

Chapter 22

THE OUTLINE OF A DECREE

Lucien was evidently expected. Bonaparte had not mentioned his name once since entering the study; but in spite of this silence he had turned his head three or four times with increasing impatience toward the door, and when the young man appeared an exclamation of contentment escaped his lips.

Lucien, the general's youngest brother, was born in 1775, making him now barely twenty-five years old. Since 1797, that is, at the age of twenty-two and a half, he had been a member of the Five Hundred, who, to honor Bonaparte, had made him their president. With the projects he had conceived nothing could have been more fortunate for Bonaparte.

Frank and loyal, republican to the core, Lucien believed that, in seconding his brother's plans, he was serving the Republic better than the future First Consul. In his eyes, no one was better fitted to save it a second time than he who had saved it the first. It was with these sentiments in his heart that he now came to confer with his brother.

"Here you are," said Bonaparte. "I have been waiting for you impatiently."

"So I suspected. But I was obliged to wait until I could leave without being noticed."

"Did you manage it?"

"Yes; Talma was relating a story about Marat and Dumouriez. Interesting as it was, I deprived myself of the pleasure, and here I am."

"I have just heard a carriage driving away; the person who got in it couldn't have seen you coming up my private stairs, could he?"

"The person who drove off was myself, the carriage was mine. If that is not seen every one will think I have left."

Bonaparte breathed freer.

"Well," said he, "let us hear how you have spent your day."

"Oh! I haven't wasted my time, you may be sure."

"Are we to have a decree or the Council?"

"We drew it up to-day, and I have brought it to you--the rough draft at least--so that you can see if you want anything added or changed."

"Let me see it," cried Bonaparte. Taking the paper hastily from Lucien's hand, he read:

Art. I. The legislative body is transferred to the commune of Saint-Cloud; the two branches of the Council will hold their sessions in the two wings of the palace.

"That's the important article," said Lucien. "I had it placed first, so that it might strike the people at once."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Bonaparte, and he continued:

Art. II. They will assemble there to-morrow, the 20th Brumaire--
"No, no," said Bonaparte, "to-morrow the 19th. Change the date, Bourrienne;" and he handed the paper to his secretary.

"You expect to be ready for the 18th?"

"I shall be. Fouché said day before yesterday, 'Make haste, or I won't answer for the result.'"

"The 19th Brumaire," said Bourrienne, returning the paper to the general.

Bonaparte resumed:

Art. II. They will assemble there to-morrow, the 19th Brumaire,
at noon. All deliberations are forbidden elsewhere and before
the above date.

Bonaparte read the article a second time.

"Good," said he; "there is no double meaning there." And he continued:

Art. III. General Bonaparte is charged with the enforcement of
this decree; he will take all necessary measures for the safety
of the National Legislature.

A satirical smile flickered on the stony lips of the reader, but he continued almost immediately.

The general commanding the 17th military division, the guard of
the Legislature, the stationary national guard the troops of the

line within the boundaries of the Commune of Paris, and those in the constitutional arrondissement, and throughout the limits of the said 17th division, are placed directly under his orders, and are directed to regard him as their commanding officer.

"Bourrienne, add: 'All citizens will lend him assistance when called upon.' The bourgeois love to meddle in political matters, and when they really can help us in our projects we ought to grant them this satisfaction."

Bourrienne obeyed; then he returned the paper to the general, who went on:

Art. IV. General Bonaparte is summoned before the Council to receive a copy of the present decree, and to make oath thereto.

He will consult with the inspecting commissioners of both

branches of the Council. Art. V. The present decree shall be transmitted immediate, by

messenger, to all the members of the Council of Five Hundred and to the Executive Directory. It shall be printed and posted, and promulgated throughout the communes of the Republic by special messengers. Done at Paris this....

"The date is left blank," said Lucien.

"Put 'the 18th Brumaire,' Bourrienne; the decree must take everybody by surprise. It must be issued at seven o'clock in the morning, and at the same hour or even earlier it must be posted on all the walls of Paris."

"But suppose the Ancients won't consent to issue it?" said Lucien.

"All the more reason to have it posted, ninny," said Bonaparte. "We must act as if it had been issued."

"Am I to correct this grammatical error in the last paragraph?" asked Bourrienne, laughing.

"Where?" demanded Lucien, in the tone of an aggrieved author.

"The word 'immediate,'" replied Bourrienne. "You can't say 'transmitted immediate'; it ought to be 'immediately.'"

"It's not worth while," said Bonaparte. "I shall act, you may be sure, as if it were 'immediately.'" Then, after an instant's reflection, he added: "As to what you said just now about their not being willing to pass it, there's a very simple way to get it passed."

"What is that."

"To convoke the members of whom we are sure at six o'clock in the morning, and those of whom we are not sure at eight. Having only our own men, it will be devilishly hard to lose the majority."

"But six o'clock for some, and eight for the others--" objected Lucien.

"Employ two secretaries; one of them can make a mistake." Then turning to Lucien, he said: "Write this."

