

## Chapter 17

### INVESTIGATIONS

Two persons were waiting for Roland's return; one in anguish, the other with impatience. These two persons were Amélie and Sir John. Neither of them had slept for an instant. Amélie displayed her anguish only by the sound of her door, which was furtively closed as Roland came up the staircase. Roland heard the sound. He had not the courage to pass before her door without reassuring her.

"Be easy, Amélie, I am here," he said. It did not occur to him that his sister might be anxious for any one but him.

Amélie darted from her room in her night-dress. It was easy to see from her pallor and the dark circles which spread nearly to the middle of her cheeks that she had not closed her eyes all night.

"Has nothing happened to you, Roland?" she cried, clasping her brother in her arms and feeling him over anxiously.

"Nothing."

"Nor to any one else?"

"No."

"And you saw nothing?"

"I didn't say that," answered Roland.

"Good God! What did you see?"

"I'll tell that to you later. Meantime, there is no one either killed or wounded."

"Ah! I breathe again!"

"Now, let me give you a bit of advice, little sister. Go to bed and sleep, if you can, till breakfast. I am going to do the same thing, and can assure you I won't need any rocking. Good-night, or rather good-morning."

Roland kissed his sister tenderly. Then affecting to whistle a hunting-air carelessly, he ran up the next flight of steps. Sir John was frankly waiting for him in the hall. He went straight to the young man.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well, I didn't roll my stone entirely for nothing."

"Did you see any ghosts?"

"At any rate I saw something that resembled one very closely."

"Come, tell me all about it."

"I see you won't be able to sleep, or at best only fitfully, if I don't. Here's what happened, in a nutshell."

And Roland gave him a minute account of the night's adventure.

"Excellent," said Sir John, when Roland had finished. "I hope you have left something for me to do."

"I am even afraid," answered Roland, "that I have left you the hardest part."

Then, as Sir John went over each detail, asking many questions about the localities, he said:

"Listen, Sir John. We will pay the Chartreuse a visit in broad daylight after breakfast, which will not interfere in the least with your night-watch. On the contrary, it will acquaint you with the localities. Only you must tell no one."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sir John, "do I look like a gabbler?"

"No, that's true," cried Roland laughing, "you are not a gabbler, but I am a ninny." So saying, he entered his bedchamber.

After breakfast the two young men sauntered down the slopes of the garden, as if to take a walk along the banks of the Reissouse. Then they bore to the left, swung up the hill for about forty paces, struck into the highroad, and crossed the woods, till they reached the convent wall at the very place where Roland had climbed over it on the preceding night.

"My lord," said Roland, "this is the way."

"Very well," replied Sir John, "let us take it."

Slowly, with a wonderful strength of wrist, which betokened a man well trained in gymnastics, the Englishman seized the coping of the wall, swung himself to the top, and dropped down on the other side. Roland followed with the rapidity of one who is not achieving a feat for the first time. They were both on the other side, where the desertion and desolation were more visible by night than by day. The grass was growing knee high in the paths; the espaliers were tangled with vines so thick that the grapes could not ripen in the shadow of the leaves. The wall had given way in several places, and ivy, the parasite rather than the friend of ruins, was spreading everywhere.

As for the trees in the open space, plums, peaches and apricots, they had grown with the freedom of the oaks and beeches in the forest, whose breadth and thickness they seemed to envy. The sap, completely absorbed by the branches which were many and vigorous, produced but little fruit, and that imperfect. By the rustle of the tall grass, Sir John and Roland divined that the lizards, those crawling offsprings of solitude, had established their domicile there, from which they fled in amazement at this disturbance.

Roland led his friend straight to the door between the orchard and the cloister, but before entering he glanced at the clock. That clock, which went at night, was stopped in the day time. From the cloister he passed into the refectory. There the daylight showed under their true aspect the various objects which the darkness had clothed with such fantastic forms the night before. Roland showed Sir John the overturned stools, the table marked by the blow of the pistol, the door by which the phantom had entered. Accompanied by the Englishman, he followed the path he had taken in pursuit of the spectre. He recognized the obstacles which had hindered him, and noted how easily one who knew the locality might cross or avoid them.

At the spot where he had fired, he found the wad, but he looked in vain for the bullet. The arrangement of the passage, which ran slanting, made it impossible for the bullet, if its marks were not on the walls, to have missed the ghost. And yet if the ghost were hit, supposing it to be a solid body, how came it to remain erect? How had it escaped being wounded, and if

wounded, why were there no bloodstains on the ground? And there was no trace of either blood or ball.

Sir John was almost ready to admit that his friend had had to do with a veritable ghost.

"Some one came after me," said Roland, "and picked up the ball."

"But if you fired at a man, why didn't the ball go into him?"

"Oh! that's easily explained. The man wore a coat of mail under his shroud."

That was possible, but, nevertheless, Sir John shook his head dubiously. He preferred to believe in a supernatural occurrence; it gave him less trouble.

