

# THE REFUGEES

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

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(Continued from Saturday.)

"ASK HIM, AMOS," said the seaman, "why we are yawing and tacking here when we should be cracking on all sail to stand after them."

Du Lhut smiled and shook his head. "Your friend is a brave man," said he, "if he thinks that with four men we can follow a hundred and fifty."

"Tell him, Amos, that the Lord will bear us up," said the other excitedly. "Say that he will be with us against the children of Jeroboam, and we will cut them off utterly."

But Du Lhut waved aside the seaman's suggestions. "We must have a care now," said he, "or we shall lose our own scalps and be the cause of those at Ste. Marie losing theirs as well."

"Ste. Marie!" cried De Catinat. "Is there, then, danger at Ste. Marie?"

"Aye, they are in the wolf's mouth now. This business was done last night. The place was stormed by a war party of a hundred and fifty men. This morning they left and went north upon foot. They have been cached among the woods all day between Poitou and Ste. Marie."

"Then we have come through them?"

"Yes, we have come through them. They would keep their camp today and send out scouts. Brown Moose and his son were among them and struck our trail. Tonight"—

"Tonight they will attack Ste. Marie!"

"It is possible. And yet with so small a party I should scarce have thought that they would have dared. Well, we can but hasten back as quickly as we can and give them warning of what is hanging over them."

And so they turned for their weary backward journey, though their minds were too full to spare a thought upon the leagues which lay behind them or those which were before.

Dark as it was, Du Lhut walked as swiftly as during the sunlight and never hesitated about the track. His comrades could see, however, that he was taking them a different way from that which they had gone in the morning, for twice they caught a sight of the glimmer of the broad river upon their left, while before they had only seen the streams which flowed into it. On the second occasion he pointed to where on the farther side they could see dark shadows.

"Iroquois canoes," he whispered. "There are ten of them, with eight men in each. They are another party."

"How do you know that they are another party?"

"Because we have crossed the trail of the first within the hour."

De Catinat was filled with amazement at this marvelous man who could hear in his sleep and could detect a trail when the very tree trunks were invisible to ordinary eyes. Du Lhut halted a little to watch the canoes and then turned his back to the river and plunged into the woods once more until they came to the edge of a moonlit clearing. Du Lhut was about to skirt this, as he had done others, when suddenly he caught De Catinat by the shoulder and pushed him down behind a clump of sumac, while Amos did the same with Ephraim Savage.

A man was walking down the other side of the open space. He had just emerged and was crossing it diagonally, making in the direction of the river. His body was bent double, but as he came out from the shadow of the trees they could see that he was an Indian brave in full war paint, with leggings, loin cloth and musket. Close at his heels came a second, and then a third and a fourth, on and on, until it seemed as if the wood was full of men and that the line would never come to an end. Last of all came a man in the fringed tunic of a hunter, with a cap and feather upon his head. He passed across like the others, and they vanished into the shadows. It was five minutes before Du Lhut thought it safe to rise from their shelter.

"By Ste. Anne!" he whispered. "Did you count them?"

"Three hundred and ninety-six," said Amos.

"I made it 402."

"And you thought that there were only a hundred and fifty of them!" cried De Catinat.

"Ah, you do not understand. This is a fresh band. The others who took the blockhouse must be over there, for their trail lies between us and the river. In their camp there are now nearly 600 warriors. Unless we warn them at Ste. Marie these devils will lay some trap for them. Their parties are assembling by land and by water, and there may be a thousand before day-break. We must push on and give our warning."

"They had one who was dressed like a white man," remarked Amos.

"Aye, and the most deadly of the lot. His father was a Dutch trader, his mother an Iroquois, and he goes by the name of the Flemish Bastard. By Ste. Anne, I have a score to settle with him, and I may pay it before this business is over."

families were all about. De Catinat burst through the throng and rushed upstairs to Adele, who had herself flown down to meet him, so that they met in each other's arms. Together, with his arm around her, they ascended to the great hall.

