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THE REFUGEES

By **A. CONAN DOYLE**,
Author of "The Return of Sherlock Holmes"

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of blue smoke, and after the first roar there was a deathly silence, which was broken by the patter and thud of falling bodies.

The blow was a heavy one. Of the thirty-six warriors, all picked for their valor, only four regained the shelter of the woods and those so torn and shattered that they were spent men. Already the Indians had lost heavily, and this fresh disaster made them reconsider their plan of attack. Their fire gradually slackened.

"Is it possible that they are going to abandon the attack?" cried De Catinat joyously.

But the wily Du Lhut shook his head. "A wolf would as soon leave a half gnawed bone as an Iroquois such a prize as this."

"But they have lost heavily."

"Aye, but not so heavily as ourselves in proportion to our numbers. They have lost fifty out of a thousand and we twenty out of three score. No, no; they are holding a council, and we shall soon hear from them again. But it may be some hours first, and if you will take my advice you will have an hour's sleep, for you are not, as I can see by your eyes, as used to doing without it as I am."

De Catinat was indeed weary to the last pitch of human endurance. Amos Green and the seaman had already wrapped themselves in their blankets and sunk to sleep under the shelter of the stockade. The soldier rushed upstairs to say a few words of comfort to the trembling Adele, and then, throwing himself down upon a couch, he slept the dreamless sleep of an exhausted man. When at last he was aroused by a fresh sputter of musketry fire from the woods the sun was already low in the heavens, and the mellow light of evening tinged the bare walls of the room. He sprang from his couch, seized his musket and rushed downstairs. The defenders were gathered at their loopholes once more, while Du Lhut, the seigneur and Amos Green were whispering eagerly together.

"What is it, then? Are they coming?" he asked.

"They are up to some devilry," said Du Lhut, peering out at the corner of the embrasure. "They are gathering thickly at the east fringe, and yet the firing comes from the north. It is not the Indian way to attack across the open, and yet, if they think help is coming from the fort, they might venture."

"The wood in front of us is alive with them," said Amos. "They are as busy as beavers among the underwood."

"Perhaps they are going to attack from this side and cover the attack by a fire from the flank."

"That is what I think," cried the seigneur. "Bring the spare guns up here and all the men except five for each side."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a shrill yell rose from the wood, and in an instant a cloud of warriors burst out and charged across the open, howling, springing and waving their guns and tomahawks in the air. Some of those in front bore canoes between them, and as they reached the stockade they planted them against it and swarmed up them as if they had been scaling ladders. Others fired through the embrasures and loopholes, the muzzles of their guns touching those of the defenders, while others again sprang unaided on to the tops of the palisades and jumped fearlessly down upon the inner side. The Canadians fired while they had time to load, and then, clubbing their muskets, they smashed furiously at every red head which showed above the rails.

The din within the stockade was infernal, the shouts and cries of the French, the whooping of the savages and the terrified screaming of the frightened women blending into one dreadful uproar, above which could be heard the high, shrill voice of the old seigneur imploring his censitaires to stand fast. With Du Lhut, Amos, De Catinat and Ephraim Savage, he was ever in the forefront of the defense. So desperately did they fight, the sword and musket butt outreaching the tomahawk, that though at one time fifty Iroquois were over the palisades they had slain or driven back nearly all of them, when a fresh wave burst suddenly over the south face, which had been stripped of its defenders. Du Lhut saw in an instant that the inclosure was lost and that only one thing could save the house.

"Hold them for an instant!" he screamed, and rushing at the brass gun, he struck his flint and steel and fired it straight into the thick of the savages. Then, as they recoiled for an instant, he stuck a nail into the touch-hole and drove it home with a blow from the butt of his gun. Dashing across the yard, he spiked the gun at the other corner and was back at the door as the remnants of the garrison were hurried against it by the rush of the assailants. The Canadians darted in and swung the ponderous mass of wood into position, breaking the leg of the foremost warrior who had striven to follow them. Then for an instant they had time for breathing and for counsel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BUT their case was a very evil one. Had the guns been lost, so that they might be turned upon the door, all further resistance would have been vain, but Du Lhut's presence of mind had saved them from that danger. The two guns upon the river face and the canoes were safe, for they were commanded by the windows of the house. But their numbers were terribly reduced, and those who were left were weary and wounded and spent. Nineteen had gained the house, but one had been shot through the body, while a second had his shoulder cleft by a tomahawk and could no longer raise his musket. Du Lhut, De la Noue and De Catinat were uninjured, but Ephraim Savage had a bullet hole in his forearm and Amos was bleeding from a cut upon the face. A few shots from the barricaded windows sufficed to clear the inclosure, for it was all exposed to their aim, but on the other hand the Indians had the shelter of the stockade now, and from the farther side of it they kept up a fierce fire upon the windows. Half a dozen of the censitaires returned the fusillade, while the leaders consulted as to what had best be done.

