

## THE SISTER OF CHARITY

### Chapter XLVI: A Scene from the Peasant Revolt

They had to get out of that madhouse, and Luizzi followed the Devil. As long as they were walking through that enormous building, all went well: doors and walls opened before Satan to give him free passage, and Luizzi quickly slipped through behind him. But as soon as they got outside he had great trouble keeping up with his infernal guide. The night was utterly black, and a harsh wind drove a steady icy rain into Luizzi's face. The dirt on the road, soaked by the rain, stuck to his shoes so it was as if he were walking in mud overshoes—till the mud sucked off his shoes and left our friend holding one foot in the air while he felt around in the dark with his toes for the other shoe. As for Satan, he strode over that muddy ground as easily as if he's been walking on glowing coals—the usual road-paving material in his empire. He stopped in silence every time the baron stopped and swore like the damned, and he waited patiently till Luizzi had put his shoes back on.

At that point they were on a narrow lane bordered on both sides by high earthen banks topped by impenetrable hedges. Great oaks and ancient elms grew intermittently along those hedges and spread their vast branches out across the narrow lane far enough to span its width and rest against the hedge on the opposite side. Like some aerial cavalry corps riding at a gallop, the wind passed straight through those trees and those hedges, shouting and howling and carrying away clouds of leaves that looked in the night like flocks of birds racing away as fast as their wings would beat. Then suddenly, as if those invisible squadrons had run up against more powerful troops, the wind stopped and broke. They could hear it pulling back and charging again in irregular whining gusts. The torn leaves passed over again in a whirlwind and fell here and there on the damp ground, like a flock of songbirds dispersed and decimated by the scattered pellets of a shotgun blast. Then the loud noises fell silent for a moment, and they could hear the murmur of the rain falling on the trees, and the mournful call of an owl, and the distant crowing of a rooster.

The storm picked up again, crossing and recrossing and battling, striking heavy muffled blows and uttering a piercing whistle: not one of those splendid roiling storms, crisscrossed by brilliant flashes of lightning and speaking majestically out of great claps of thunder, that strike your soul with a holy terror filled with admiration, in which you stand with your head bare to soak in their warm aroma and breathe their electric air; but one of those black storms that grip the body with cold and the heart with sadness, against which you carefully shut your doors and windows so you can huddle next to the glowing hearth or curl up under your bedcovers.

Meanwhile Luizzi was still following the Devil, and he had enough to do to keep up with him not to be able to question him. The further they went, the harder the walking became, and finally in a fit of impatience the baron cried, "We're on the road to hell!"

"The road to hell, master," replied Satan, "is smooth and easy. There's a fine paved way down the middle for people in carriages, and asphalt sidewalks for the pedestrians. It's shaded by flowering green trees. Along the sides of the road there are tall linden trees and lovely inns, with cheerful dance halls and big restaurants and gaming rooms fit for a prince and prostitutes dressed like honest women. You can eat there, drink there, sleep there; you can gamble away your health, your life, your fortune anytime and anywhere. The road to hell is almost as beautiful as the boulevard des Italiens will be someday."

"So then this must be the path of righteousness?" laughed the baron.

"Could be."

"If so, it's hard and disagreeable."

"Are you tired already? And yet you're not one of those badly dressed, badly nourished children who live in this region; you're not an old blind man hunched over his cane; you're not a pale sickly girl; and you're not walking down this road to go to the rescue of some unfortunate stranger. You're a man in the prime of life, and you're doing it to save yourself and regain your fortune and your freedom."

“Fine! But I highly doubt any human beings besides me are out on the road at this hour and in this weather, unless they’re bandits, and those gentlemen aren’t usually weak children or old blind men or pale sickly girls.”

“At the end of this lane, where it intersects several other paths, you’ll meet the child, the old man, and the girl. Ask them for shelter for the night.”

“On what pretext?”

“You’ll tell them you’re a traveler who’s lost.”

“They won’t believe me, because it isn’t normal for a respectable man to be out on foot in the middle of the night on some remote lane. They’ll take me for a bandit.”