"Ah, monsieur," said the old nobleman, with his courtly bow, "I am indeed rejoiced to see you safe under my roof again, not only for your own sake, but for that of madame. You are doubtless hungry and weary. When you are yourself again, I must claim my revenge in piquet, for the cards lay against me the other night."

But Du Lhut had entered at De Catinat's heels with his tidings of disaster.

"You will have another game to play, M. de Ste. Marie," said he. "There are 600 Iroquois in the woods, and they are preparing to attack."

"Tut, tut! We cannot allow our arrangements to be altered by a handful of savages," said the seigneur. "I must apologize to you, my dear De Catinat, that you should be annoyed by such people while you are upon my estate. Now, when I played piquet last with De Lannes of Poitou—"

"De Lannes of Poitou is dead, and all his people," said Du Lhut. "The blockhouse is a heap of smoking ashes."

The seigneur raised his eyebrows. "I always told him that his fort would be taken unless he cleared away those maple trees which grew up to the very walls. They are all dead, you say?"

"Every man."

"And the fort burned?"

"Not a stick was left standing."

"Have you seen these rascals?"

"We saw the trail of a hundred and fifty. Then there were a hundred in canoes, and a war party of 400 passed us under the Flemish Bastard. Their camp is five miles down the river, and there cannot be less than 600."

"You are fortunate in escaping them."

"But they were not so fortunate in escaping us. We killed Brown Moose and his son."

"Excellent! Excellent!" said the seigneur, clapping gently with his dainty hands. "You have done very well indeed, Du Lhut. You are, I presume, very tired?"

"I am not often tired."

"Then perhaps you would pick a few men and go back into the woods to see what these villains are doing?"

"I shall be ready in five minutes."

"Perhaps you would like to go also, Achille?"

His son's dark eyes and Indian face lit up.

"Yes, I shall go also," he answered.

"Very good. And we shall make all ready in your absence. Madame, you will excuse these little annoyances which mar the pleasure of your visit. Next time that you do me the honor to come here I trust that we shall have cleared all these vermin from my estate. You will excuse me now, as there are one or two things which demand my attention. De Catinat, you are a tried soldier, and I should be glad of your advice."

It was bright daylight now, and the square inclosure within the stockade was filled with an anxious crowd who had just learned the evil tidings. The scouting party under Du Lhut and Achille de la Noue had already left, and at the orders of the seigneur the two gates were now secured with huge bars of oak fitted into iron staples on either side. The children were placed in the lower storeroom with a few women to watch them, while the others were told off to attend to the fire buckets and to reload the muskets. The men had been paraded, fifty-two of them in all, and they were divided into parties now for the defense of each part of the stockade. On one side it had been built up to within a few yards of the river, which not only relieved them from the defense of that face, but enabled them to get fresh water by throwing a bucket at the end of a rope from the stockade. The boats and canoes of Ste. Marie were drawn up on the bank just under the wall and were precious now as offering a last means of escape should all else fail. The next fort, St. Louis, was but a few leagues up the river, and De la Noue had already sent a swift messenger to them with news of the danger. At least it would be a point on which they might retreat should the worst come to the worst.

And that the worst might come to the worst was very evident to so experienced a woodsman as Amos Green. He had left Ephraim Savage snoring in a deep sleep upon the floor and was now walking round the defenses with his pipe in his mouth, examining with a critical eye every detail in connection with them. The stockade was very strong, nine feet high and closely built of oak stakes, which were thick enough to turn a bullet. Halfway up it was loopholed in long, narrow slits for the fire of the defenders. But, on the other hand, the trees grew so thick in a hundred yards of it and formed a screen for the attack, while the garrison was so scanty that it could not spare more than twenty men at the utmost for each face. His face darkened as he thought of the young wife

who had come so far in their safe keeping and of the women and children whom he had seen crowding into the fort.

"Would it not be better if you could send them up the river?" he suggested to the seigneur.

"I should very gladly do so, monsieur, and perhaps, if we are all alive, we may manage it tonight if the weather should be cloudy, but I cannot spare the men to guard them and I cannot send them without a guard when we know that Iroquois canoes are on the river."

