

THE REFUGEES

By A. CONAN DOYLE,
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CHAPTER I.

IT was the sort of window which was common in Paris about the end of the seventeenth century.

Inside the window was furnished with a broad bancal of brown stamped Spanish leather, where the family might recline and have an eye from behind the curtains on all that was going forward in the busy world beneath them. Two of them sat there, a man and a woman, but their backs were turned to the spectacle and their faces to the large and richly furnished room. From time to time they stole a glance at each other, and their eyes told that they needed no other sign to make them wary.

Nor was it to be wondered at, for they were a well favored pair. She was very young, twenty at the most, with a face which was pale, indeed, and yet of a brilliant pallor, which was so clear and fresh and carried with it such a suggestion of purity and innocence that one would not wish its maiden grace to be marred by an intrusion of color. In her whole expression there was something quiet and subdued, which was accentuated by her simple dress of black taffeta. Such was Adele Catinat, the only daughter of the famous Huguenot cloth merchant.

But if her dress was somber it was atoned for by the magnificence of her companion. He was a man who might have been ten years her senior, with a keen soldier face, small well marked features, a carefully trimmed black mustache and a dark hazel eye which might harden to command a man or soften to supplicate a woman and be successful at either. Any Frenchman would have recognized his uniform as being that of an officer in the famous Blue Guard of Louis XIV. A trim, dashing soldier he looked, with his curling black hair and well poised head. Such he had proved himself before now in the field, too, until the name of Amory de Catinat had become conspicuous among the thousands of the valiant lesser nobles who had flocked into the service of the king.

They were first cousins, these two, and there was just sufficient resemblance in the clear cut features to recall the relationship. De Catinat was sprung from a noble Huguenot family, but, having lost his parents early, he had joined the army and had worked his way without influence and against all odds to his present position. His father's younger brother, however, finding every path to fortune barred to him through the persecution to which men of his faith were already subjected, had dropped the "de" which implied his noble descent and had taken to trade in the city of Paris, with such success that he was now one of the richest and most prominent citizens of the town.

"Tell me, Adele," said he, "why do you look troubled?"

"You leave me this evening."

"But only to return tomorrow."

"And must you really, really go to-night?"

"It would be as much as my commission is worth to be absent. Why, I am on duty tomorrow morning outside the king's bedroom! After chapel time Major de Brissac will take my place, and then I am free once more. But still that line upon your brow, dear-est."

"I was wishing that father would re- turn."

"And why? Are you so lonely, then?"

Her pale face lit up with a quick smile. "I shall not be lonely until to- night. But I am always uneasy when he is away. One hears so much now of the persecution of our poor brethren."

"Tut, my uncle can defy them."

"He has gone to the provost of the Mercer guild about this notice of the quartering of the dragons."

"Ah, you have not told me of that."

"Here it is." She rose and took up a slip of blue paper with a red seal dangling from it which lay upon the table. His strong black brows knitted together as he glanced at it.

"Take notice," it ran, "that you, Theophile Catinat, cloth mercer of the Rue St. Martin, are hereby required to give shelter and rations to twenty men of the Languedoc Blue dragons, under Captain Dalbert, until such time as you receive a further notice. [Signed] De Beaupre, commissioner of the king."

De Catinat knew well how this method of annoying Huguenots had been practiced all over France, but he had flattered himself that his own position at court would have insured his kinsman from such an outrage. He threw the paper down with an exclamation of anger.

"When do they come?"

"Father said tonight."

"Then they shall not be here long. Tomorrow I shall have an order to re- move them. But the sun has sunk behind St. Martin's church, and I should already be upon my way."

"No, no; you must not go yet."

"I would that I could give you into your father's charge first, for I fear to leave you alone when these troopers may come. And yet no excuse will avail me if I am not at Versailles. But see; a horseman has stopped before the door. He is not in uniform. Perhaps he is a messenger."

The girl ran eagerly to the window and peered out.

"Ah!" she cried. "I had forgotten. It is the man from America. Father said that he would come today."

"The man from America?" repeated the soldier in a tone of surprise, and they both craned their necks from the window.