“So there’s nothing in the world between the rich man who rides down the road in his berline with post-horses and the bandit who sneaks through the night on dark paths? Frugality, poverty, misery all face other kinds of stormy weather.”

“But if they ask me my name, how will they believe a Baron de Luizzi could come to be out with no carriage in a place like this?”

“If you tell them you’re Baron de Luizzi, they’ll take you for the madman who’s escaped from the place we’ve just left, because your name must be known in the area around it. Think up a name and a profession, and figure out how to get out of this fix.”

“So you’re planning to abandon me there?”

“What did I promise you? That I’d give you your freedom, and you’re free. Your fortune? In Paris you’ll recover your income of two hundred thousand livres: unlike lots of others, your banker took advantage of the July Revolution to recover his footing in business, and Rigot’s claim against your assets has been dismissed.”

“You also promised you’d restore my good reputation.”

“You were acquitted at the court of assize. Everyone testified in your favor, saying you’d been insane for a long time. And since Rigot’s lawyer recovered and he’s perfectly healthy, they didn’t look too closely at the whole thing.”

“In other words I’m reentering society as some kind of paroled convict?”

“You’re mistaken, master: the crime you committed is one of those society forgives easily.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because there was no apparent motive. If you’d tried to kill a man to take his money or his wife or his name, you’d be a villain. If you’d attempted murder out of revenge or hatred, you’d be a vile scoundrel. But you wanted to kill him just to kill him; you’re a monomaniac, a man suffering from vertigo, for whom science has a stack of incontestible explanations that make you very interesting. The idea is a modern invention, which I owe to the young men’s bar association, and which I expect to turn to my advantage. Besides, in the middle of the giant upheaval that’s just roiled France, your case went completely unnoticed. Most of the people who know you never heard about it, and by finding a different set of friends you’ll be a brand-new man in the circle you join.”

“How far away am I from Paris?”

“Eighty leagues.”<sup>1</sup>

“What is this place?”

“It’s the municipality of Vitré.”<sup>2</sup>

“How am I supposed to get to Paris without money?”

“That’s not my problem.”

“But there must be a way of getting some!”

“There are three: borrowing it, stealing it, or earning it. Your choice. As for me, I’ve kept my promise. Farewell.”

And just as they reached the place where the lane divided into several paths, the Devil vanished, and Luizzi found himself a few steps away from a small group of people who were about to pass by in front of him.

“Who goes there?” cried a loud voice.

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<sup>1</sup> About 320 kilometers, or 200 miles.

<sup>2</sup> Vitré is in the Vendée region, which was the center of a bloody pro-royalist counterrevolutionary insurgency in western France between 1793 and 1796. That quasi-guerrilla war is often referred to simply as “the Vendée,” but it’s also known as the “Peasant Revolt,” which gives this chapter its title.

“Alas,” answered Luizzi, “I’m an unlucky traveler who was waylaid by a gang of bandits. After dragging me into the woods they took my money and my papers, and I got lost trying to find my way back to the main road from Laval to Vitré.”

No sooner had Luizzi finished speaking than a boy of about twelve, who’d been circling him and examining him carefully, cried out a little scornfully, “It’s a gentleman, grandpa!”

“Watch him closely, Matthieu,” replied the old man.

A woman’s voice said gently, “And what is it you want, my good man?”

“Shelter for the night, if it’s no trouble.”

“It’s no trouble, sir,” said the old man. “We won’t get much sleep at our house tonight, and one more or less around the fireplace won’t make anyone colder. Come along, sir, and follow us. You must need to get warmed up.”

“Grandpa Bruno,” said the boy, “we’re just two pistol shots from the house. I’ll run ahead and tell them it’s us, with Sister Angélique and a gentleman. You can’t miss it from here—just keep going straight in this direction.”

“All right,” said the old man, starting down the path to which his grandson had led him. “Let’s hurry.”

Luizzi was surprised at how easily the blind man had swallowed his story; but he was even more surprised when the old man, asking him questions, spoke of his fictitious adventure as something completely natural. “Was it a big gang that attacked you?”

