

A woman in a long, flowing blue dress stands on the edge of a dark, rocky cliff. She is looking out over a vast, choppy ocean under a pale, overcast sky. The scene is dramatic and atmospheric.

FINDING
NAPOLEON

MARGARET RODENBERG

BOOK CLUB KIT

Dear Readers,

Ever since I can remember—and I have a very long memory—I made up stories to put myself to sleep. As I got older, I progressed to imagining stories within my stories. The heroine (someone like me, of course) would face a traumatic situation, write a novel based on the experience, and then emerge triumphant.

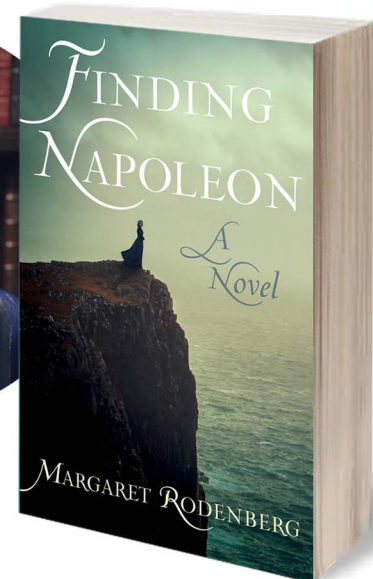
So, as early as high school, when my heart had been bruised, my nightly imaginings would follow a writer through an unrequited love affair. That sad writer would pen a short novel to soothe her wounded spirit. Out of the novel-writing, a new love—the waiter in a coffee shop, the librarian, the head of the debate team—would appear.

Now, decades later, I realize that's why I wrote *Finding Napoleon* the way I did. It starts with Albine de Montholon, Napoleon's last lover, telling you, dear reader, that she is writing this book. Then you have the book, which ends with Albine transformed owing to the traumas she experienced in the very book you are reading.

As for Napoleon Bonaparte, he, too, is writing a novel, as he really did when he was twenty-six. In *Finding Napoleon*, the older, defeated emperor struggles to overcome his humiliating exile on St. Helena Island. As he learns whom to love and whom to distrust, he finishes writing that idealistic, romantic manuscript from his youth. Whether he emerges triumphant, I leave to you to judge.

In a sense, writing *Finding Napoleon* has been like a many-chaptered novel in my life. I traveled halfway around the globe, gained many friends, and acquired new skills. I also struggled through low points, as a writer must. If you and other readers find enjoyment in it, I will emerge triumphant.

MARGARET RODENBERG



Character List from *FINDING NAPOLEON*



NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

Born in Ajaccio, Corsica, on August 15, 1769, the second son of middle-class parents. At nine, he was sent to military school in Brienne, France, went on to graduate from the officers' École Militaire in Paris, and joined the French Army as a Second Lieutenant of Royal Artillery in 1785. At age 24, he won promotion to General of the Brigade. At age 30, he became First Consul, effectively the leader of the post-Revolution government. On December 2, 1803, at age 34, he crowned himself Emperor of the French. He reigned until his first abdication in 1814, when he was exiled to the Mediterranean island of Elba. After ten months, he escaped to France and, without firing a shot, reinstated himself as emperor. One hundred days later, he met disastrous defeat at Waterloo and was exiled to St. Helena Island in the South Atlantic. He died there on May 5, 1821.



THE EAGLET

(born 1811 – died 1832) Son of Napoleon and his second wife, Marie Louise of Austria. He died in Austria of tuberculosis. He was Napoleon's only legitimate child. The two never saw each other after 1814, when Napoleon left for the wars that would lead to his first abdication.



ALBINE DE MONTHOLON

(born 1779 – died 1848) Napoleon's lover on St. Helena Island, wife of Charles de Montholon. Reportedly, she died in Brussels, surrounded by loving grandchildren at a ball held in her honor.



