

## Chapter 49

### ROLAND'S REVENGE

It is easy to guess what had happened. Roland had not wasted his time with the captain of gendarmerie and the colonel of dragoons. They on their side did not forget that they had their own revenge to take.

Roland had informed them of the subterranean passage that led from the church of Brou to the grotto of Ceyzeriat. At nine in the evening the captain and the eighteen men under his command were to go to the church, descend into the burial vault of the Dukes of Savoy, and prevent with their bayonets all communication between the subterranean passage and the quarry.

Roland, at the head of twenty men, was to inclose the woods in a semicircle, drawing in upon it until the two ends should meet at the grotto of Ceyzeriat. The first movement of the party was to be made at nine o'clock, in conjunction with the captain of the gendarmerie.

We have seen, from what Morgan told Amélie, the nature of the present intentions of the Companions of Jehu. The news brought from Mittau and from Brittany had put them at ease. Each man felt that he was free, and, knowing that the struggle had been a hopeless one, he rejoiced in his liberty.

There was therefore a full meeting at the grotto of Ceyzeriat, almost a fête. At twelve o'clock the Companions of Jehu were to separate, and each one, according to his facilities, was to cross the frontier and leave France.

We know how their leader employed his last moments. The others, who had not the same ties of the heart, were supping together in the broad open space of the quarry, brilliantly illuminated--a feast of separation and farewell; for, once out of France, the Vendée and Brittany pacificated, Condé's army destroyed, who knew when and where they should meet again in foreign lands.

Suddenly the report of a shot fell upon their ears.

Every man sprang to his feet as if moved by an electric shock. A second shot, and then through the depths of the quarry rang the cry, quivering on the wings of the bird of ill-omen, "To arms!"

To the Companions of Jehu, subjected to all the vicissitudes of life of an outlaw, the occasional rest they snatched was never that of peace. Pistols, daggers, carbines, were ever near at hand. At the cry, given no doubt by the sentinel, each man sprang to his weapons and stood with panting breast and strained ears, waiting.

In the midst of the silence a step as rapid as well could be in the darkness was heard. Then, within the circle of light thrown by the torches and candles, a man appeared.

"To arms!" he cried again, "we are attacked!"

The two shots the Companions of Jehu had heard were from the double-barrelled gun of the sentry. It was he who now appeared, his smoking gun in his hand.

"Where is Morgan?" cried twenty voices.

"Absent," replied Montbar; "consequently I command. Put out the lights and retreat to the church. A fight is useless now. It would only be waste of blood."

He was obeyed with an alacrity that showed that every one appreciated the danger. The little company drew together in the darkness.

Montbar, who knew the windings of the subterranean passage almost as well as Morgan, directed the troop, and, followed by his companions, he plunged into the heart of the quarry. Suddenly, as he neared the gate of the passage, he fancied he heard an order given in a low tone not fifty feet away, then a sound like the cocking of guns. He stretched out both arms and muttered in a low voice:

"Halt!" At the same instant came the command, this time perfectly audible:  
"Fire!"

It was hardly given before the cavern was lighted with a glare, followed by a frightful volley. Ten carbines had been discharged at once into the narrow passage. By their light Montbar and his companions recognized the uniform of the gendarmes.

"Fire!" cried Montbar in turn.

Seven or eight shots answered the command. Again the darkness was illuminated. Two of the Companions of Jehu lay upon the ground, one killed outright, the other mortally wounded.

"Our retreat is cut off, my friends," cried Montbar. "To the right-about! If we have a chance, it is through the forest."

The movement was executed with the precision of a military manoeuvre. Montbar, again at the head of his companions, retraced his steps. At that moment the gendarmes fired again. But no one replied. Those who had discharged their guns reloaded them. Those who had not, reserved their fire for the real struggle which was to come. One or two sighs alone told that the last volley of the gendarmes had not been without result.

At the end of five minutes Montbar stopped. The little party had reached the open space of the quarry.

"Are your pistols and guns all loaded?" he asked.

"Yes," answered a dozen voices.

"Remember the order for those who fall into the hands of the police. We belong to the army of M. de Teyssonnet, and we are here to recruit men for the royalist cause. If they talk to us of mail-coaches and diligences, we don't know what they mean."

"Agreed."

"In either case it will be death. We know that well enough; but the death of a soldier is better than that of thieves--the volley of a platoon rather than the guillotine."