“A dozen men,” said Luizzi, whose vanity wouldn’t let him stint on the number of his attackers.

“Did you notice among them a tall thin man with a goatskin on his back and a red bonnet under his hat?”

“That’s right. I thought I spotted a tall fellow, dressed more or less the way you describe.”

“I knew it. That’s Bertrand’s gang. Oh, if I hadn’t lost my sight, that old scoundrel wouldn’t dare hang around these parts like that. He knows I shoot straight—or rather I used to shoot straight.”

“But didn’t that Bertrand used to be a friend of yours?” asked Sister Angélique, who was walking next to the old man.

“Yes, yes, in the days of the Republic we cried, ‘Long live the king!’ together. And I’m sure if I hadn’t picked him up half dead off the field at Croix Bataille he’d long since have been buried with all the holy priests who died that famous day.<sup>3</sup> But we fought a fair war in those days: we didn’t attack remote houses to loot them and guzzle all their wine; we didn’t stop travelers out late on the roads to strip them and rob them—because those bandits took everything, didn’t they, sir?”

“Everything! Absolutely everything!” answered Luizzi.

“Oh, those cowardly wretches!” said old Bruno.

“But didn’t you say they’d fought valiantly just a few hours ago?” asked the nun.<sup>4</sup>

“That’s true. And if—instead of making it easy for the Red Pants to retreat by opening the gates to the grounds—we’d wanted to attack their rear, not one of them would’ve been left alive.”

“Is that when the wounded officer took shelter at your house?” she asked.

“He didn’t take shelter. He was wounded by the hedge in the courtyard, and just as he’d led the attack he was the last to retreat. That’s why his soldiers were already long gone and didn’t see him fall, and when the Chouans who were chasing them passed him they must’ve thought he was dead. More than two hours later, when we went out to inspect around the house, we found him sprawled on the ground, and we took him inside. My son Jacques went to fetch the doctor, and since none of our plowboys had the guts to go find you, I took charge of it. But, since unfortunately I lost my sight six months ago and I couldn’t find my way, Matthieu came along.”

As they were speaking, old Bruno, Sister Angélique, and Luizzi arrived at a small courtyard enclosed by a wall, whose entrance was blocked by gates like on the private roads in the royal forests. There was a narrow gap on either side of the gates; and when our travelers had passed through, the

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<sup>3</sup> Croix-Bataille was the site of a battle during the first War in the Vendée. The Catholic clergy were strongly represented on the side fighting against the atheistic Revolution.

<sup>4</sup> In 1832 supporters of the recently deposed Charles X and his heir, the so-called Henri V, tried unsuccessfully to rally a short-lived second War in the Vendée to reverse the July Revolution. The “Red Pants” (*Culottes Rouges*) were the troops of the new king, Louis Philippe. The peasant rebels were known as the Chouans, just as they’d been in the 1790s. The shared counterrevolutionary Legitimist cause created a sense of continuity between 1793 and 1832, as if it were a single ongoing guerrilla insurgency, the Chouannerie.

baron—bothered by two dogs who came up to him to sniff him curiously—could see a long irregular group of single-story buildings. One door was open; the brightly lit interior they would've glimpsed through it was masked by a group of people standing in the doorway.

"Is that you, father?" cried a powerful voice over the intensifying wind and rain.

"It's me, Jacques," said the old man.

The people in the doorway withdrew and left it open for them. The old man led the way in, taking off the goatskin coat he wore, and his grandson hung it from a nail inside the chimney, where several others were already drying. The man who'd spoken was sitting by the fire with his feet up on the grate, his elbow on his knee, and his chin resting on his hand. He watched carefully while little Matthieu led his grandfather to a seat by the fire. Then he turned slightly toward the Sister of Charity, whose long black mantle a servant had taken; pointing toward a door, he said, "The wife is in there with the sick man. Step in there for a little bit. You'll see the prescription the doctor left and that he said to show you. If there's nothing urgent, come back and dry off a little, for it's sad weather out."

