing. And yet, consider that things might have turned out differently, that there is no necessity in what happened. Either you have to say it was sheer chance, or you have to believe that we do weave patterns in that fabric. Or rather: that we try to. The designs we produce are often ludicrously, or tragically, crude and formless versions of what we’d intended. Smudges of design really.

*The Consul*

HE SETTLED himself into the worn leather armchair, reflecting once again that it was the only comfortable piece of furniture in the whole of this bleak consulate, and began his inspection of the mail that had accumulated during his absence. The late afternoon sunlight slanted through the dirty windows onto the two stacks of paper. The one on the right was the official stuff, from the ministry, where he knew there would be renewed demands for an exact count of trading vessels—subdivided into sailing ships and steamships—entering and leaving the port, for statistics on the export of sulfur and pozzolana ash for making cement, and the import of French silk and codfish. Codfish: the irresolvable problem, since if the French cod was clearly of superior quality, the English seemed to deliver theirs fresher. Faster ships. A disgusting taste anyway, codfish, but in this country where fish was required of everyone at least once a week, an item of commerce worth letter upon letter from the ministry. The other pile might hold something more interesting, maybe a bank draft from his publisher. This he very much needed.

Dust danced in the rays of sunlight. He was getting nowhere. His eyes were tired, his back ached from the nine-hour coach ride from Rome. To be sure, if he put in more regular hours at this desk things would not pile up to such an extent. But to be condemned to an uninterrupted string of days in this godforsaken port would bring the black devils into his soul. Rome was all that made it bearable. And now that Countess Cini seemed to show some interest in him. Did she really? What had she meant, two nights ago, when they were leaving the palazzo on the way to the opera (Bellini's *Norma*), and he had kissed her hand and held it a moment, and her eyes had softened and she had said, *Ma, che tenerezza!* Nothing more. The rest of the evening she was gracious, but distant.

He rose from the chair and moved slowly to the window, stretching his back as he went. The tiled roofs of Civitavecchia lay below him, reddish brown, patched. Glimpses from between them into the narrow streets with their windows shuttered against the sunlight. An occasional figure—always in black, always a woman—shuffling in the streets. An air of poverty and affliction hung over it all. A sense of exile and melancholy. As he scanned the city walls, he noticed a straggling funeral procession on its way out to the Camposanto. A priest in his round black hat, a rumpled white bib over his black robe, leading a hearse drawn by an emaciated horse, with four old women in black straggling behind. Ashes to ashes. What a place to end his days.

His eyes moved over rooftops to the quays, the only place where the mournful

town seemed to come alive. A steamboat newly arrived, he noticed, its smokestack still throwing up a spume of black vapor. He reached to his left and took the telescope from its stand. He brought it to bear on the stern of the steamboat. Yes, there it was, the tricolor flag of France. One of his ships.

The door behind him swung open with its usual grating sound, and he turned to see Tavernier's unpleasant foxlike face appear in the opening. A rush of annoyance overcame him: How many times had he told his wretched aide to knock before entering? Damnation. With his own absences, his chancellor was becoming more and more insubordinate, assuming the functions of consul himself. He prepared for expostulation, once again.

"Sir..." Tavernier began, with an expression of abject flattery in which he detected a trace of mockery.

"What is it? Why do you enter like this?"

"My humble excuses to His Majesty's Consul, but there is an express packet, just arrived by the *vapore* from Marseille. Marked urgent, you see."

Tavernier sidled deferentially into the room. His black suit and white shirt were as always impeccably clean, yet somehow his sallow face with its ratty whiskers and crooked obsequious half-smile made him look like a hired assassin, or a spy. Which he was: constantly reporting on his superior's absences to the ministry. Yet indispensable precisely because of those absences.

Tavernier held out the diplomatic pouch stamped *Roi des Français*. "I thought you should see it at once, sir."

"Yes. Thank you. You can go now."

He sensed that Tavernier had more to say, but he turned his back on him and seated himself at the desk with the pouch. To his satisfaction, he heard the door close.

He opened the pouch, and drew out the packet of papers. The top sheet was a letter from the Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Desages, writing on behalf of Prime Minister Thiers. As he scanned the page, he found himself sitting upright, his fatigue forgotten. In a moment he was on his feet, the Secretary's letter in hand, pacing the room.

