

## Chapter 13

### THE WILD-BOAR

Sir John was just finishing that interesting bit of history when Madame de Montrevel and her daughter returned. Amélie, who did not know how much had been said about her between Roland and Sir John, was astounded by the expression with which that gentleman scrutinized her.

To him she seemed more lovely than before. He could readily understand that mother, who at the risk of life had been unwilling that this charming creature should profane her youth and beauty by serving as a mourner in a celebration of which Marat was the deity. He recalled that cold damp cell which he had lately visited, and shuddered at the thought that this delicate white ermine before his eyes had been imprisoned there, without sun or air, for six weeks. He looked at the throat, too long perhaps, but swan-like in its suppleness and graceful in its exaggeration, and he remembered that melancholy remark of the poor Princesse de Lamballe, as she felt her slender neck: "It will not give the executioner much trouble!"

The thoughts which succeeded each other in Sir John's mind gave to his face an expression so different from its customary aspect, that Madame de Montrevel could not refrain from asking what troubled him. He then told her of his visit to the prison, and Roland's pious pilgrimage to the dungeon where his mother and sister had been incarcerated. Just as Sir John had concluded his tale, a view-halloo sounded without, and Roland entered, his hunting-horn in his hands.

"My dear friend," he cried, "thanks to my mother, we shall have a splendid hunt to-morrow."

"Thanks to me?" queried Madame de Montrevel.

"How so?" added Sir John.

"I left you to see about my dogs, didn't I?"

"You said so, at any rate."

"I had two excellent beasts, Barbichon and Ravaude, male and female."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sir John, "are they dead?"

"Well, yes; but just guess what this excellent mother of mine has done?" and, tilting Madame de Montrevel's head, he kissed her on both cheeks. "She wouldn't let them drown a single puppy because they were the dogs of my dogs; so the result is, that to-day the pups, grand-pups, and great-grand-pups of Barbichon and Ravaude are as numerous as the descendant of Ishmael. Instead of a pair of dogs, I have a whole pack, twenty-five beasts, all as black as moles with white paws, fire in their eyes and hearts, and a regiment of cornet-tails that would do you good to see."

And Roland sounded another halloo that brought his young brother to the scene.

"Oh!" shouted the boy as he entered, "you are going hunting to-morrow, brother Roland. I'm going, too, I'm going, too!"

"Good!" said Roland, "but do you know what we are going to hunt?"

"No. All I know is that I'm going, too."

"We're going to hunt a boar."

"Oh, joy!" cried the boy, clapping his little hands.

"Are you crazy?" asked Madame de Montrevel, turning pale.

"Why so, madame mother, if you please?"

"Because boar hunts are very dangerous."

"Not so dangerous as hunting men. My brother got back safe from that, and so will I from the other."

"Roland," cried Madame de Montrevel, while Amélie, lost in thought, took no part in the discussion, "Roland, make Edouard listen to reason. Tell him that he hasn't got common-sense."

But Roland, who recognized himself again in his young brother, instead of blaming him, smiled at his boyish ardor. "I'd take you willingly," said he, "only to go hunting one must at least know how to handle a gun."

"Oh, Master Roland," cried Edouard, "just come into the garden a bit. Put up your hat at a hundred yards, and I'll show you how to handle a gun."

"Naughty child," exclaimed Madame de Montrevel, trembling, "where did you learn?"

"Why, from the gunsmith at Montagnac, who keeps papa's and Roland's guns. You ask me sometimes what I do with my money, don't you? Well, I buy powder and balls with it, and I am learning to kill Austrians and Arabs like my brother Roland."

Madame de Montrevel raised her hands to heaven.

"What can you expect, mother?" asked Roland. "Blood will tell. No Montrevel could be afraid of powder. You shall come with us to-morrow, Edouard."

The boy sprang upon his brother's neck.

"And I," said Sir John, "will equip you to-day like a regular huntsman, just as they used to arm the knights of old. I have a charming little rifle that I will give you. It will keep you contented until your sabre and pistols come."

"Well," asked Roland, "are you satisfied now, Edouard?"

"Yes; but when will he give it to me? If you have to write to England for it, I warn you I shan't believe in it."

"No, my little friend, we have only to go up to my room and open my gun-case. That's soon done."

"Then, let's go at once."

"Come on," said Sir John; and he went out, followed by Edouard.

A moment later, Amélie, still absorbed in thought, rose and left the room. Neither Madame de Montrevel nor Roland noticed her departure, so interested were they in a serious discussion. Madame de Montrevel tried to persuade Roland not to take his young brother with him on the morrow's hunt. Roland explained that, since Edouard was to become a soldier like his father and brother, the sooner he learned to handle a gun and become

familiar with powder and ball the better. The discussion was not yet ended when Edouard returned with his gun slung over his shoulder.

"Look, brother," said he, turning to Roland; "just see what a fine present Sir John has given me." And he looked gratefully at Sir John, who stood in the doorway vainly seeking Amélie with his eyes.