And walking up and down, he dictated without hesitating, like a man who has long thought over and carefully prepared what he dictates; stopping occasionally beside Bourrienne to see if the secretary's pen were following his every word:

CITIZENS--The Council of the Ancients, the trustee of the nation's wisdom, has issued the subjoined decree: it is authorized by articles 102 and 103 of the Constitution. This decree enjoins me to take measures for the safety of the National Legislature, and its necessary and momentary removal.

Bourrienne looked at Bonaparte; instantaneous was the word the latter had intended to use, but as the general did not correct himself, Bourrienne left momentary.

Bonaparte continued to dictate:

The Legislature will find means to avoid the imminent danger into which the disorganization of all parts of the administration has brought us. But it needs, at this crisis, the united support and confidence of patriots. Rally around it; it offers the only means of establishing the Republic on the bases of civil liberty, internal prosperity, victory and peace.

Bonaparte perused this proclamation, and nodded his head in sign of approval. Then he looked at his watch.

"Eleven o'clock," he said; "there is still time."

Then, seating himself in Bourrienne's chair, he wrote a few words in the form of a note, sealed it, and wrote the address: "To the Citizen Barras."

"Roland," said he, when he had finished, "take a horse out of the stable, or a carriage in the street, and go to Barras' house. I have asked him for an interview tomorrow at midnight. I want an answer."

Roland left the room. A moment later the gallop of a horse resounded through the courtyard, disappearing in the direction of the Rue du Mont-Blanc.

"Now, Bourrienne," said Bonaparte, after listening to the sound, "to-morrow at midnight, whether I am in the house or not, you will take my carriage and go in my stead to Barras."

"In your stead, general?"

"Yes. He will do nothing all day, expecting me to accept him on my side at night. At midnight you will go to him, and say that I have such a bad headache I have had to go to bed, but that I will be with him at seven o'clock in the morning without fail. He will believe you, or he won't believe you; but at any rate it will be too late for him to act against us. By seven in the morning I shall have ten thousand men under my command."

"Very good, general. Have you any other orders for me?"

"No, not this evening," replied Bonaparte. "Be here early to-morrow."

"And I?" asked Lucien.

"See Sièyes; he has the Ancients in the hollow of his hand. Make all your arrangements with him. I don't wish him to be seen here, nor to be seen myself at his house. If by any chance we fail, he is a man to repudiate. After tomorrow I wish to be master of my own actions, and to have no ties with any one."

"Do you think you will need me to-morrow?"

"Come back at night and report what happens."

"Are you going back to the salon?"

"No. I shall wait for Josephine in her own room. Bourrienne, tell her, as you pass through, to get rid of the people as soon as possible."

Then, saluting Bourrienne and his brother with a wave of the hand, he left his study by a private corridor, and went to Josephine's room. There, lighted by a single alabaster lamp, which made the conspirator's brow seem paler than ever, Bonaparte listened to the noise of the carriages, as one after the other they rolled away. At last the sounds ceased, and five minutes later the door opened to admit Josephine.

She was alone, and held a double-branched candlestick in her hand. Her face, lighted by the double flame, expressed the keenest anxiety.

"Well," Bonaparte inquired, "what ails you?"

"I am afraid!" said Josephine.

"Of what? Those fools of the Directory, or the lawyers of the two Councils? Come, come! I have Sièyes with me in the Ancients, and Lucien in the Five Hundred."

"Then all goes well?"

"Wonderfully so!"

"You sent me word that you were waiting for me here, and I feared you had some bad news to tell me."

"Pooh! If I had bad news, do you think I would tell you?"

"How reassuring that is!"

"Well, don't be uneasy, for I have nothing but good news. Only, I have given you a part in the conspiracy."

"What is it?"

"Sit down and write to Gohier."

"That we won't dine with him?"

"On the contrary, ask him to come and breakfast with us. Between those who like each other as we do there can't be too much intercourse."

Josephine sat down at a little rosewood writing desk "Dictate," said she; "I will write."

"Goodness! for them to recognize my style! Nonsense; you know better than I how to write one of those charming notes there is no resisting."

Josephine smiled at the compliment, turned her forehead to Bonaparte, who kissed it lovingly, and wrote the following note, which we have copied from the original:

To the Citizen Gohier, President of the Executive Directory of the
French Republic--

"Is that right?" she asked.

"Perfectly! As he won't wear this title of President much longer, we won't cavil at it."

"Don't you mean to make him something?"

"I'll make him anything he pleases, if he does exactly what I want. Now go on, my dear."

Josephine picked up her pen again and wrote:

Come, my dear Gohier, with your wife, and breakfast with us
to-morrow at eight o'clock. Don't fail, for I have some very
interesting things to tell you. Adieu, my dear Gohier! With the sincerest
friendship,

Yours, LA PAGERIE-BONAPARTE.

"I wrote to-morrow," exclaimed Josephine. "Shall I date it the 17th
Brumaire?"

"You won't be wrong," said Bonaparte; "there's midnight striking."

In fact, another day had fallen into the gulf of time; the clock chimed twelve. Bonaparte listened gravely and dreamily. Twenty-four hours only separated him from the solemn day for which he had been scheming for a month, and of which he had dreamed for years.

Let us do now what he would so gladly have done, and spring over those twenty-four hours intervening to the day which history has not yet judged, and see what happened in various parts of Paris, where the events we are about to relate produced an overwhelming sensation.