The nun went into the room he'd pointed out. The master of the house, turning to the baron, went on, "Have a seat, sir, and warm yourself. So they didn't even leave you a coat to cover you?" he added, seeing the water running off Luizzi's clothes. "You can't stay like that, it's enough to make a frog catch cold. Wife!" he cried. "Bring the clothes and the suits from the wounded man's room, and we'll give the gentleman a little time to undress and dress... I apologize, sir! We only have these two rooms, and we do the best we can."

Luizzi was about to thank him, when the peasant cried out angrily, "Who left that door open? You want someone to shoot us right here by the fire? Close it and lock it."

"That was me, father," said little Matthieu. "But Lion and Beauty are in the yard, and they won't let any strangers get near the house."

"All right," said Jacques, softening. Then he added in a mutter, "It's not the ones the dogs don't recognize I'm worried about, it's the ones who come here all the time as friends."

"You're right," said the old blind man, who'd set his feet on top of his wooden clogs as if they were a stool, the better to expose them to the warmth of the fire. "You're right. Given what the gentleman told me, it was Bertrand's gang that attacked him."

"You know this Bertrand?" asked Jacques.

"No," replied Luizzi, "but based on the description your father gave me: a tall man..."

"There's more than one Chouan as tall as Bertrand, and if you didn't get a good look at him..."

"It was already night when they stopped my carriage."

"Your carriage!" said Jacques in surprise. "Whereabouts was that?"

"Well, on the main road from Vitré to Laval," said Luizzi, already sorry he'd mentioned the word carriage.

"And you were coming from?"

"From Vitré," said Luizzi, more and more embarrassed.

"What happened to the horses and the postilion who was driving you?"

"I must admit, I have no idea."

"Bonfils," said the master of the house to a plowboy who was fixing a pitchfork in a corner of the large room, "go to the relay stop and find out what happened to the carriage that got waylaid. How long ago was that?"

"Two hours," said Luizzi impulsively.

"Two hours!" echoed Jacques. "That's odd." He gave Luizzi a suspicious look.

But just then Jacques's wife, Marianne, appeared, saying, "Everything's ready for the gentleman in the other room."

Jacques motioned to the baron to go ahead, and followed him closely with his eyes.

As Luizzi was about to go through the door he met the nun coming out, and saw her face for the first time. The woman's features struck him as if they were those of someone he'd met before; and it seemed to him that his face had the same effect on her, because she stopped suddenly and gave a quiet exclamation. But they passed each other in the doorway without anyone else noticing what had happened.

Luizzi found himself in a much smaller room than the first one. One corner was filled by a large four-poster bed with curtains of green serge that were completely closed, so the light from a small standing lamp wouldn't bother the sick man. On a chair Luizzi saw the clothes meant for him. As he

dressed he tried to recall where and when he'd met Sister Angélique before; but the memory, which at first had been so vivid, blurred in his mind, and he decided he'd been struck by her resemblance to someone else he knew.

Meanwhile he took advantage of this first moment alone to think over his situation. He realized that, thanks to his recklessness, his position had become quite suspect, and his usual habit of referring to his servants and his carriage had made his alleged adventure fairly hard to explain. Certainly a carriage wouldn't vanish without a trace; and he was pondering how to get out of that fix when it occurred to him that maybe he could confide his name to the wounded officer and put himself under his protection.

"If he's a young man," thought Luizzi, "it'll be easy to persuade him I was locked up in a madhouse for no reason, and he'll help me get back to Paris." To confirm his hopes, he opened the bed curtains a little; but he couldn't make out the face of the man hidden in the shadows cast by the curtains, and he was about to pick up the lamp to see him better—when he noticed Jacques standing in the open doorway.

"You're rather inquisitive, sir!" said the peasant.

Taken by surprise, Luizzi tried to play it off with a witticism; and with ill-considered facetiousness he replied, "Some friends of mine are serving in the regiment that's garrisoned in this region. I was afraid it might be one of them who was wounded, and I wanted to check."