It was in truth a beautiful present. The rifle, designed with that plainness of ornament and simplicity of form peculiar to English weapons, was of the finest finish. Like the pistols, of which Roland had had opportunity to test the accuracy, the rifle was made by the celebrated Manton, and carried a twenty-four calibre bullet. That it had been originally intended for a woman was easily seen by the shortness of the stock and the velvet pad on the trigger. This original purpose of the weapon made it peculiarly suitable for a boy of twelve.

Roland took the rifle from his brother's shoulder, looked at it knowingly, tried its action, sighted it, tossed it from one hand to the other, and then, giving it back to Edouard, said: "Thank Sir John again. You have a rifle fit for a king's son. Let's go and try it."

All three went out to try Sir John's rifle, leaving Madame de Montrevel as sad as Thetis when she saw Achilles in his woman's garb draw the sword of Ulysses from its scabbard.

A quarter of an hour later, Edouard returned triumphantly. He brought his mother a bit of pasteboard of the circumference of a hat, in which he had put ten bullets out of twelve. The two men had remained behind in the park conversing.

Madame de Montrevel listened to Edouard's slightly boastful account of his prowess. Then she looked at him with that deep and holy sorrow of mothers to whom fame is no compensation for the blood it sheds. Oh! ungrateful indeed is the child who has seen that look bent upon him and does not

eternally remember it. Then, after a few seconds of this painful contemplation, she pressed her second son to her breast, and murmured sobbing: "You, too! you, too, will desert your mother some day."

"Yes, mother," replied the boy, "to become a general like my father, or an aide-de-camp like Roland."

"And to be killed as your father was, as your brother perhaps will be."

For the strange transformation in Roland's character had not escaped Madame de Montrevel. It was but an added dread to her other anxieties, among which Amélie's pallor and abstraction must be numbered.

Amélie was just seventeen; her childhood had been that of a happy laughing girl, joyous and healthy. The death of her father had cast a black veil over her youth and gayety. But these tempests of spring pass rapidly. Her smile, the sunshine of life's dawn, returned like that of Nature, sparkling through that dew of the heart we call tears.

Then, one day about six months before this story opens, Amélie's face had saddened, her cheeks had grown pale, and, like the birds who migrate at the approach of wintry weather, the childlike laughter that escaped her parted lips and white teeth had fled never to return.

Madame de Montrevel had questioned her, but Amélie asserted that she was still the same. She endeavored to smile, but as a stone thrown into a lake rings upon the surface, so the smiles roused by this maternal solicitude faded, little by little, from Amélie's face. With keen maternal instinct Madame de Montrevel had thought of love. But whom could Amélie love? There were no visitors at the Château des Noires-Fontaines, the political troubles had put an end to all society, and Amélie went nowhere alone. Madame de Montrevel could get no further than conjecture. Roland's return had given her a moment's hope; but this hope fled as soon as she perceived the effect which this event had produced upon Amélie.

It was not a sister, but a spectre, it will be recalled, who had come to meet him. Since her son's arrival, Madame de Montrevel had not lost sight of Amélie, and she perceived, with dolorous amazement, that Roland's presence awakened a feeling akin to terror in his sister's breast. She, whose eyes had formerly rested so lovingly upon him, now seemed to view him with alarm. Only a few moments since, Amélie had profited by the first opportunity to return to her room, the one spot in the château where she seemed at ease, and where for the last six months she had spent most of her time. The dinner-bell alone possessed the power to bring her from it, and even then she waited for the second call before entering the dining-room.

Roland and Sir John, as we have said, had divided their time between their visit to Bourg and their preparations for the morrow's hunt. From morn until noon they were to beat the woods; from noon till evening they were to hunt the boar. Michel, that devoted poacher, confined to his chair for the present with a sprain, felt better as soon as the question of the hunt was mooted, and had himself hoisted on a little horse that was used for the errands of the house. Then he sallied forth to collect the beaters from Saint-Just and Montagnac. He, being unable to beat or run, was to remain with the pack, and watch Sir John's and Roland's horse, and Edouard's pony, in the middle of the forest, where it was intersected by one good road and two practicable paths. The beaters, who could not follow the hunt, were to return to the château with the game-bags.

The beaters were at the door at six the following morning. Michel was not to leave with the horses and dogs until eleven. The Château des Noires-Fontaines was just at the edge of the forest of Seillon, so the hunt could begin at its very gates.

As the battue promised chiefly deer and hares, the guns were loaded with balls. Roland gave Edouard a simple little gun which he himself had used as a child. He had not enough confidence as yet in the boy's prudence to trust him with a double-barrelled gun. As for the rifle that Sir John had given him the day before, it could only carry cartridges. It was given into Michel's safe keeping, to be returned to him in case they started a boar for the second part of the hunt. For this Roland and Sir John were also to change their guns for rifles and hunting knives, pointed as daggers and sharp as razors,

which formed part of Sir John's arsenal, and could be suspended from the belt or screwed on the point of the gun like bayonets.

From the beginning of the battue it was easy to see that the hunt would be a good one. A roebuck and two hares were killed at once. At noon two does, seven roebucks and two foxes had been bagged. They had also seen two boars, but these latter had only shaken their bristles in answer to the heavy balls and made off.