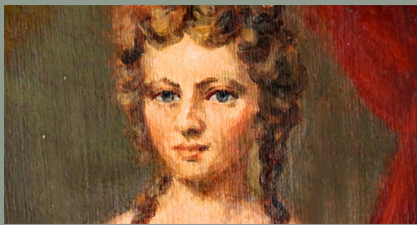
CHARLES DE MONTHOLON

(born 1783 – died 1853) Third husband of Albine, and a French General and follower of Napoleon, often suspected of treason (or worse) on St. Helena. Nonetheless, Napoleon made him executor of his Will. In later years, he was a fervent supporter of Louis-Napoleon, Napoleon's nephew, who became Napoleon III.



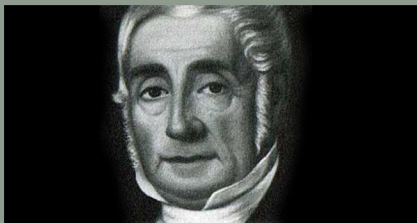
MARCHAND

(born 1791 – died 1876) Napoleon's loyal valet who followed him into exile on Elba and then again on St. Helena. In his Will, Napoleon conferred the title of count upon Marchand and made him co-executor of his estate.



BETSY BALCOMBE

(born 1802 – died 1871) The young daughter of the Balcombe family on whose St. Helena estate, The Briars, Napoleon stayed for several weeks. In 1818, the Balcombe family was sent away from St. Helena under suspicion of aiding Napoleon.



SAUL SOLOMON

(born 1776 – died 1852) The founder of Solomon's and other businesses on St. Helena. Hudson Lowe suspected him of aiding Napoleon, and, indeed, in 1840, the French gave him the honor of accompanying Napoleon's body from St. Helena to its reburial in Paris. He died in London, but his daughter had his body smuggled back to St. Helena for burial. His family operated Solomon's until the 1960s.



GENERAL SIR HUDSON LOWE

(born 1769 – died 1844) The British governor of St. Helena from 1816 through Napoleon's death in 1821. Napoleon and he bickered throughout the emperor's exile, and Lowe's reputation suffered. Lowe worked with the St. Helena slaveholders to reach an agreement to set free (when they reached age 16) all children who were born to the island's enslaved after Christmas of 1818.

CIPRIANI

(born 1773 – died 1818) A mysterious Corsican who had been in service to the Bonaparte family since his youth, Cipriani died suddenly on St. Helena and his gravesite is not known. As far as I can tell, there aren't any images of him—well, of course not!

TOBY

(birth and death dates unknown) The enslaved gardener who tended the Balcombe estate. Reportedly, Napoleon spent time in his company, attempted to buy his freedom, and gave him twenty gold Napoleon coins. Unfortunately, I've never found a good image of him.

BASIL JACKSON

(born 1795 – died 1889) A British lieutenant known to be friendly with both Charles and Albine de Montholon, as well as to meet Albine clandestinely. When Albine left St. Helena, Basil Jackson followed her a few days later. They spent time together in Brussels and later in Paris. He outlived all the figures who played a part in Napoleon's St. Helena exile. I've never come across an image of him when he was young.

Characters List from *Clisson the novel-within-Finding Napoleon*

CLISSON

A young Corsican whose parents send him to military school in France. He joins the French army and becomes a hero. He falls in love with one woman and marries another.

BERVILLE

Clisson's aristocratic friend from military school and fellow officer.

DES MAZIS

Clisson's loyal, middle-class friend from military school and fellow officer.

AMÉLIE

A young widow whom Clisson falls in love with at first sight.

EUGÉNIE

The daughter of a wealthy merchant whom Clisson marries.

Locations from FINDING NAPOLEON



VALENCE FRANCE

Napoleon's first military post

BRIENNE FRANCE

Home of Napoleon's French Military School



AJACCIO CORSICA

Napoleon's birth place



THE ISLE OF ELBA

Napoleon's
first exile



ST HELENA ISLAND

Napoleon's second exile and where he died



HAVE A DRINK AND DESSERT WITH NAPOLEON

Napoleon Bonaparte didn't consume much alcohol or eat rich foods. His favorite red wine was a Burgundy called Chambertin, which has Pinot noir as its main variety of grape. A good Chambertin can be quite expensive, so you may want to sip a Pinot Noir instead.

