

## Chapter 32

### WHITE AND BLUE

Roland entered, as we have said, behind Georges, and as he entered cast a glance of careless curiosity around him. That glance sufficed to show him that they were alone.

"Are these your quarters, general?" asked Roland with a smile, turning the soles of his boots to the blaze.

"Yes, colonel."

"They are singularly guarded."

Georges smiled in turn.

"Do you say that because you found the road open from La Roche-Bernard here?" he asked.

"I did not meet a soul."

"That does not prove that the road was not guarded."

"Unless by the owls, who seemed to fly from tree to tree, and accompanied me all the way, general. In that case, I withdraw my assertion."

"Exactly," replied Cadoudal. "Those owls were my sentinels, sentinels with good eyes, inasmuch as they have this advantage over the eyes of men, they can see in the dark."

"It is not the less true that I was fortunate in having inquired my way at La Roche-Bernard; for I didn't meet even a cat who could have told me where to find you."

"But if you had raised your voice at any spot on the road and asked: 'Where shall I find Georges Cadoudal?' a voice would have answered: 'At the village of Muzillac, fourth house to the right.' You saw no one, colonel; but at that very moment fifteen hundred men, or thereabout, knew that Colonel Roland, the First Consul's aide-de-camp, was on his way to a conference with the son of the miller of Leguerno."

"But if they knew that I was a colonel in the Republican service and aide-de-camp to the First Consul, how came they to let me pass?"

"Because they were ordered to do so."

"Then you knew that I was coming?"

"I not only knew that you were coming, but also why you have come."

Roland looked at him fixedly.

"Then it is useless for me to tell you; and you will answer me even though I say nothing?"

"You are about right."

"The deuce! I should like to have a proof of this superiority of your police over ours."

"I will supply it, colonel."

"I shall receive it with much satisfaction, especially before this excellent fire, which also seems to have been expecting me."

"You say truer than you know, colonel; and it is not the fire only that is striving to welcome you warmly."

"Yes, but it does not tell me, any more than you have done, the object of my mission."

"Your mission, which you do me the honor to extend to me, was primarily intended for the Abbé Bernier alone. Unhappily the Abbé Bernier, in the letter he sent his friend Martin Duboys, presumed a little on his strength. He offered his mediation to the First Consul."

"Pardon me," interrupted Roland, "you tell me something I did not know; namely that the Abbé Bernier had written to General Bonaparte."

"I said he wrote to his friend Martin Duboys, which is very different. My men intercepted the letter and brought it to me. I had it copied, and forwarded the original, which I am certain reached the right hands. Your visit to General Hédouville proves it."

"You know that General Hédouville is no longer in command at Nantes. General Brune has taken his place."

"You may even say that General Brune commands at La Roche-Bernard, for a thousand Republican soldiers entered that town to-night about six o'clock, bringing with them a guillotine and the citizen commissioner-general

Thomas Millièrre. Having the instrument, it was necessary to have the executioner."

"Then you say, general, that I came to see the Abbé Bernier?"

"Yes; the Abbé Bernier had offered his mediation. But he forgot that at the present there are two Vendées--the Vendée of the left bank, and the Vendée of the right bank--and that, after treating with d'Autichamp, Châtillon, and Suzannet at Pouancé, it would still be necessary to negotiate with Frotté, Bourmont and Cadoudal--and where? That no one could tell--"

"Except you, general."

"So, with the chivalry that is the basis of your nature, you undertook to bring me the treaty signed on the 25th. The Abbé Bernier, d'Autichamp, Châtillon, and Suzannet signed your pass, and here you are."

"On my word, general, I must admit that you are perfectly well-informed. The First Consul desires peace with all his heart. He knows that in you he has a brave and honorable adversary, and being unable to meet you himself, since you were not likely to come to Paris, he expedited me to you in his behalf."

"That is to say, to the Abbé Bernier."

"That can hardly matter to you, general, if I bind myself to make the First Consul ratify what may be agreed upon between you and me. What are your conditions of peace?"

"They are very simple, colonel: that the First Consul shall restore his Majesty Louis XVIII. to the throne; that he himself be constable, lieutenant-general, general-in-chief by land and sea, and I his first subordinate."

"The First Consul has already replied to that demand."

"And that is why I have decided to reply myself to his response."

"When?"

"This very night, if occasion offers."

"In what way?"

"By resuming hostilities."

"But are you aware that Châtillon, d'Autichamp and Suzannet have laid down their arms?"

"They are the leaders of the Vendéans, and in the name of the Vendéans they can do as they see fit. I am the leader of the Chouans, and in the name of the Chouans I shall do what suits me."

"Then you condemn this unhappy land to a war of extermination, general!"

"It is a martyrdom to which I summon all Christians and royalists."

"General Brune is at Nantes with the eight thousand prisoners just returned to us by the English after their defeats at Alkmaar and Castricum."

"That is the last time they will have the chance. The Blues have taught us the bad habit of not making prisoners. As for the number of our enemies, we don't care for that; it is a mere detail."

"If General Brune with his eight thousand men, joined to the twenty thousand he has received from General Hédouville, is not sufficient, the First Consul has decided to march against you in person with one hundred thousand men."

Cadoudal smiled.

"We will try to prove to him," he said, "that we are worthy to fight against him."

"He will burn your towns."

"We shall retire to our huts."

"He will burn your huts."

"We will live in the woods."

"Reflect, general."

"Do me the honor to remain here forty-eight hours, colonel, and you will see that my reflections are already made."

"I am tempted to accept."

"Only, colonel, don't ask for more than I can give; a night's sleep beneath a thatched roof or wrapped in a cloak under an oak tree, a horse to follow me, and a safe-guard when you leave me."

"I accept."

"Have I your word, colonel, that you will not interfere with any orders I give, and will do nothing to defeat the surprises I may attempt?"

"I am too curious to see for that. You have my word, general."

"Whatever takes place before your eyes?"

"Whatever takes place before my eyes, I renounce the rôle of actor and confine myself wholly to that of spectator. I wish to say to the First Consul: 'I have seen.'"

Cadoudal smiled.

"Well, you shall see," said he.

At that moment the door opened, and two peasants brought in a table all laid, on which stood a smoking bowl of cabbage-soup and a piece of lard; an enormous pot of cider, just drawn from the cask, was foaming over the edges of the jug between two glasses. A few buckwheat cakes served as a desert to this modest repast. The table was laid for two.

"You see, Monsieur de Montrevel, that my lads hoped you would do me the honor to sup with me."

"Faith! they were not far wrong. I should have asked for supper, had you not invited me; and I might have been forced to seize some had you not invited me."

"Then fall to!"

The young colonel sat down gayly.

"Excuse the repast I offer you," said Cadoudal; "unlike your generals, I don't make prize money; my soldiers feed me. Have you anything else for us, Brise-Bleu?"

"A chicken fricassee, general."

"That's your dinner, Monsieur de Montrevel."

"A feast! Now, I have but one fear, general."

"What is it?"

"All will go well for the eating, but when it comes to drinking--"

"Don't you like cider? The devil! I'm sorry; cider or water, that's my cellar."

"Oh! that's not it; but whose health are we going to drink?"

"Is that all, sir?" said Cadoudal, with great dignity. "We will drink to the health of our common mother, France. We are serving her with different



minds, but, I hope, the same hearts. To \_France\_, Monsieur," said Cadoudal, filling the two glasses.

"To \_France\_, general!" replied Roland, clinking his glass against that of Georges.

And both gayly reseated themselves, their consciences at rest, and attacked the soup with appetites that were not yet thirty years old.