"We have twenty-five women and fourteen children," said the seigneur. "I am sure that you will agree with me, gentlemen, that our first duty is toward them. Some of you, like myself, have lost sons or brothers this day. Let us at least save our wives and sisters."

"No Iroquois canoes have passed up the river," said one of the Canadians. "If the women start in the darkness they can get away to the fort."

"By Ste. Anne of Beaupre!" exclaimed Du Lhut, "I think it would be well if you could get your men out of this also, for I cannot see how it is to be held until morning."

"Tut! tut! What nonsense is this!" cried De la Noue. "Are we to abandon the manor house of Ste. Marie to the first gang of savages who choose to make an attack upon it? No, no, gentlemen; there are still nearly a score of us, and when the garrison learns that we are so pressed, which will be by tomorrow morning at the latest, they will certainly send us relief."

"If you stand by the fort I will not desert you," said Du Lhut, "and yet it is a pity to sacrifice brave men for nothing."

"The canoes will hardly hold the women and children as it is," cried Theuriet. "There are but two large and four small. There is not space for a single man."

The Iroquois were very quiet now, and an occasional dropping shot from the trees or the stockade was the only sign of their presence. The twilight was gathering in and the sun had already sunk beneath the treetops. Leaving a watchman at each window, the leaders went round to the back of the house, where the canoes were lying upon the bank. There were no signs of the enemy upon the river to the north of them.

"We are in luck," said Amos. "The clouds are gathering, and there will be little light."

"It is luck, indeed, since the moon is only three days past the full," answered Du Lhut. "I wonder that the Iroquois have not cut us off upon the water, but it is likely that their canoes have gone south to bring up another war party."

"In an hour it might be dark enough to start."

"I think that there is rain in those clouds, and that will make it darker still."

The women and children were assembled, and their places in each boat were assigned to them. To Omega, the Indian wife of the seigneur, who was as wary and as experienced as a war sache of her people, the command of the women was intrusted.

"It is not very far, Adele," said De Catinat. "It is but a league or two."

"But I do not wish to leave you, Amory. We have been together in all our troubles."

"My dear love, you will tell them at the fort how things are with us, and they will bring us help."

"Let the others do that, and I will stay. I will not be useless, Amory. Omega has taught me to load a gun. I will not be afraid, indeed I will not."

"You must not ask it, Adele. It is impossible, child. I could not let you stay. It is for my sake, dear. You do not know what a load it will be from my heart when I know that you are safe. And you need not be afraid for me. We can easily hold the place until morning."

Adele was silent, but her hands tightened upon his arm. Her husband was still endeavoring to reassure her when a groan burst from the watcher in the window which overlooked the stream.

"There is a canoe on the river to the north of us!" he cried.

"How many warriors are in it?" asked the seigneur.

"I cannot see. The light is not very good, and it is in the shadow of the bank."

"Which way is it coming?"

"It's coming this way. Ah, it shoots

out into the open now, and I can see it! May the good Lord be praised!"

"What is it then?" cried De la Noue impatiently.

"It is not an Iroquois canoe. There is but one man in it. He is a Canadian."

"A Canadian!" cried Du Lhut, springing up to the window. "Who but a madman would venture into such a hornets' nest alone? Ah, yes; I can see him now. He keeps well out from the bank to avoid their fire. Now he is in midstream, and he turns toward us."

"It is a Jesuit," said one, craning his neck. "They are everywhere there is most danger."

"No. I can see his capote," said another. "It is a Franciscan friar."

An instant later there was the sound of a canoe grounding upon the pebbles, the door was unbarred, and a man strode in attired in the long, dark gown of the Franciscans. He cast a rapid glance around and then, stepping up to De Catinat, laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"So! You have not escaped me," said he. "We have caught the evil seed before it had time to root."

"What do you mean, father?" asked the seigneur. "You have made some mistake. This is my good friend Amory de Catinat, of a noble French family."

"This is Amory de Catinat, the heretic and Huguenot!" cried the monk. "I have followed him up the St. Lawrence, and I have followed him up the Richelieu, and I would have followed him to the world's end if I could but bring him back with me."

"Tut, father! Your zeal carries you too far," said the seigneur. "Whither would you take my friend, then?"

"He shall go back to France with his wife. There is no place in Canada for heretics."

Du Lhut burst out laughing. "By Ste. Anne, father," said he, "if you could take us all back to France at present we should be very much your debtors."

"And you will remember," said De la Noue sternly, "that you are under my roof and that you are speaking of my guest."

But the friar was not to be abashed. "Look at this," said he, whipping a paper out of his bosom. "It is signed by the governor, and calls upon you, under pain of the king's displeasure, to return this man to Quebec. But I have you now and I shall never leave you until I see you on board of the ship which will carry you and your wife back to France."