On St. Helena Island, Napoleon usually drank white wine from South Africa, often a sweet white from the Constantia vineyard near Cape Town. (On my way to St. Helena, I spent a week in South Africa and visited the vineyard.) Again, it's not easy or inexpensive to find Constantia wine, so you may want to pick a different white wine from South Africa.

Your third and easiest option is a glass of Champagne. Napoleon did drink Champagne, but there's no proof that he really said,

“Champagne! In victory, one deserves it! In defeat, one needs it!”

Even if it's not verifiable, it's a great quote.

If you'd prefer a non-alcoholic drink, have a glass of clear spring water in memory of the water he drank from the Valley of the Geraniums.

For dessert, on St. Helena, Napoleon almost always ate a bit of cheese—parmesan or blue cheese—with a slice of fruit or some grapes. Treat yourself to some nibbles!

Cheers! Or, as we say in French: Á votre santé!



Fun Fact:
Napoleon added water to all his wine, even Champagne.

Fun NAPOLEONIC *Facts*

1. Napoleon wasn't particularly short! He stood almost 5'7", average height for a Frenchman of his time. We think he's short for several reasons: (1) in his era, the French measurement of a foot was longer than that of the British. Result: Napoleon was 5'2" in French feet, but 5'7" in British or American feet. (2) As propaganda, British cartoonists made him into a caricature of a short man wearing high boots and an oversized bicorne hat; (3) By the early twentieth century, the term "Napoleonic complex" had evolved into a common name for a now-debunked theory that short people overcompensate for lack of height with aggressive ambition. (Full disclosure: This author is barely 5'2".)
2. Napoleon had all his adult teeth when he arrived on St. Helena at age 46—unusual for that era. He had a wisdom tooth extracted while in exile.
3. Napoleon put his hand in his vest in some paintings because, at the time, it was considered a dignified pose. There are also paintings of George Washington, Mozart, the Marquis de Lafayette, and more modern figures such as Karl Marx and Joseph Stalin in the same stance.
4. The dessert commonly called a Napoleon isn't named after Napoleon Bonaparte. The French actually call that many-layered, custard-filled dessert a mille-feuille, translated as "a thousand leaves or sheets." The recipe goes back many decades before Napoleon's birth. It's likely its name "Napoleon" is a corruption of "Napolitain," meaning that it comes from Naples, Italy.



Fun NAPOLEONIC *Facts* (continued)

5. Josephine Beauharnais—Napoleon’s first wife and great love—was six years older than he was. On their marriage documents, each lied about their age so that she appeared to be only two years older. Napoleon showed up late for their private wedding, because he was planning his invasion of Italy and lost track of time.
6. Today, there are 18 places in the world called Napoleon and 56 places named after Waterloo, the battle where Napoleon met his final defeat.
7. Napoleon is considered one of the greatest military geniuses of all time, but he couldn’t sing or dance well. Plus, his handwriting was atrocious.
8. May 5, 2021, marks the 200th anniversary of Napoleon’s death. More books have been written about him than the number of days that have passed since his death.
9. The largest collection of Napoleonic art and artifacts in the western hemisphere is in Havana, Cuba.
10. Empress Josephine popularized the high-waisted dress style we call Empire.



NOTE TO READERS

If you liked *FINDING NAPOLEON*, please take a moment to post a quick review on your favorite book website, such as GoodReads or Amazon. This author and your fellow readers will appreciate it!

Thank you for reading

FINDING NAPOLEON

CONNECT WITH

MARGARET RODENBERG

www.mrodenberg.com

www.facebook.com/MargaretRodenberg.author

www.instagram.com/margaretrodenberg