

"No, Lieutenant,— nothing."  
"I must have said something; you are hiding it from me!"

"Nonsense! How can I remember?" All sick persons mutter to themselves.

"I did say something, then?— what was it?" he demanded eagerly.

"How can I remember? If you wish it, I'll make a note of what you say next time."

He turned deadly pale, and looked at me as if he were endeavoring to penetrate to the bottom of my soul; he then closed his heavy eyelids, pressed his lips together, and muttered in a low tone:—"A glass of absinthe would do me good." At length his arms fell by his side, and he remained stoically motionless.

One morning, as I was about to enter Castagnac's room, I saw Raymond Dutertre coming towards me from the end of the corridor. "Doctor," he said, putting out his hand, "I am come to ask a favor of you."

"With pleasure, my dear fellow, if I can grant it," I said.

"I want you to give me a written permission to go out for the day."

"My dear fellow, don't think of such a thing; anything else you like."

"But I'm quite well, Doctor; I've had no fever for four days."

"Yes; but there's a great deal of fever about in the city, and I cannot expose you to the chance of a relapse."

"Give me only two hours,—time to go and return."

"Impossible, my dear fellow; do not press me,—it will be useless. I know how tiresome the restraints of the hospital are, I know how impatient the sick are to breathe the free air; but we *must* have patience."

"You won't let me go, then?"

"In the course of a week, if you go on well, we'll see about it."

He left me, greatly out of temper. I cared nothing for that; but what was my surprise to see Castagnac, with staring eyes, following his retreating comrade with a strange look.

"Well," I said; "how are you this morning?"

"I'm very well," he answered abruptly.

"Isn't that Raymond going away yonder?"

"Yes."

"What did he want?"

"Oh! only a written permission to go out, which I refused."

Castagnac drew a long breath, and, sinking back into himself, appeared to fall into a state of somnolency.

Something in his voice awoke in me I know not what vague apprehension; and I left him, feeling nervous and abstracted.

That day one of my patients died; I had the body carried into the dissecting room, whither I descended, towards nine o'clock in the evening. It was a small vaulted room, fifteen feet high by twenty feet wide, lit by two windows opening on the precipice, on the side of the high road to Philippeville. On an inclined table lay the body which I proposed to study. After placing my lamp upon a stone, built out from the side of the wall for this purpose, I began my work, and continued my task uninterruptedly for two hours. The "rappel" had long been sounded; the only sounds that reached my ears were the measured steps of the sentinel, his times of stopping, when he dropped the butt of his musket on the ground, and, from hour to hour, the passage of the patrol, the *qu vive*, the distant whisper of the pass word rapid and mingled sounds, the dying away of which seemed to intensify the silence which they left behind.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, and I was

beginning to feel fatigued, when, happening to turn my eyes towards the open window, I was overcome by a strange spectacle: it was a row of small grey owls, with ruffled feathers and green blinking eyes fixed upon the rays of my lamp, settled upon the sill of the window and jostling each other for places. These hideous birds were drawn thither by the scent of human flesh, and were only awaiting my departure to dart up on their prey. It is impossible for me to tell you the horror which this sight caused me: I rushed towards the window, and its revolting occupants disappeared into the darkness, like dead leaves carried away by the wind.

But at the same moment a strange sound fell upon my ear, a sound almost imperceptible in the void of the abyss. I leant forward, grasping the bar of the window and holding my breath the better to see and listen.

Castagnac's chamber was above the dissecting room, which was at the base of the building, its floor resting on the solid rock. Between the precipice and the hospital wall, ran a ledge, not more than a foot wide, and covered with fragments of bottles and crockery thrown out by the nurses. All was so still that the lightest sound was perceptible, and I could plainly hear the steps and gropings of somebody passing along this perilous path.

"Heaven send that the sentinel does not hear him!" I said to myself. "The least hesitation, and his destruction is inevitable."

I had hardly made this reflection, when a hoarse stifled voice, the voice of Castagnac, cried through the silence: "Raymond, where are you going?"

This exclamation pierced me to the marrow of my bones. It was a sentence of death.