"All you had to do was ask us his name."

"You know it?"

"Yes."

"So what's his name?"

"First tell me your friends' names."

The baron threw out a few names at random, and the peasant said curtly, "That's not him." Then he added roughly, "Supper's waiting for you."

Luizzi accepted the invitation and went back to the larger room. In his absence the long table in the middle of the room had been laid: a chair for the master of the house stood at one end, and the rest of the company sat along the sides on wooden benches. Besides the people already mentioned, there were two women servants and three farm hands. The entire meal, consisting of a plate of cabbage and buckwheat biscuits, had already been served out. When Luizzi reached the place assigned to him, between old Bruno and his daughter-in-law and across from the nun, they all murmured a *Benedicite* to themselves and sat down. Luizzi alone hadn't taken part in the moment of blessing, and they all noticed it with displeasure. Small jugs of cider stood here and there along the table, from which they all took as much as they wanted. Only Jacques had a bottle of wine next to him; but he took none, and merely poured glasses for his father and for Sister Angélique, who declined.

"Drink, drink," he said to her, "it'll strengthen you for a sleepless night."

"I'm used to keeping vigil, and I'm not used to wine," the nun replied. "But I think you'd do better to offer some to the gentleman, who probably doesn't like cider."

Her advice seemed to displease Jacques; but he didn't show it openly, and he passed the bottle to Luizzi, who also declined, saying he was neither thirsty nor hungry. Then he added, "I asked you for shelter for a few hours, and as soon as it's daylight I'll rid you of an unwanted guest."

"As you wish. But I should warn you, we have no bed to offer you."

"I didn't expect one. And while I'm waiting for morning I'll talk with Sister Angélique, if she'll permit me."

She nodded her agreement and lowered her eyes, which since the beginning of supper had been fixed on Luizzi. He'd been examining her no less carefully; and though he couldn't say where he'd seen her fresh lovely face before, he was forced to acknowledge that it awoke faint memories in him.

Meanwhile supper had come to an end. The complete silence that reigned around the table allowed them all to hear the power of the storm rattling the doors and shutters. They all seemed preoccupied and tongue-tied, till Sister Angélique said to Jacques, "The doctor's orders say the compresses for treating the patient should be soaked in the coldest water possible, to reduce the inflammation. If I could have water from the well, that'd be ideal."

"Jean," said the peasant, "go draw a bucket of water."

The farmhand went out; and Luizzi noticed that the plowboy Jacques had sent to the relay stop for news was no longer in the house. He was anticipating some new predicament, when Jacques, rising, said in a bad-tempered voice, "Come! One last drink, to the wounded man's recovery, and then let those who have to sleep tonight go to bed!"

They'd all filled their glasses and were getting ready to end the meal by responding to Jacques's toast, when a man appeared in the doorway, which the farmhand had left open, and said jokingly, "I hope you're not going to drink without me!"

No sooner had he spoken than the whole company rose, and the old blind man grabbed a knife off the table and cried, "Bertrand! It's that villain Bertrand!"

Jacques stopped his father, while the other guests around the table seemed to be standing there petrified by intense fear. Marianne, Jacques's wife, had thrown herself in front of her husband, but he gently moved her aside and said coldly to the newcomer, "If you're thirsty, there's cider here for you."

"And some wine too, if I'm not mistaken," said Bertrand, stepping forward to take the bottle. He was a tall man, with long red hair, and a few locks of white, falling to his shoulders. He wore the goatskin coat typical of peasants in the lower Maine region and in Bretagne. He was armed with a double-barreled shotgun of some value and a highly ornamented hunting knife.

They all looked at each other, waiting with painful anxiety for what would happen, till Jacques, setting his hand on the bottle Bertrand was about to pick up, said firmly, "You can have what I'm offering, but you can't have what you want to take."

"As you wish," said Bertrand, unbothered by that refusal. He picked up a jug of cider and drained it in one draft. No sooner had he finished than there was a loud noise at the door.