Edouard was in the seventh heaven; he had killed a roebuck. The beaters, well rewarded for their labor, were sent to the château with the game, as had been arranged. A sort of bugle was sounded to ascertain Michel's whereabouts, to which he answered. In less than ten minutes the three hunters had rejoined the gardener with his hounds and horses.

Michel had seen a boar which he had sent his son to head off, and it was now in the woods not a hundred paces distant. Jacques, Michel's eldest son, beat up the woods with Barbichon and Ravaude, the heads of the pack, and in about five minutes the boar was found in his lair. They could have killed him at once, or at least shot at him, but that would have ended the hunt too quickly. The huntsmen launched the whole pack at the animal, which, seeing this troop of pygmies swoop down upon him, started off at a slow trot. He crossed the road, Roland giving the view-halloo, and headed in the direction of the Chartreuse of Seillon, the three riders following the path which led through the woods. The boar led them a chase which lasted until five in the afternoon, turning upon his tracks, evidently unwilling to leave the forest with its thick undergrowth.

At last the violent barking of the dogs warned them that the animal had been brought to bay. The spot was not a hundred paces distant from the pavilion belonging to the Chartreuse, in one of the most tangled thickets of the forest. It was impossible to force the horses through it, and the riders dismounted. The barking of the dogs guided them straight along the path, from which they deviated only where the obstacles they encountered rendered it necessary.

From time to time yelps of pain indicated that members of the attacking party had ventured too close to the animal, and had paid the price of their temerity. About twenty feet from the scene of action the hunters began to see the actors. The boar was backed against a rock to avoid attack in the rear; then, bracing himself on his forepaws, he faced the dogs with his ensanguined eyes and enormous tusks. They quivered around him like a moving carpet; five or six, more or less badly wounded, were staining the battlefield with their blood, though still attacking the boar with a fury and courage that might have served as an example to the bravest men.

Each hunter faced the scene with the characteristic signs of his age, nature and nation. Edouard, at one and the same time, the most imprudent and the smallest, finding the path less difficult, owing to his small stature, arrived first. Roland, heedless of danger of any kind, seeking rather than avoiding it, followed. Finally Sir John, slower, graver, more reflective, brought up the rear. Once the boar perceived his hunters he paid no further attention to the dogs. He fixed his gleaming, sanguinary eyes upon them; but his only movement was a snapping of the jaws, which he brought together with a threatening sound. Roland watched the scene for an instant, evidently desirous of flinging himself into the midst of the group, knife in hand, to slit the boar's throat as a butcher would that of a calf or a pig. This impulse was so apparent that Sir John caught his arm, and little Edouard exclaimed: "Oh! brother, let me shoot the boar!"

Roland restrained himself, and stacking his gun against a tree, waited, armed only with his hunting-knife, which he had drawn from its sheath.

"Very well," said he, "shoot him; but be careful about it."

"Oh! don't worry," retorted the child, between his set teeth. His face was pale but resolute as he aimed the barrel of his rifle at the animal's head.

"If he misses him, or only wounds him," observed Sir John, "you know that the brute will be upon us before we can see him through the smoke."

"I know it, my lord; but I am accustomed to these hunts," replied Roland, his nostrils quivering, his eyes sparkling, his lips parted: "Fire, Edouard!"

The shot followed the order upon the instant; but after the shot, with, or even before it, the beast, swift as lightning, rushed upon the child. A second shot followed the first, but the animal's scarlet eyes still gleamed through the smoke. But, as it rushed, it met Roland with his knee on the ground, the knife in his hand. A moment later a tangled, formless group, man and boar, boar and man, was rolling on the ground. Then a third shot rang out, followed by a laugh from Roland.

"Ah! my lord," cried the young man, "you've wasted powder and shot. Can't you see that I have ripped him up? Only get his body off of me. The beast weighs at least four hundred pounds, and he is smothering me."

But before Sir John could stoop, Roland, with a vigorous push of the shoulder, rolled the animal's body aside, and rose to his feet covered with blood, but without a single scratch. Little Edouard, either from lack of time or from native courage, had not recoiled an inch. True, he was completely protected by his brother's body, which was between him and the boar. Sir John had sprung aside to take the animal in the flank. He watched Roland, as he emerged from this second duel, with the same amazement that he had experienced after the first.

The dogs--those that were left, some twenty in all--had followed the boar, and were now leaping upon his body in the vain effort to tear the bristles, which were almost as impenetrable as iron.

"You will see," said Roland, wiping the blood from his face and hands with a fine cambric handkerchief, "how they will eat him, and your knife too, my lord."

"True," said Sir John; "where is the knife?"

"In its sheath," replied Roland.

"Ah!" exclaimed the boy, "only the handle shows."

He sprang toward the animal and pulled out the poniard, which, as he said, was buried up to the hilt. The sharp point, guided by a calm eye and a firm hand, had pierced the animal's heart.

There were other wounds on the boar's body. The first, caused by the boy's shot, showed a bloody furrow just over the eye; the blow had been too weak to crush the frontal bone. The second came from Sir John's first shot; it had caught the animal diagonally and grazed his breast. The third, fired at close quarters, went through the body; but, as Roland had said, not until after the animal was dead.