De Catinat could but admire the energy and tenacity of the man.

"It seems to me, father, that you would have shone more as a soldier than as a follower of Christ," said he.

"but since you have followed us here and since there is no getting away we may settle this question at some later time."

A great brown cloud had overspread the heavens and the night had fallen so rapidly that they could hardly see the gleam of the river in front of them. The savages in the woods and behind the captured stockade were quiet, save for an occasional shot. Suddenly a dull red glow began to show above one of the roofs of the cottages.

"They have set it on fire!" cried Du Lhut. "The canoes must go at once, for the river will soon be as light as day. In! In! There is not an instant to be lost!"

There was no time for leave taking. One impassioned kiss and Adele was torn away and thrust into the smallest canoe, which she shared with Omega, two children and an unmarried girl. The others rushed into their places, and in a few moments they had pushed off and had vanished into the drift and the darkness. The great cloud had broken and the rain pattered heavily on the roof.

"Thank God for this storm!" murmured Du Lhut. "It will prevent the cottages from blazing up too quickly."

But he had forgotten that, though the roofs might be wet, the interior was as

whole long stretch of the river. A fearful yell from the woods announced that the savages had seen the canoes.

"They are rushing through the woods. They are making for the water's edge," cried De Catinat.

"They have some canoes down there," said Du Lhut.

"But they must pass us," cried the seigneur of Ste. Marie. "Get down to the cannon and see if you cannot stop them."

They had hardly reached the guns when the large canoes filled with warriors shot out from among the reeds below the fort.

"Jean, you are our best shot," cried De la Noue. "Lay for her as she passes the great pine tree. Lambert, do you take the other gun."

The two wrinkled old artillerymen glanced along their guns and waited for the canoes to come a least of them. The fire blazed higher and higher, and the broad river lay like a sheet of dull metal, with the two dark lines which marked the canoes sweeping swiftly down the center. One was fifty yards in front of the other, but in each the Indians were bending to their paddles and pulling frantically, while their comrades from the wooded shores whooped them on to fresh exertions. The fugitives had already disappeared around the bend of the river.

As the first canoe came abreast of the lower of the two guns the Canadian made the sign of the cross over the touchhole and fired. A cheer and then a groan went up from the eager watchers. The charge had struck the surface close to the mark and dashed such a shower of water over it that for an instant it looked as if it had been sunk. The next moment, however, the splash subsided, and the canoe shot away uninjured save that one of the rowers had dropped his paddle, while his head fell forward upon the back of the man in front of him. The second gunner sighted the same canoe as it came abreast of him.

It was a beautiful shot. The whole charge took the canoe about six feet behind the bow and doubled her up like an eggshell. Before the smoke had cleared she had foundered, and the second canoe had paused to pick up some of the wounded men.

"Quick, quick!" cried the seigneur. "Load the gun! We may get the second one yet!"

But it was not to be. Long before they could get it ready the Iroquois had picked up their wounded warriors and were pulling madly downstream. As they shot away the fire died suddenly down in the burning cottages, and the rain and the darkness closed in upon them once more.

"My God!" cried De Catinat furiously. "They will be taken! Let us abandon this place, take a boat and follow them! Come, come! Not an instant is to be lost!"

"I do not think that they will be caught," said Du Lhut, laying his hand soothingly upon his shoulder. "Do not fear. They had a long start, and the women here can paddle as well as the men. Besides, these canoes of the Mohawks are not as swift as the Algonquin birch barks which we use. In any case, it is impossible to follow, for we have no boat."

"There is one lying there."

"Ah, it will but hold a single man. It is that in which the friar came."

"Then I am going in that! My place is with Adele!"

He flung open the door, rushed out and was about to push off the frail skiff when some one sprang past him and with a blow from a hatchet stove in the side of the boat.

"It is my boat," said the friar, throwing down his ax and folding his arms. "I have found you and you shall not escape me again."

The hot blood flushed to the soldier's head, and, picking up the ax, he took a quick step forward. The light from the open door shone upon the grave, harsh face of the friar, but not a muscle twitched nor a feature changed as he saw the ax whirl up in the hands of a furious man. He only signed himself with the cross and muttered a Latin prayer under his breath. It was that composure which saved his life. De Catinat hurled down the ax again with a bitter curse and was turning away from the shattered boat when in an instant, without a warning, the great door of the manor house crashed inward and a flood of whooping savages burst into the house.



"This is Amory de Catinat, the heretic and Huguenot!"

dry as tinder. He had hardly spoken before a great yellow tongue of flame licked out of one of the windows, and again and again, until suddenly half of the roof fell in, and the cottage was blazing like a pitch bucket. The flames hissed and sputtered in the pouring rain; but, fed from below, they grew still higher and fiercer, flashing redly upon the great trees and turning their trunks to burnished brass. Their light made the inclosure and the manor house as clear as day and exposed the

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