Amazing. Desages' letter was dated 12 May 1840—just three days ago—and it announced that the government had obtained permission from Her Britannic Majesty's government to make an expedition to the island of Saint Helena, there to exhume the body of Napoleon and return it to France, so that it might henceforth lie in a suitable tomb in Paris. The return of the Emperor. As a dead body, of course, dead—let's see—nearly twenty years, having expired in a truly godforsaken spot at the end of the world.

Saint Helena. He'd seen the engravings of that island, rising like a rock from the ocean somewhere off the southern tip of Africa, and of Longwood House where the famous prisoner idled away his last years, constantly replaying in his mind the shifting tides of battle on the plain of Waterloo. Seen, too, the renderings of the cemetery with its sole tomb. And they would dig into that tomb. In a momentary hallucination, he saw a coffin uncovered by the gravediggers, then its lid unscrewed and turned back. A fearsome ghoul appeared, the Emperor with eyes glaring from the sockets of a skull from which the flesh hung in flaccid ribbons, under that famous hat cocked jauntily to one side. The ghoul rose from the coffin, brandishing a sword, thrusting aside the shroud. The mouth opened, as if to cry a battle command. But instead it vomited a flux

of dark liquid.

He went to the washbasin in the corner and splashed water on his face. Decidedly, his imagination was becoming morbid.

He returned to the pages on his desk. There was a three-page minute of the correspondence between François Guizot, French Ambassador to the Court of Saint James, and Viscount Palmerston, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs—from which it appeared that the British after all these years offered no objection to returning the body of their illustrious captive to the French (after all the indignities they had made him suffer while alive and in captivity—why make trouble over a decomposed body?). Then a summary of the session in the Assembly, and the motion of Monsieur Rémusat which led to the response by Monsieur Thiers for the government. All carefully staged, of course—Rémusat couldn't have made his motion without knowing Thiers and Guizot had prearranged everything. But his eye was caught by an interesting phrase in Rémusat's speech, where he referred to Napoleon as "the legitimate sovereign of our nation." Curious, that, when you recall that for the regimes that succeeded his, Napoleon was always the "usurper," the man who had grabbed the throne from the legitimate kings.:

Now memory came roiling through his mind. Milan, in the wake of the young Bonaparte's victories. The missions he had led in Germany, as agent in charge of supply for the Grand Army. Moscow in flames. That was, yes that was the farthest he had ever been, not only in distance from Paris, but in the testing of what he could do. That incredible night before the retreat began, when he joined a group of officers in their forage through the dark palaces of Moscow against the lurid backdrop of fire hanging on the horizon, approaching inexorably.

He had twice begun to write a book about Napoleon, his Napoleon, to recount his own experience of that glorious adventure, his own youth and the youth of the world, when anything was possible, when everyone he knew was in uniform and you had to set out for Brunswick or Vienna at a day's notice, when you were a piece of a great irresistible machine that was reorganizing all of Europe—when to will it in the name of Napoleon Bonaparte was to see it happen. But he had started those two unfinished books to judge, too. To pass judgment on the moment when Napoleon betrayed the Revolution, betrayed the principles of '89 and the spirit of the Jacobins. When he had himself made Emperor, and created the court of Saint-Cloud, and started naming barons and counts of the Empire, and revived all the fustian and pomp of monarchy. A self-betrayal as well: Caught up in the life of court etiquette and its intrigues, surrounded by stupid toadies and counselors, he lost that incredible power of eagle vision, that capacity for instant decisions that led him triumphant through Marengo and Arcole and the Pyramids and Austerlitz. To the butchery of Eylau. To the madness of the Russian campaign, where an army of 400,000 men vanished in the snow. To Leipzig. To Waterloo.

Where were those manuscripts? He wanted to reread them. Now would be the moment to finish them, to publish his judgment on the Man of Destiny. His journals, too, from his years as commissioner, especially the journal from 1812, the Russian campaign, though he'd lost a volume during the retreat from Moscow. Wasn't the government taking a risk in bringing back this corpse? The Bonapartists were far from inactive. The foreign nephew, Louis-Napoléon, had attempted a putsch at Strasbourg.

Did King Louis-Philippe and his ministers think they could rally the Bonapartists by this gesture? Was their grasp on power really strong enough to resist the wave of nostalgia for past glory that this corpse would bring with it? Did they understand the childishness of the French, who had never forgotten this fateful memory? What a folly, this expedition, what a magnificent folly. What would it lead to?