"What is it?" asked Jacques.

"It's me," said Jean from outside.

"It's the cold water for the wounded man," said Sister Angélique. "Let the boy in."

"Ah!" said Bertrand gravely, "so that officer is here? Let the boy in, and guard the door carefully."

The farmhand came in and set his bucket of water down in the corner.

"Close the door," said his master.

The boy hesitated.

"Leave the door open," said Bertrand. "My men will at least be able to see the fire in the hearth, and that'll cheer them up."

Two men stepped into the doorway and flanked it, half in and half out of the house, with their guns in their hands.

"Is everyone in position?" asked Bertrand.

"Yes," replied one of the sentinels.

"Good," said the leader of the Chouans, going to the door and glancing outside the house.

Jacques's eye followed his movements attentively, and Marianne in turn anxiously watched her husband's slightest gestures. "And now," said Jacques, "are you going to tell me what you want?"

Bertrand sat down by the fire. Jacques motioned for his wife, his son, and his servants to go wait at the far end of the room; then he took a seat on the other side of the hearth, next to his father. Sister Angélique and Luizzi stepped forward between the Chouan and the master of the house, as if to position themselves as neutral intermediaries in the matter about to be discussed. Bertrand, with his head lowered, toyed awkwardly with the strap of his gun and seemed unable to speak. They could hear the storm beating down on the house from all sides.

"I'm waiting," said Jacques after a short silence.

"Did you give shelter to a wounded infantry officer?" asked Bertrand abruptly, as if he were relieved at finally being prompted.

"Yes."

"You have to turn that officer over to us."

"He's dying!" cried the nun. "And that would kill him."

"And even if he were as healthy as I am, I wouldn't give him up to you," added Jacques scornfully.

"Listen, Jacques," said Bertrand, "I came here as a friend, and I'm asking you nicely for what I could take by force."

"True," said Jacques. "You could have us all killed right here, me, my father, my wife, my children. You can murder us all if that's your good pleasure. You can..."

"You know perfectly well I won't do that, Jacques," replied the Chouan impatiently, "even though you refused to take up arms for the righteous cause."

"You'll have to do it," said Jacques, "because I'm not going to hand over the officer, and if you want to have him you'll have to step over my dead body to get to him."

"You've certainly changed, and you must like the new regime a lot," said Bertrand coldly, "for you to risk your life like that for a man you don't even know."

"I'm risking my life because that officer, whoever he is, is in my house, and I don't want anyone touching that man, any more than my wife, any more than my father..." Jacques's own thoughts suddenly seemed to make him grow angry. "I don't want anyone touching him, any more than a straw from my roof or a nail from my walls."

"Hey! No one's going to touch a nail or a straw of yours," said Bertrand. "But that officer is a stranger, and it can't matter much to you to hand him over. Besides, listen! This morning Georges was arrested by the police, and he's being taken to the prison at Angers. We need someone who'll answer for Georges's life. If you'll hand over that man..."

"You should've picked him up this morning," said Jacques, "when he was dying on the ground outside."

"You should've left him there, so we could've found him," replied Bertrand.

"You would've found him dead," said Sister Angélique.

"Possibly," said the Chouan. "In which case there'd have been one fewer of them. But since he's alive, he has to be of some use to us. We can exchange him for Georges. Come on, where is he?"

Bertrand stood up and headed toward the wounded man's room. Sister Angélique threw herself in front of the door. "Don't go in! The slightest commotion could kill him!" she cried in a tone of supplication.

"Bertrand!" cried the old blind man in a loud voice. "You asked me some time ago why my son didn't take up arms and why I didn't advise him to do so. It's because I didn't want him mixed up in a war with murderers and thieves."

"Are you saying this for my benefit?" asked Bertrand.

"Yes, for your benefit," said old Bruno, advancing toward him.

"I'll give you an answer in a little while," said Bertrand. "But first I have to see that officer. I beg your pardon, Sister," he added. "Don't make me use force. I'm going to get in, because I mean to get in."