Roland and he continued their investigations. They reached the end of the passage which opened on the furthest extremity of the orchard. It was there that Roland had seen his spectre for an instant as it glided into the dark vault. He made for the cistern, and so little did he hesitate that he might still have been following the ghost. There he understood how the darkness of the night had seemed to deepen by the absence of all exterior reflection. It was even difficult to see there by day.

Roland took two torches about a foot long from beneath his cloak, took a flint, lighted the tinder, and a match from the tinder. Both torches flared up.

The problem was now to discover the way by which the ghost had disappeared. Roland and Sir John lowered their torches and examined the ground. The cistern was paved with large squares of limestone, which seemed to fit perfectly. Roland looked for his second ball as persistently as for the first. A stone lay loose at his feet, and, pushing it aside, he disclosed an iron ring screwed into one of the limestone blocks.

Without a word Roland seized the ring, braced his feet and pulled. The square turned on its pivot with an ease which proved that it was frequently subjected to the same manipulation. As it turned, it disclosed a subterranean passage.

"Ah!" exclaimed Roland, "this is the way my spectre went."

He entered the yawning cavern, followed by Sir John. They traversed the same path that Morgan took when he returned to give an account of his expedition. At the end of the passage they came upon an iron gate opening into the mortuary vaults. Roland shook the gate, which yielded to his touch. They crossed this subterranean cemetery, and came to a second gate; like the first, it was open. With Roland still in front, they went up several steps, and found themselves in the choir of the chapel, where the scene we have related between Morgan and the Company of Jehu took place. Only now the stalls were empty, the choir was deserted, and the altar, degraded by the abandonment of worship, was no longer covered by the burning tapers or the sacred cloth.

It was evident to Roland that this was the goal of the false ghost, which Sir John persisted in believing a real one. But, real or false, Sir John admitted that its flight had brought it to this particular spot. He reflected a moment and then remarked: "As it is my turn to watch tonight, I have the right to choose my ground; I shall watch here."

And he pointed to a sort of table formed in the centre of the choir by an oaken pedestal which had formerly supported the eagle lectern.

"Indeed," said Roland, with the same heedlessness he showed in his own affairs, "you'll do very well there, only as you may find the gates locked and the stone fastened tonight, we had better look for some more direct way to get here."

In less than five minutes they had found an outlet. The door of the old sacristy opened into the choir, and from the sacristy a broken window gave passage into the forest. The two men climbed through the window and found themselves in the forest thicket some twenty feet from the spot where they had killed the boar.

"That's what we want," said Roland; "only, my dear Sir John, as you would never find your way by night in a forest which, even by day, is so impenetrable, I shall accompany you as far as this."

"Very well. But once I am inside, you are to leave me," said the Englishman. "I remember what you told me about the susceptibility of ghosts. If they know you are near, they may hesitate to appear, and as you have seen one, I insist on seeing at least one myself."

"I'll leave you, don't be afraid," replied Roland, adding, with a laugh, "Only I do fear one thing."

"What is that?"

"That in your double capacity of an Englishman and a heretic they won't feel at ease with you."

"Oh," replied Sir John, gravely, "what a pity I shall not have time to abjure before this evening."

The two friends, having seen all there was to see, returned to the chateau. No one, not even Amélie, had suspected that their walk was other than an ordinary one. The day passed without questions and without apparent anxiety; besides, it was already late when the two gentlemen returned.

At dinner, to Edouard's great delight, another hunt was proposed, and it furnished a topic for conversation during dinner and part of the evening. By ten o'clock, as usual, all had retired to their rooms, except Roland, who was in that of Sir John.

The difference of character showed itself markedly in the preparations of the two men. Roland had made them joyously, as if for a pleasure trip; Sir John made his gravely, as if for a duel. He loaded his pistols with the utmost care and put them into his belt English fashion. And, instead of a cloak, which might have impeded his movements, he wore a top-coat with a high collar put on over his other coat.

At half-past ten the pair left the house with the same precautions that Roland had observed when alone. It was five minutes before eleven when they reached the broken window, where the fallen stones served as a stepping-block. There, according to agreement, they were to part. Sir John, reminded Roland of this agreement.

"Yes," said Roland, "an agreement is an agreement with me. Only, let me give you a piece of advice."

"What is it?"

"I could not find the bullets because some one had been here and carried them off; and that was done beyond doubt to prevent me from seeing the dents on them."

"What sort of dent do you mean?"

"Those of the links of a coat of mail; my ghost was a man in armor."



"That's too bad!" said Sir John; "I hoped for a ghost." Then, after a moment's silence and a sigh expressive of his deep regret in resigning the ghost, he asked: "What was your advice?"

"Fire at his face!"

Sir John nodded assent, pressed the young officer's hand, clambered through the window and disappeared in the sacristy.

"Good-night!" called Roland after him. Then with the indifference to danger which a soldier generally feels for himself and his companions, Roland took his way back to the Château des Noires-Fontaines, as he had promised Sir John.