He was back in the chair now. He knew that the packet must also contain instructions on how he was to handle this news in his dealings with the Papal States—there would be tiresome conversations with the Ambassador in Rome, too—but his reverie was too all-consuming to deal with this now. He turned instead to the other stack of letters, the one on the left, turning them over with his fingertips, looking for that letter from Buloz that might contain a bank draft, royalties from his last novel. Not there, apparently. But a small, elegant envelope emerged from pile, one without any markings but his own name and address. He knew the hand, and his heart gave a momentary thump as he recognized it. He smiled at himself. Good, still capable of a thump of the heart at the possibility of an encounter with Giulia.

Giulia's message was discreet—as all her messages had become since her marriage to Martini—but perfectly clear: he was to meet her at the *Albergo del Campo* in Siena on the 24th, for what looked to be a four-day rendezvous.

Giulia Rinieri, now Martini. What of her? She was the ward of the Tuscan envoy to Paris. Beyle had flirted with her, in a distracted sort of way, for years. He admired her immense dark eyes under their arched brows, and her elegant figure, with its almost unbelievably narrow waist, and the fine feet shod with the finest Florentine slippers. But at age forty-seven—as he was in that miraculous year 1830—he ruled himself out as a lover for this woman in her late twenties, never married, bathed in a kind of aura of virginity. Yet that evening just ten years ago—her own twenty-ninth birthday fête—as he moved down the long corridor from dining room to salon, she had appeared at his shoulder. Her lips were parted, as if on the brink of speech. But she didn't speak. Instead, she threw her arms around his neck, drew him close—she was, he realized on the spot, an inch taller than he—and kissed him hard on the mouth. Astonishing. As he awkwardly, almost reluctantly, returned the kiss, that was all he could think: Astonishing. Then she stood back and said, “Henri, I know you are old and a fright, but I love you.” An unforgettable declaration.

He had written to her as soon as he returned to his small apartment in the *rue de Richelieu*. It was a guarded note. He asked for a two-month delay to think about it. Why such a display of caution and suspicion to this oasis of love offered in the desert of his existence? He was wary. He had suffered, more than he ever wanted to admit, from what had up to then been the love of his life, with Menti—the Countess Clémentine Curial—who after three years of wild passion had left him for a colonel of the Hussars, of all things. Did he really want Giulia? Did he trust her?

But the love notes continued to be exchanged. And it was almost exactly two months to the day, on 22 March, that, wearing a veil and deeply mantled, she came to the *rue de Richelieu*. Her beauty, her elegant simplicity, swept the difficulties away. As he wrote to himself in his journal the next day, at age forty-seven he became a lion for love.

Giulia wanted to marry, of course. And why should he not? With the new regime that took the place of the fallen Bourbon monarchs in July of that year, after a three-

day revolution he had watched unfold from the windows of his apartment, he had been appointed to his consulate—not Trieste, where his credentials were refused by the Austrian government, and not Livorno, as he had hoped, but still a steady position—which allowed him to ask her guardian for her hand. He had refused, in a letter whose surface courtesy covered an insulting insinuation that Monsieur Beyle was merely an unstable and impecunious scribbler whose new position depended on a government of dubious legitimacy whose days in power might be numbered. He had felt the insult, but Giulia had insisted that nothing would change between them. And it hadn't—except that seeing her had become more and more difficult, even with her return to Florence. And then she had accepted the hand of the washed-out Martini, at her guardian's insistence—but made it clear that Henri maintained all his rights.

So Giulia on the 24th. Only a week here in Civitavecchia, then turn things over again to his wretch of a chancellor. Yes, that was dangerous, the man was becoming ever more powerful, entertaining his own relations with the ministry—and with the Vatican—while keeping an insidious record of Beyle's absences. But for a lion in love, there was no hesitation possible.

Darkness was settling into the office. And there was still the matter of the urgent instructions concerning the news of the Emperor's body. He glanced again at Desages' account. The frigate *La Belle Poule*, escorted by the corvette *La Favorite*, was to sail from Toulon as soon as she could be made ready. She was to be commanded by the Prince de Joinville, third son of King Louis-Philippe, only twenty-two but already lieutenant commander in the French navy. A voyage halfway round the world, to dig up a rotting corpse. But what a corpse!