"Just you dare try!" cried the nun, setting her back against the door and raising toward Bertrand the crucifix hanging from her rosary.

Bertrand took off his hat and crossed himself. He looked all around in annoyance, but he didn't dare lift his eyes to the girl; and he went back to his seat, grumbling like a mastiff looking for something to bite.

"Are you going to be done with all this nonsense soon?" asked Jacques.

"Right away, if you like!" cried Bertrand loudly, suddenly standing up and aiming his shotgun at Jacques.

But while the Chouan was moving toward the wounded man's door again, little Matthieu slipped behind his father and handed him his own gun, which had been hidden in a corner of the room. In an instant Jacques had his gun leveled in turn at his enemy, while the boy, rushing at Bertrand, pushed down the barrel of his gun. It all happened in a flash, and Jacques cried in a loud voice, "If anyone moves or takes one step into this room, Bertrand drops dead!"

There was a terrible moment of silence, during which they could hear the muffled gusts of wind and the rain lashing the flagstone threshold. Then a shot was fired, and Jacques's gun dropped from his shoulder, which had been shattered by a bullet. It was one of Bertrand's men hiding in the darkness in the courtyard who'd slipped the barrel of his gun between the two sentinels and easily taken aim at the peasant.

"Who fired?" cried old Bruno.

"A Chouan," said Jacques. And then Marianne's and little Matthieu's cries let the old blind man know it was his son who'd been hit.

What followed was a scene of indescribable chaos and peculiar terror. The blind man, armed with a big knife and crying, "Bertrand! Bertrand!" rushed at the spot where he thought the leader of the Chouans was standing. But he stepped aside, and Bruno began running around the room with his knife raised, shouting furiously, "Bertrand! Bertrand! Where are you? Killer! Murderer! Where are you? Oh, you want to try it again?" He ran back and forth across the large room that way, bumping into the furniture, waving his knife, and still shouting, "Bertrand, where are you?" while everybody who stood

in his path moved aside in fear, telling him who they were. Finally he ran into his own son and grabbed him by the arm, saying hoarsely and furiously, "Who are you?"

"It's me, father. Calm down, you're going to kill us all."

"Did they hurt you?"

"They broke my arm! It's the one you're holding—you're hurting me."

Bruno dropped his son's arm and backed away with a cry, and the knife fell from his hands.

Bertrand kicked away the knife and said calmly, "You asked for it, Jacques."

"Murderer! Thief!" cried the old blind man.

"Neither one nor the other," said Bertrand. "But I want what I want, and I feel like you should know that. If Jacques hadn't picked up his gun, nothing would've happened to him. He wanted to have his say, and we answered him."

"Your time will come," said Bruno.

"When it's God's will."

"You dare invoke him after a crime like that?" said Sister Angélique.

"Yes, Sister," replied Bertrand. "I'm not like some of those among us: I don't do harm for the sake of doing harm, and I don't kill the people who attack me."

"But you rob the people you don't kill," said old Bruno, to whom robbery seemed if possible even worse than murder, because it lacked the political justification the Chouans gave their revolt.

"That reminds me," said Bertrand, pointing out Luizzi. "I assume this is the traveler who says he was waylaid. Well, I swear if it was any of our men who did it, they'll be severely punished, and this stranger won't be able to say we're just a bunch of highwaymen."

Meantime Marianne and the nun had cut away Jacques's vest and exposed his wound. While they were washing it, Bertrand returned to his seat. For lack of tending, the fire had almost gone out; and the lamp, whose flame was blown about by the wind that rushed into the room, threw a sad and dying light on that scene of desolation.

Bertrand spoke again, addressing Luizzi. "Whereabouts were you stopped?"

"I can't say exactly," said the baron, whose courage had fled in the face of all these new and unfamiliar dangers.

"Well, at least, how far were you from Vitré?" pursued the Chouan.

"I was asleep in my carriage, and I really don't know..."

"Don't shake like that. We've got no quarrel with you. Nobody here means you any harm. Tell me: what did they take?"

"Well," stammered the baron, "my papers, my money..."