In a moment I heard some of the *debris* clatter down, and then along the narrow ledge I heard some one struggling with long-drawn breath. The cold sweat burst from every pore. I tried to see—to descend—to call for help; but I was powerless; my tongue was glued to my mouth. Suddenly there was a groan—then—nothing! Yes, there was a peal of devilish laughter; then a window was slammed to so violently as to break some of the glass in it. And then silence, like a winding-sheet, enveloped all without.

I cannot describe to you the terror which made me shrink to the far side of the room, and there, trembling, and with hair erect, and eyes fixed before me, remain for more than twenty minutes, listening through the throbbing of my heart, and vainly endeavouring, with the pressure of my hand, to stay its wild pulsations. At the end of that time I mechanically closed the window, took my lamp, mounted the stairs to my chamber, and went to bed; but it was impossible for me to close an eye. I heard sighs,—the long-drawn sighs of the victim—then the murderer's savage peal of laughter.

Worn out and needing rest as I was, fright kept me awake. I saw constantly before me the image of Castagnac in his shirt, his neck outstretched, watching his victim's descent into the black depths of the precipice; it froze my blood. "It was he," I said to myself.—"But if he ever suspects that I was there!" I seemed to hear the boards of the corridor creak under a stealthy footstep; and I raised myself upon my elbow, with open mouth and listening ear. The sirocco had risen; it whirled over the plain with lugubrious wailings, carrying even to the summit of the rock the sand and gravel of the descent. Sleep at last seized upon me, however; and towards three o'clock I sank into a heavy slumber. It was

midday when I awoke; the wind of the preceding night had fallen, and the deep blue sky was so calm and pure that I doubted my recollections, and thought that I had been under the influence of a horrible dream.

But I felt a strange disinclination to verify my impressions. I went to fulfil my professional duties; and it was not until after I had visited all my sick wards, and examined each of my patients with more than my ordinary care, that I at last went to Dutertre's room. I knocked at the door—no answer. I opened it and went in: his bed had not been disturbed. I called the nurses and questioned them; nobody had seen Lieutenant Dutertre since the preceding evening.

Rousing all my courage, I went to Castagnac's room. A rapid glance towards the window showed me that two squares of glass in it were broken; I felt myself turn pale, but recovered my coolness as quickly as I could. "We had a high wind last night, Lieutenant," I said.

He was tranquilly seated at his table, his head supported by his hands, and making believe to read a book of military exercises. He looked up with his dull, ordinary look. "Only two windows blown in," he said; "not much harm done."

"This chamber appears to be more exposed than the others on this side," I said; "or perhaps, you left it open?"

There was an almost imperceptible contraction of the old soldier's cheeks. "No,—it was closed, all the night," he said, looking strangely at me.

"Ah!" I said; then approached him to feel his pulse. "And how is your health?"

"I'm all right," he said.

"Good," I replied; "you are decidedly better,—a little agitated at this moment, but decidedly better. But then you must take care of yourself; no more green poison!"

In spite of the good-natured tone I assumed, my voice trembled. The old scoundrel's hand, which I held in mine, produced upon me the same effect as if had been a serpent's head. I could have wished to fly from his presence. His restless eye was fixed upon me, and its glance filled me with nameless horror. I contained myself, however. At the moment of leaving him, I returned suddenly, as if I had recollected something.—"By-the-bye, Lieutenant," I said, "did Dutertre happen to pay you a visit last night?"

A shudder passed through him.

"Dutertre?"

"Yes; he has been out since yesterday,—nobody knows what has become of him. I suppose—"

"Nobody has been to see me," he said, in a dry tone of voice; "nobody."

He returned to his book, and I closed the door, as convinced of his crime as I was that the sun was shining in the sky. Unfortunately I had no proofs. "If I denounce him," I said to myself on regaining my room, "he'll deny everything I may say,—that is evident; if he denies it, what proof of the facts can I bring forward? None. My own testimony would not suffice. Besides crimes of this kind are not provided for by the laws. All the odium of the accusation would fall back upon my own head, and I should have made a terrible enemy."

In consequence of these reflections, I determined to wait, and to watch Castagnac without appearing to do so, persuaded that he would end in betraying himself. I went to the Commandant of the place, and simply reported to him the disappearance of Lieutenant Dutertre.

On the following day, some Arabs coming to Constantine, with their asses laden with vegetables, said that from the road to Philip-