If he were a novelist of sea adventures, this would make a great subject—he tried for a moment to imagine it. He might finally be able to write something popular, adventure stories sold well, especially seafaring tales. You should try this, he told himself. Find out who else is going on the voyage, find a hero for your novel. Make it true to life, but free yourself to imagine it, too. You're after all a successful novelist, at least to the happy few who appreciate you. Could he pull this off? Up to now, he had only written—of what? Of the inner life, maybe. Of the complexities of the soul. Of love, especially, he thought with a certain bittersweet irony, though lord knows you've never quite got that right.

*The Diplomat*

IT WAS close to midnight, Saturday, 20 June, when the cab drew up before the portico of Hartford House. Philippe felt a sense of accomplishment and relief as he paid the driver and began to mount the steps of the embassy. Another official reception done, and he had managed five minutes of private conversation with Lord Palmerston himself—though it was only about shooting grouse, His Excellency had recognized him and shown a general benevolence, and even congratulated him on his impeccable English. He could no doubt count on Palmerston’s good will, and that would be of prime importance if he decided to pursue this career. And yet, what ennui! He recalled a phrase from Stendhal’s novel *The Red and the Black*, that French wit lost three-quarters of its value in England. Solemnity was the tone in Whitehall, and he longed for Paris. Longed, too, for another meeting with Amelia (he liked to anglicize her name, as a private joke between them), whom distance had made only more perfect, the woman he was determined he would marry.

At the top of the stairs, the footman was waiting. But Philippe’s customary “Good night, Burton” was answered by the footman’s stepping forward.

“Mr. Chabot, a word with you.”

“Yes, Burton?”

“His Excellency the Ambassador is awaiting you, sir.”

“At this hour?” François Guizot was hardly known as a night owl.

“Yes, sir.” He moved closer, and spoke in a stage whisper. “He’s received a pouch from Paris just an hour ago. Says he must speak to you without delay.”

This was sufficiently mysterious to be interesting. Ambassadorial secretaries have no choice, anyway.

“Thank you, Burton. I go at once.”

So he turned into the right-hand staircase, leading to the Ambassador’s cabinet. On the second floor, the footman bowed, opened the door, and announced him.

Guizot was behind his massive desk, his severe face knotted in a frown. Without rising, he waved the young man to a seat, and picked up a sheaf of papers.

“Good evening, Chabot. Let me come to the point at once. I have received curious instructions concerning you. The King wishes to send you to Saint Helena as royal commissioner, so that you may write and sign the official affidavit. He requires your immediate answer. Your place in the ministry will be held for you, you’ll in fact be entitled to promotion on your return.”

“Yes, Excellency.” Philippe was having trouble bringing Guizot’s words into focus. Had he missed something? “But excuse me, sir. What affidavit are we talking

about?”

“That concerning the disinterment of the body of Napoleon, and its return to French hands.” He stared at Philippe over the sheets of paper he held.

“Let me understand. I am to ship out to Saint Helena?”

“Under the command of the Prince de Joinville. You are to leave London at once, travel to Paris where you will stop only long enough to assemble your kit, and then make your way with dispatch to Toulon, where the frigate *La Belle Poule* is readying for departure.” Here he paused, and the lines of his austere face relaxed slightly. “I don’t think a refusal is in order.”

“Of course not. On His Majesty’s service.” Still, Philippe hesitated a moment. “Excellency, may I inquire, why me?”

This brought something close to a smile to Guizot’s lips. “I don’t know. Certainly an extraordinary mark of confidence in a man of your age. I suppose because you have established cordial relations with the English, with Lord Aberdeen and Lord Palmerston. And you are a familiar of the Prince de Joinville—the two of you make a kind of children’s crusade. Not that I think this crusade is well considered.” Here he lowered his voice. “I may tell you in confidence that I don’t think much of this move. France without Napoleon, alive or dead, is better off. We have no need of tyrants. We have reached an age of true constitutional monarchy, like our friends the English. I would leave Napoleon’s body where it is, seven thousand sea miles away.”

“Yes, I understand. This risks stirring up factions. Couldn’t it even put King Louis-Philippe’s regime in question, Excellency? I mean, there’s the Bonaparte nephew waiting in the wings. There are still those remnants of the Grand Army grumbling about their pensions.”

