

## Chapter 28

### FAMILY MATTERS

Let us leave our four \_hunters\_ on their way to Lagny--where, thanks to the passports they owed to the obligingness of certain clerks in citizen Fouché's employ, they exchanged their own horses for post-horses and their coachman for a postilion--and see why the First Consul had sent for Roland.

After leaving Morgan, Roland had hastened to obey the general's orders. He found the latter standing in deep thought before the fireplace. At the sound of his entrance General Bonaparte raised his head.

"What were you two saying to each other?" asked Bonaparte, without preamble, trusting to Roland's habit of answering his thought.

"Why," said Roland, "we paid each other all sorts of compliments, and parted the best friends in the world."

"How does he impress you?"

"As a perfectly well-bred man."

"How old do you take him to be?"

"About my age, at the outside."

"So I think; his voice is youthful. What now, Roland, can I be mistaken? Is there a new royalist generation growing up?"

"No, general," replied Roland, shrugging his shoulders; "it's the remains of the old one."

"Well, Roland, we must build up another, devoted to my son--if ever I have one."

Roland made a gesture which might be translated into the words, "I don't object." Bonaparte understood the gesture perfectly.

"You must do more than not object," said he; "you must contribute to it."

A nervous shudder passed over Roland's body.

"In what way, general?" he asked.

"By marrying."

Roland burst out laughing.

"Good! With my aneurism?" he asked.

Bonaparte looked at him, and said: "My dear Roland, your aneurism looks to me very much like a pretext for remaining single."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes; and as I am a moral man I insist upon marriage."

"Does that mean that I am immoral," retorted Roland, "or that I cause any scandal with my mistresses?"

"Augustus," answered Bonaparte, "created laws against celibates, depriving them of their rights as Roman citizens."

"Augustus--"

"Well?"

"I'll wait until you are Augustus; as yet, you are only Cæsar."

Bonaparte came closer to the young man, and, laying his hands on his shoulders, said: "Roland, there are some names I do not wish to see extinct, and among them is that of Montrevel."

"Well, general, in my default, supposing that through caprice or obstinacy I refuse to perpetuate it, there is my little brother."

"What! Your brother? Then you have a brother?"

"Why, yes; I have a brother! Why shouldn't I have brother?"

"How old is he?"

"Eleven or twelve."

"Why did you never tell me about him?"

"Because I thought the sayings and doings of a youngster of that age could not interest you."

"You are mistaken, Roland; I am interested in all that concerns my friends. You ought to have asked me for something for your brother."

"Asked what, general?"

"His admission into some college in Paris."

"Pooh! You have enough beggars around you without my swelling their number."

"You hear; he is to come to Paris and enter college. When he is old enough, I will send him to the Ecole Militaire, or some other school which I shall have founded before then."

"Faith, general," said Roland, "just as if I had guessed your good intentions, he is this very day on the point of, starting for Paris."

"What for?"

"I wrote to my mother three days ago to bring the boy to Paris. I intended to put him in college without mentioning it, and when he was old enough to tell you about him--always supposing that my aneurism had not carried me off in the meantime. But in that case--"

"In that case?"

"Oh! in that case I have left a bit of a will addressed to you, and recommending to your kindness my mother, and the boy and the girl--in short, the whole raft."

"The girl! Who is she?"

"My sister."

"So you have a sister also?"

"Yes."

"How old is she?"

"Seventeen."

"Pretty?"

"Charming."

"I'll take charge of her establishment."

Roland began to laugh.

"What's the matter?" demanded the First Consul.

"General, I'm going to put a placard over the grand entrance to the Luxembourg."

"What will you put on the placard?"

"Marriages made here."

"Why not? Is it any reason because you don't wish to marry for your sister to remain an old maid? I don't like old maids any better than I do old bachelors."

"I did not say, general, that my sister should remain an old maid; it's quite enough for one member of the Montrevel family to have incurred your displeasure."

"Then what do you mean?"

"Only that, as the matter concerns my sister, she must, if you will allow it, be consulted."

"Ah, ha! Some provincial love-affair, is there?"

"I can't say. I left poor Amélie gay and happy, and I find her pale and sad. I shall get the truth out of her; and if you wish me to speak to you again about the matter, I will do so."

"Yes, do so--when you get back from the Vendée."

"Ah! So I am going to the Vendée?"

"Why, is that, like marriage, repugnant, to you?"

"Not in the least."

"Then you are going to the Vendée."

"When?"

"Oh, you need not hurry, providing you start to-morrow."

"Excellent; sooner if you wish. Tell me what I am to do there."

"Something of the utmost importance, Roland."

"The devil! It isn't a diplomatic mission, I presume?"

"Yes; it is a diplomatic mission for which I need a man who is not a diplomatist."

"Then I'm your man, general! Only, you understand, the less a diplomatist I am, the more precise my instructions must be."

"I am going to give them to you. Do you see that map?"

And he showed the young man a large map of Piedmont stretched out on the floor, under a lamp suspended from the ceiling.