"What were the papers?... How much money did you have?..."

"There was my passport... some letters."

"And how much money?"

"How much money... I don't know."

"What! You don't know?"

"About two thousand francs."

"In gold or in silver?"

"In gold," said Luizzi, answering quickly to hide his distress.

"And what carriage were you riding in?"

"A post chaise."

"There are lots of different kinds," said Bertrand, examining the baron with a look that added mightily to his distress.

"It was... It was... a caleche."

"Ah!... And I assume you had luggage, trunks?"

"Yes, yes."

"And what was in those trunks?"

"Well..." said Luizzi impatiently, "what people put in trunks... clothes, suits..."

"I just want everything to be returned perfectly to you, besides weapons, if you had any."

Since that wasn't a question, Luizzi was spared having to answer.

Bertrand went on, "And what's your name?"

"My name... I can't... I can't tell you..."

"We'll see it on your passport, if you really have a passport that can be seen."



"It seems to me," replied the baron, who'd finally understood into what trouble he'd put himself by his lies and hesitations, "it seems to me it can't matter much to you who I am. I'm not asking for my carriage or my money back; just let me go, that's all I want from you."

"Yes, indeed!" said the Chouan. "I can believe that. And I even think you don't have much reason to miss the money and the carriage you lost."

As he spoke, the plowboy Jacques had sent to the relay stop came running in.

"Well, Bonfils!" said Bertrand. "Did you accomplish your master's errand?"

The boy stopped, saw Jacques was wounded, and lowered his head.

"Will you answer, fool?" said Bertrand angrily. "I heard the story this man told old Bruno at the crossroads, and I know where they sent you, so talk: what did you find out?"

"Oh, hell," said Bonfils. "I'll tell you. There hasn't been a post chaise through Vitré for two days."

"I suspected as much," said Bertrand. "Hey, you there, men! Grab this rascal, string him up like a calf by all four feet, and toss him to the bottom of the big pond."

"Me?" cried Luizzi, backing away from the four or five armed peasants who'd come in together. "Why me?"

"Because that's what we do with spies."

"But I'm not a spy, I'm a stranger in these parts!"

"So who are you exactly?"

"I'm... I'm Baron de Luizzi."

"Baron de Luizzi!" echoed a woman's voice. Sister Angélique immediately stepped forward. Looking into his face, she said, "You're Baron de Luizzi?"

"Yes, Armand de Luizzi."

"Yes," she said, examining him. "Yes, it's true..."

"Who are you, Sister, since you seem to know me? Might you have paid a visit occasionally to the place I've just come from?"

"I don't know where you've come from," she replied. "But as for me... I'm... But perhaps you've forgotten me, since it's been ten years... I need to speak to you, Armand, though I've found you too late..."

While the baron, saved by that unexpected intervention, tried to put a name to this woman's face, which had made such a strong impression on him, Bertrand came forward and said to Sister Angélique, "So you know this man?"

"Yes."

"You're positive?"

"Yes."

"Then he can stay here. As for the rest of us," he added, raising his voice, "let's be off, because it's almost daylight."

"And the officer? What about the officer?" cried the Chouans standing by the door.

"Is the stretcher ready? Go get him, and don't hurt him."

Old Bruno rose from his chair. "You win today, Bertrand, but my turn will come."

"Be quiet," replied the Chouan. "Don't give them the idea to burn down your house and loot your barn. I did everything I could to save you from disaster."

Jacques, with his wife and his servants around him, said nothing. And while they all stayed at the far end of the room, Luizzi and the nun stood aside to make room for the stretcher carrying the wounded officer.

As the stretcher passed in front of Sister Angélique she looked at the wounded officer. Drawing back in horror, she cried, "Henri!..."

He turned, raised his head slightly, and cried out. Then he fell back, murmuring dully, "Caroline!... Caroline!"

The stretcher bearers had stopped. But at a gesture from Bertrand they moved on, while the Sister of Charity hid in Luizzi's arms and cried, "Oh, my brother! My brother!"