The horseman, a sturdy, broad shouldered young man, clean shaven and crop haired, turned his long, swarthy face and his bold features in their direction as he ran his eye over the front of the house. He had a soft brimmed gray hat of a shape which was strange to Parisian eyes, but his somber clothes and high boots were such as any citizen might have worn. Yet his general appearance was so unusual that a group of townsfolk had already assem- bled round him, staring with open mouth at his horse and himself. A battered gun with an extremely long

barrel was fastened by the stock to his stirrup, while the muzzle stuck up into the air behind him. The rider, having satisfied himself as to the house, sprang lightly out of his saddle and, disengaging his gun, pushed his way unconcernedly through the gaping crowd and knocked loudly at the door.

"Who is he, then?" asked De Catinat.

"A Canadian? I am almost one myself. I had as many friends on one side of the sea as on the other."

"Nay, he is from the English provinces, Amory. But he speaks our tongue. His mother was of our blood."

"And his name?"

"Is Amos—Amos—ah, those names! Yes, Green, that was it, Amos Green. His father and mine have done much trade together, and now his son, who, as I understand, has lived ever in the woods, is sent here to see something of men and cities."

The stranger entered and, having bowed to Adele, said to her companion, "Do I speak with my father's friend, M. Catinat?"

"No, monsieur," said the guardsman from the staircase, "my uncle is out, but I am Captain de Catinat, at your service, and here is Mlle. Catinat, who is your hostess."

"I am sorry my father is not here to welcome you, monsieur," she said; "but I do so very heartily in his place. Your room is above. Pierre will show it to you, if you wish."

"My room? For what?"

"Why, monsieur, to sleep in."

"And must I sleep in a room?"

De Catinat laughed at the gloomy face of the American. "You shall not sleep there if you do not wish," said he.

The other brightened at once, and stepped across to the farther window, which looked down upon the courtyard.

"Ah!" he cried. There is a beech tree there, mademoiselle, and if I might take my blanket out yonder I should like it better than any room."

"You are not from a town, then?" said De Catinat.

"My father lives in New York, two doors from the house of Peter Stuyvesant, of whom you must have heard. He is a very hardy man and he can do it, but I—even a few days of Albany or Schenectady are enough for me. My life has been in the woods."

"I am sure that my father would wish you to sleep where you like and to do what you like."

"I thank you, mademoiselle. Then I shall take my things out there, and I shall groom my horse."

"I will come with you," said De Catinat, "for I would have a word with you. Until tomorrow, then, Adele, fare- well!"

The two young men passed down- stairs together, and the guardsman fol- lowed the American out into the yard.

"You have had a long journey," he said. "Are you tired?"

"No; I am seldom tired."

"Remain with the lady, then, until her father comes back. I have to go, and she might need a protector."

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CHAPTER II.

IT was the morning after the guardsman had returned to his duties. Eight o'clock had struck on the great clock of Versailles, and it was almost time for the monarch to rise. Servants, with clothes thrown over their arms, bustled down the passage which led to the ante- chamber. The young officer, who had been looking wistfully out of the window at some courtiers who were laugh- ing and chatting on the terraces, turned sharply upon his heel and strode over to the white and gold door of the royal bedroom.

He had hardly taken his stand there before the handle was very gently turned from within, the door revolved noiselessly upon its hinges and a man slid silently through the aperture, closing it again behind him.

"Hush!" said he, with his finger to his thin, precise lips, while his whole clean shaven face and high arched brows were an entreaty and a warning. "The king still sleeps."

The words were whispered from one to another among the group who had assembled outside the door. The speak- er, who was M. Bontems, head valet-de- chambre, gave a sign to the officer of the guard and led him into the window alcove from which he had lately come.

"Good morning, Captain de Catinat. Who commands at the main guard?"

"Major de Brissac."

"And you will be here?"

"For four hours I attend the king."

"Very good. He gave me some in- struction for the officer of the guard. He bade me to say that M. de Vivonne was not to be admitted to the grand lever. You are to tell him so."

"I shall do so."

"Then, should a note come from her—you understand me, the new one?"

"Mme. de Maintenon?"

"Precisely. But it is more discreet not to mention names. Should she send a note, you will take it and deliver it quietly when the king gives you an opportunity."

"It shall be done."

"But if the other should come, as is possible enough—the other, you under- stand me, the former?"

"Mme. de Montespan."