"You are right. It would be madness."

"I have stationed you on the eastern face with your friends and with fifteen men. M. de Catinat, will you command the party?"

"Willingly."

"I will take the south face, as it seems to be the point of danger. Du Lhut can take the north, and five men should be enough to watch the river side."

"Have we food and powder?"

"I have flour and smoked eels enough to see this matter through. As to powder, we have all our trading stores to draw upon."

"We have not time to clear any of these trees?" asked the soldier.

"Impossible. They would make better cover down."

"But at least I might clear that patch of brushwood round the birch sapling which lies between the east face and the edge of the forest. It is good cover for their skirmishers."

"Yes; that should be fired without delay."

"Nay; I think that I might do better," said Amos. "We might bait a trap for them there. Where is this powder of which you spoke?"

"Theuriet, the major domo, is giving out powder in the main storehouse."

"Very good." Amos vanished upstairs and returned with a large linen bag in his hand. This he filled with powder, and then, slinging it over his shoulder, he carried it out to the clump of bushes and placed it at the base of the sapling, cutting a strip out of the bark immediately above the spot. Then with a few leafy branches and fallen leaves he covered the powder bag very carefully over, so that it looked like a little hillock of earth. Having arranged all to his satisfaction, he returned.

"I think that we are all ready for them now," said the seigneur. "I would that the women and children were in a safe place. Has any one heard anything of Du Lhut?"

"Jean has the best ears of any of us, your excellency," said one man from beside the brass cannon. "He thought that he heard shots a few minutes ago."

"Then he has come into touch of them. Etienne, take ten men and go to the withered oak to cover them if they are retreating, but do not go another yard on any pretext. I am too short handed already. Perhaps, De Catinat, you wish to sleep?"

"No; I could not sleep."

"We can do no more down here. What do you say to a round or two of piquet?"

They ascended to the upper hall, where Adele came and sat by her husband, while the swarthy Omega crouched by the window, looking keenly out into the forest.

"Men are rushing from the woods!" cried Omega.

"Tut! It grows serious!" said the nobleman. "We can finish the game later. Remember that the deal lies with you. Let us see what it all means."

De Catinat had already rushed to the window. Du Lhut, young Achille de la Noue and eight of the covering party were running with their heads bent toward the stockade, the door of which had been opened to admit them. Here and there from behind the trees came little blue puffs of smoke. As the gate swung into place behind the little party the brass cannon at the corner gave a flash and a roar, while the whole outline of the wood was traced in a rolling cloud, and the shower of bullets rapped up against the wooden wall like hail upon a casement.

Having left Adele to the care of her Indian hostess and warned her for her life to keep from the windows, De Catinat seized his musket and rushed downstairs. As he passed, a bullet came piping through one of the narrow embrasures and started itself in a little blotch of lead upon the opposite wall. The seigneur had already descended and was conversing with Du Lhut beside the door.

"A thousand of them, you say?"

"Yes; we came on a fresh trail of a large war party—300 at the least. They are all Mohawks and Cayugas, with a sprinkling of Oneidas. We had a running fight for a few miles, and we have lost five men. We had best have all ready to retire to the house if they carry the stockade. We can scarce hope to hold it when they are twenty to one."

"All is ready."

"And with our cannon we can keep their canoes from passing, so we might send our women away tonight."

"I had intended to do so. Will you take charge of the north side? You might come across to me with ten of your men now."

The firing came in one continuous rattle now from the edge of the wood, and the air was full of bullets. The assailants were all trained shots, men who had lived by their guns and to whom a shaking hand or a dim eye meant poverty and hunger. On the other hand, the defenders were also skilled in Indian fighting and wise in every trick and lure which could protect themselves or tempt their enemies to show. They kept well to the sides of the loopholes, watching through little crevices of the wood and firing swiftly when a chance offered. A red

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CHAPTER XXII.  
DAY was just breaking as the four comrades entered the gate of the stockade, but early as it was the constables and their

(To Be Continued.)