"Yes, yes," cried a mocking voice, "we know what that is--Vive la fusillade!"

"Forward, friends!" said Montbar, "and let us sell our lives for what they are worth; that is to say, as dearly as possible."

"Forward!" they all cried.

Then, as rapidly as was possible in the profound darkness, the little troop resumed its march, still under the guidance of Montbar. As they advanced, the leader noticed a smell of smoke which alarmed him. At the same time gleams of light began to flicker on the granite walls at the angles of the path, showing that something strange was happening at the opening of the grotto.

"I believe those scoundrels are smoking us out," exclaimed Montbar.

"I fear so," replied Adler.

"They think we are foxes."

"Oh!" replied the same voice, "they shall know by our claws that we are lions."

The smoke became thicker and thicker, the light more and more vivid.

They turned the last corner. A pile of dried wood had been lighted in the quarry about fifty feet from the entrance, not for the smoke, but for the light it gave. By the blaze of that savage flame the weapons of the dragoons could be seen gleaming at the entrance of the grotto.

Ten steps in advance of the men stood an officer, waiting. He was leaning on his carbine, not only exposed to attack, but apparently courting it. It was Roland. He was easily recognized. He had flung his cap away, his head was bare, and the fitful light of the flames played upon his features. But that which should have cost him his life saved him. Montbar recognized him and stepped backward.

"Roland de Montrevel!" he said. "Remember Morgan's injunction."

"Yes," replied the other Companions, in muffled tones.

"And now," said Montbar, "let us die, but dearly!"

And he sprang forward into the space illuminated by the fire, and discharged one barrel of his gun at the dragoons, who replied with a volley.

It would be impossible to relate all that followed. The grotto was filled with smoke, which the flame of each weapon pierced like a flash of lightning. The two bands clinched and fought hand to hand, pistols and daggers serving them in turn. At the noise of the struggle, the gendarmes poured in from the rear--few more demons added to this fight of devils--but the groups of friends and enemies were so confused they dared not fire. They struggled in the red and lurid atmosphere, fell down and rose again; a roar of rage was heard, then a cry of agony--the death sigh of a man. The survivor sought another man, and the struggle was renewed.

This work of death lasted fifteen minutes, perhaps twenty. At the end of those twenty minutes twenty corpses could be counted in the grotto of Ceyzeriat. Thirteen were those of the gendarmes and the dragoons, nine belonged to the Companions of Jehu. Five of the latter were still living; overwhelmed by numbers, crippled by wounds, they were taken alive. The gendarmes and the dragoons, twenty-five in number, surrounded them.

The captain of gendarmes had his arm shattered, the colonel of dragoons was wounded in the thigh. Roland alone, covered with blood that was not his own, had not a scratch. Two of the prisoners were so grievously wounded that it was impossible for them to walk, and the soldiers were obliged to carry them on an improvised litter. Torches were lighted, and the whole troop, with the prisoners, took the road to the town.

As they were leaving the forest to branch into the high-road, the gallop of a horse was heard. It came on rapidly. "Go on," said Roland; "I will stay here and find out what this means."

It was a rider, who, as we have said, was advancing at full speed.

"Who goes there?" cried Roland, raising his carbine when the rider was about twenty paces from him.

"One more prisoner, Monsieur de Montrevel," replied the rider, "I could not be in at the fight, but I will at least go to the scaffold. Where are my friends?"

"There, sir," replied Roland, who had recognized, not the face, but the voice of the rider, a voice which he now heard for the third time. As he spoke, he pointed to the little group in the centre of the soldiers who were making their way along the road from Ceyzeriat to Bourg.

"I am glad to see that no harm has befallen you, M. de Montrevel," said the young man, with great courtesy; "I assure you it gives me much happiness." And spurring his horse, he was beside the soldiers and gendarmes in a few strides. "Pardon me, gentlemen," he said, springing from his horse, "I claim a place among my three friends, the Vicomte de Jayat, the Comte de Valensolle, and the Marquis de Ribier."

The three prisoners gave a cry of admiration and held out their hands to their friend. The two wounded men lifted themselves up on their litters, and murmured: "Well done, Sainte-Hermine, well done!"

"I do believe, God help me!" cried Roland, "that those brigands will have the nobler side of the affair!"