

'A lion!' I exclaimed, 'a lion!'

But instead of sharing my terrors, lo and behold, my comrades all began to laugh and make fun of me.

'Eh bien! you idiot,' said the head cook, 'has the lion gobbled you up? No, of course, he hasn't, so pray do me the favor to go back and finish your bag of potatoes, and the quicker the better.'

Then as I remained there, nailed to the floor, failing to understand this indifference, he cried out:

'Now just look at him, will you; just look at this fine soldier who wants to fight the Arabs, and who is afraid of a big animal! Come now,' he went on, 'thou shalt see how fierce he is, thy lion.'

So saying, he drew me to the door-sill, and showed me the wild beast calmly seated on his haunches, in the middle of the room.

'Toto,' said he, 'come here, it is time for your "patee."'

The animal arose, and approached with a slow and majestic gait: when he was near us the chief presented me ceremoniously.

'Monsieur Toto,' said he, 'this is the Grenadier Laroux, a second-class cook, who is most anxious to make your acquaintance. From this day forward he will attend to your food, and if you are not satisfied with your portions, he is the person whom you will have to deal with.'

Toto, for sole reply, gazed at me with his great deep eyes, and began to smile so bravely that I could see his double row of shady white teeth; and after that, beat his formidable flank with his tail, as a sign of approval; then, in compliance with the chief's command, as I took up the bowl that was reserved for him and began to prepare his portion, he seated himself beside me, without ceremony, and watched me at work.

The soup, and such soup, was steamed, served, and eaten, while the chief in a few words gave me the history of Toto. He had been discovered by the troop one day, in the desert, when but a mere cub, his father and mother lying slain at a short distance; the regiment had adopted him, and he usually took his meals in the room with the officers, but there having been some mistake in the preparation of his food, he had grown impatient at a delay his stomach had not foreseen, and tired of waiting had come to get his soup in the kitchen, and this was the reason that I had been thus frightened by his visit that morning.

As soon as I understood what sort of a creature I had to deal with, my terror gave place to sympathy, and never did Toto have cause to complain of me; on the contrary, I taxed my ingenuity to the utmost to procure some delicate dish for him, or some fine bone for him to gnaw, so we soon became the best friends in the world, and whether he paced beside me or came and crouched at my feet, the lion was ever my companion by day, and in the long homesick hours at night, when we were both dreaming: he, doubtless, of his great silent desert, and I of the old corner of noisy and populous Paris, where I had passed the merry days of my childhood.

One fine morning we received an order that filled my heart with joy.

Gen. Casaignac, having learned that some hostile armaments were forming a few leagues from Tlemcen, now selected our battalion to go and disperse them; our colonel was to command the expedition, and this time, old Africans or newcomers, every one was alike included.

The food required for the day was piled up in the commissary cart, and we set out at daybreak, in order to avoid the great heat during our journey: Toto, a volunteer grenadier, was constituted a member of the battalion, and marched proudly in the rear with the trumpeters.

About 10 o'clock in the morning we debouched into a large plain, covered with groups of trees, and bounded in front of us by a series of small hills, where we could distinctly perceive the motions of huge white shadows.

The Bedouins were preparing for battle. Upon the order of the colonel, a certain number of men were

detached from the battalion, and distributed as sharpshooters. I was one of them, and went and concealed myself behind some shrubbery, while the rest advanced in serried ranks, with a slow and solemn tread.

I can still hear the wild, supernatural yell that resounded throughout the still air, as the mass of Bedouin cavalry dashed swiftly down upon us. They went like the wind, guiding their agile little horses with one hand, and holding in the other the handle of their long guns inlaid with gold and silver. When they thought they were within range, they began an irregular fire, and a crackling sound was heard all along their line.

Our troops had now come to a standstill; motionless, ready to fire, they awaited the order. Suddenly I saw the colonel make a quick gesture with his sword, and a blast from a trumpet rent the air.

But, at the same moment, I felt a shock in my head succeeded by an acute pain: the blood flowing over my face blinded me, and I fell, losing consciousness, whilst a terrific racket caused the earth to tremble around me.

Long afterwards, when I came to myself, I felt a strong warm breath upon my face. Toto was there, panting, watching for my return to life. I made an effort to raise myself a little, and could then obtain a glimpse of the surroundings. Over the plain, whereon snowy bournous were scattered, brooded a heavy silence. The battalion had dispersed, and from afar, the faint sound of drums and trumpets which marked its return to Tlemcen, was borne to my ear.

All at once the frightful truth was revealed to me. The officers did not know me at all; the soldiers were not accustomed to include me in their ranks, and my absence had not been remarked. The lion alone, more mindful and more generous than men, not seeing me at the moment of departure, had remembered, and guided by his attachment to me had searched the field of battle, until he had succeeded in discovering me.

And now what was going to become of me? Weakened by the loss of blood, incapable of the slightest movement, I should inevitably fall into the Arabs' hands, when they returned to take away their dead, and already timid groups of them could be seen beyond on the summit of the hills.

The lion would doubtless defend me, but what could he do against an avalanche of enemies, and I bitterly thought that I had survived my terrible wound, only to fall more surely beneath the yataghan of the Arab.

And now as with the brain benumbed, and all the hallucination of a frightful nightmare, I thus dwelt upon the horror of my situation, suddenly the lion arose with a supple movement, and, his head turned in the direction of the town, he uttered a resounding roar of despair, then left me, bounding in the direction of the road to Tlemcen.

I strained my ear; all at once the distant sound of the drums and clarions suddenly ceased.

But again there arose the hoarse roar of the lion; and it continued to resound at intervals, gradually diminishing, until silence once more reigned over the desolate plain. Hope, however, now imparted new strength. I managed to get up on my feet, and, supported by the branches of a bush, I there awaited my fate.

Fortunately, the Arabs, warned by the cry of the lion that our troops were still there, did not venture to show themselves.

Minutes passed by, which seemed to me hours, then an hour, which appeared to me a century—I was beginning to lose all hope, when suddenly a roar resounded near me, this time a roar of joy and triumph, and at the same instant Toto appeared upon the field of battle, and behind him a squadron of grenadiers was seen approaching at double quick.

I was saved!

On the morrow, the lion and myself were mentioned under the same head in the regimental record of the day.