Guizot waved his hand wearily, in the gesture of a man who has thought of it all already. “Yes, yes. But still you cannot refuse. If His Majesty has let himself be persuaded by Monsieur Thiers, we can only loyally carry out orders. See that things are done fittingly. And I trust you for that.”

Philippe felt a rush of pride. Of course, he had to go. And it wasn’t the round of ambassadorial receptions he’d miss. Still, Amelia.

“Very well, Excellency. What are my further orders?”

“You must be in Dover by the end of the day tomorrow. We’ll send a message by semaphore telegraph at first light. With any luck, you’ll be met at Dover by the French packet boat. Rendezvous at the Ship’s Arms in Dover. The man who will meet you will be wearing the badge of the French Mail. He will address you with the words: ‘Place Vendôme?’ and you will answer: ‘Manchester Square.’ Go on board immediately, you will set sail at once.”

“Very well, Excellency. Permit me, before withdrawing, to express my gratitude for the confidence which you have shown me, Excellency. In my position, it—”

“Enough.” Guizot managed a bleak smile beneath his frown. “I understand. But time is precious. Go pack, and be back here at ten in the morning to receive the pouch that I will prepare for Monsieur Thiers. I will profit from your trip to make you the messenger concerning the state of affairs in the Near East.”

Ah yes. Philippe would have liked to ask more. Was the Saint Helena expedition devised to distract attention from the gathering storm in the Near East? But he knew he should not insist. He rose, bowed, and moved toward the door.

“Chabot, just one more thing.” Philippe, his hand already on the massive doorknob, turned back.

“Yes, Excellency?”

“You may be followed, you know. This expedition is no secret. There may be some of our countrymen whose zeal in a mistaken cause would like to interrupt the voyage.”

Philippe nodded. “The Legitimists, I imagine. Those who would like to see the restoration of the Bourbons, who will try to seize on the King’s decision to discredit the regime.”

“Precisely. And preventing the Royal Commissioner from reaching Paris might be an effective way.”

“The packet boat is in sure hands?”

“I vouch for that. But on the high road, you are more exposed. No stopping. Keep your instructions safe. Caution and prudence, above all.”

“Yes, Excellency. I understand.”

In his small apartment on the top floor of Hartford House, Philippe decided it would not do to wake his valet—even assuming that the phlegmatic Reggie could be waked—and set to his own packing. Much of what he would need was in Paris anyway. But his two official secretarial uniforms would be required, as well as the ordinary supply of linen—what did you take on an ocean voyage anyway? And where was Saint Helena? What latitude, what climate? He was tempted to tiptoe back down to Guizot’s office, to consult the Ambassador’s magnificent globe. But no, he might still be at his desk.

He sat on the bed, contemplating his botch of a packing job. He was no good at it. Everything was in the trunk that stood at the foot of his bed, but the result was lopsided and messy. Everything would be hopelessly wrinkled. Better to catch some sleep, and call Reggie at dawn. He rose, and went to pull back the curtains from the window. Already a gray light, filtered through the morning fog, suffused the gardens behind Hartford House. Startled, he pulled out his timepiece. Five o’clock already. No time for sleep. Nap for an hour, then call Reggie.

He woke three hours later, when Reggie knocked at the door, then entered, bearing a pitcher of hot water. From then on, it was a rush of movement until he found himself—not until eleven o’clock—settled in the carriage moving at a fast trot out of Manchester Square. There was a suspicious incident during the second relay, when a rear wheel spun off the carriage. But it was quickly repaired, and who was to say it was not a chance happening. He reached Dover at eight in the evening. The man smoking his pipe on a bench before the Ship’s Arms was so clearly a French mariner he scarcely had to speak his password. Philippe was on board the steamboat within minutes. The Channel crossing was surprisingly smooth. They slipped into Calais harbor toward midnight. The night was too dark to attempt an approach to the quay, so they anchored and the launch took Philippe in to land. The mail coach was waiting; he was to be the sole passenger, and they were under way at once.

As the coach jolted over the cobblestones of Calais, and then the low shuttered houses became more rare and the road opened before them, straight and monotonous through the pastures, Philippe began again to try to make a mental list of what was to be done, a map of what lay ahead. A visit to his parents in the rue Miromesnil, of