"Yes, I see it," replied Roland, accustomed to follow the general along the unexpected dashes of his genius; "but it is a map of Piedmont."

"Yes, it's a map of Piedmont."

"So there is still a question of Italy?"

"There is always a question of Italy."

"I thought you spoke of the Vendée?"

"Secondarily."

"Why, general, you are not going to send me to the Vendée and go yourself to Italy, are you?"

"No; don't be alarmed."

"All right; but I warn you, if you did, I should desert and join you."

"I give you permission to do so; but now let us go back to Mélas."

"Excuse me, general; this is the first time you have mentioned him."

"Yes; but I have been thinking of him for a long time. Do you know where I shall defeat him?"



"The deuce! I do."

"Where?"

"Wherever you meet him."

Bonaparte laughed.

"Ninny!" he said, with loving familiarity. Then, stooping over the map, he said to Roland, "Come here."

Roland stooped beside him. "There," resumed Bonaparte; "that is where I shall fight him."

"Near Alessandria?"

"Within eight or nine miles of it. He has all his supplies, hospitals, artillery and reserves in Alessandria; and he will not leave the neighborhood. I shall have to strike a great blow; that's the only condition on which I can get peace. I shall cross the Alps"--he pointed to the great Saint-Bernard--"I shall fall upon Mélas when he least expects me, and rout him utterly."

"Oh! trust you for that!"

"Yes; but you understand, Roland, that in order to quit France with an easy mind, I can't leave it with an inflammation of the bowels--I can't leave war in the Vendée."

"Ah! now I see what you are after. No Vendée! And you are sending me to the Vendée to suppress it."

"That young man told me some serious things about the Vendée. They are brave soldiers, those Vendéans, led by a man of brains, Georges Cadoudal. I have sent him the offer of a regiment, but he won't accept."

"Jove! He's particular."

"But there's one thing he little knows."

"Who, Cadoudal?"

"Yes, Cadoudal. That is that the Abbé Bernier has made me overtures."

"The Abbé Bernier?"

"Yes."

"Who is the Abbé Bernier?"

"The son of a peasant from Anjou, who may be now about thirty-three or four years of age. Before the insurrection he was curate of Saint-Laud at Angers. He refused to take the oath and sought refuge among the Vendéans. Two or three times the Vendée was pacificated; twice she was thought dead. A mistake! the Vendée was pacificated, but the Abbé Bernier had not signed the peace; the Vendée was dead, but the Abbé Bernier was still alive. One day the Vendée was ungrateful to him. He wished to be appointed general agent to the royalist armies of the interior; Stofflet influenced the decision and got his old master, Comte Colbert de Maulevrier, appointed in Bernier's stead. When, at two o'clock in the morning, the council broke up, the Abbé

Bernier had disappeared. What he did that night, God and he alone can tell; but at four o'clock in the morning a Republican detachment surrounded the farmhouse where Stofflet was sleeping, disarmed and defenceless. At half-past four Stofflet was captured; eight days later he was executed at Angers. The next day Autichamp took command, and, to avoid making the same blunder as Stofflet, he appointed the Abbé Bernier general agent. Now, do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, the Abbé Bernier, general agent of the belligerent forces, and furnished with plenary powers by the Comte d'Artois--the Abbé Bernier has made overtures to me."

"To you, to Bonaparte, to the First Consul he deigns to--? Why, that's very kind of the Abbé Bernier? Have you accepted them?"

"Yes, Roland; if the Vendée will give me peace, I will open her churches and give her back her priests."

"And suppose they chant the *\_Domine, salvum fac regem?\_*"

"That would be better than not singing at all. God is omnipotent, and he will decide. Does the mission suit you, now that I have explained it?"

"Yes, thoroughly."

"Then, here is a letter for General Hédouville. He is to treat with the Abbé Bernier as the general-in-chief of the Army of the West. But you are to be present at all these conferences; he is only my mouthpiece, you are to be my thought. Now, start as soon as possible; the sooner you get back, the sooner Mélas will be defeated."

"General, give me time to write to my mother, that's all."

"Where will she stop?"

"At the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs."

"When do you think she will arrive?"

"This is the night of the 21st of January; she will be here the evening of the 23d, or the morning of the 24th."

"And she stops at the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs?"

"Yes, general."

"I take it all on myself."

"Take it all on yourself, general?"

"Certainly; your mother can't stay at a hotel."

"Where should she stay?"

"With a friend."

"She knows no one in Paris."

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur Roland; she knows citizen Bonaparte, First Consul, and his wife."

"You are not going to lodge my mother at the Luxembourg. I warn you that that would embarrass her very much."

"No; but I shall lodge her in the Rue de la Victoire."

"Oh, general!"

"Come, come; that's settled. Go, now, and get back as soon as possible."

Roland took the First Consul's hand, meaning to kiss it; but Bonaparte drew him quickly to him.

"Embrace me, my dear Roland," he said, "and good luck to you."

Two hours later Roland was rolling along in a post-chaise on the road to Orleans. The next day, at nine in the morning, he entered Nantes, after a journey of thirty-three hours.