"Ah, that soldierly tongue of yours, captain! Should she come, I say, you will gently bar her way, with courteous words, you understand, but on no ac- count is she to be permitted to enter the royal room."

"Very good, Bontems."

"And now we have but three min- utes." He strode through the rapidly increasing group of people in the cor- ridor with an air of proud humility, as befitted a man who, if he was a valet, was at least the king of valets by be- ing the valet of the king. Close by the door stood a line of footmen resplend- ent in their powdered wigs, red plush coats and silver shoulder knots. He turned the handle once more and slipped into the darkened room.

It was a large, square apartment, with two high windows upon the fur- ther side, curtained across with price- less velvet hangings. In one corner a narrow couch with a rug thrown across it showed where the faithful Bontems had spent the night.

In the very center of the chamber there stood a large four post bed, with curtains of Gobelin tapestry looped back from the pillow. A square of polished mahogany table, leaving a space some five feet in width all round between the inclosure and the bedside.

As Bontems passed noiselessly across the room, his feet sinking into the mosslike carpet, there was the heavy, close smell of sleep in the air, and he could hear the long, thin breathing of the sleeper. He passed through the opening in the rails and stood, watch in hand, waiting for the exact instant when the iron routine of the court de- manded that the monarch should be roused. Beneath him, from under the costly green coverlet of oriental silk, half buried in the fluffy valenciennes lace which edged the pillow, there pro- truded a round black bristle of close cropped hair, with the profile of a curv- ing nose and petulant lip outlined against the white background. The valet snapped his watch and bent over the sleeper.

"I have the honor to inform your majesty that it is half past 8," said he.

"Ah!" The king slowly opened his large dark brown eyes, made the sign of the cross and kissed a little dark reliquary which he drew from under his nightdress. Then he sat up in bed.

"Did you give my orders to the officer of the guard, Bontems?" he asked.

"Yes, sire."

"Who is on duty?"

"Major de Brissac at the main guard and Captain de Catinat in the cor- ridor."

"De Catinat! Ah, the young man who stopped my horse at Fontainebleau. I remember him. You may give the sig- nal, Bontems."

The chief valet walked swiftly across to the door and threw it open. In rushed the officer of the ovens and the four red coated, white wigged foot- men, ready handed, silent footed, each intent upon his own duties. The one seized upon Bontems' rug and couch and in an instant had whipped them off into an antechamber, another had carried away the silver taper stand, while a third drew back the great cur- tains of stamped velvet and led a flood of light into the apartment.

They were hardly gone before a more august group entered the bedchamber. Two walked together in front, the one a youth little over twenty years of age, middle sized, inclining to stoutness, with a slow, pompous bearing, a well turned leg and a face which was com- pletely enough in a masklike fashion, but which was devoid of any shadow of expression except perhaps of an occa- sional lurking gleam of mischievous humor. His companion was a man of forty, swarthy, dignified and solemn. As the pair faced the king there was sufficient resemblance between the

three faces to show that they were of one blood and to enable a stranger to guess that the older was monsieur, the younger brother of the king, while the other was Louis the Dauphin, his only legitimate child.

Behind the king's son and the king's brother there entered a little group of notables and of officials whom duty had called to this daily ceremony. There were the grand master of the robes, the first lord of the bedchamber, the Duc du Maine, a pale youth clad in black velvet, limping heavily with his left leg, and his little brother, the young Comte de Toulouse, both of them the illegitimate sons of Mme. de Montespan and the king. Such were the partak- ers in the family entry, the highest honor which the court of France could aspire to.

Bontems had poured on the king's hands a few drops of spirits of wine, catching them again in a silver dish; and the first lord of the bedchamber had presented the bowl of holy water, with which he made the sign of the cross, muttering to himself the short office of the Holy Ghost. Then, with a nod to his brother and a short word of greeting to the Dauphin and to the Duc du Maine, he swung his legs over the side of the bed and sat, in his long silken nightdress, his little white feet dangling from beneath it, a perilous position for any man to assume were it not that he had so heartfelt a sense of his own dignity that he could not realize that under any circumstances it might be compromised in the eyes of others. So he sat, the master of France and yet the slave to every puff of wind, for a wandering draft had set him shiv- ering and shaking. M. de St. Quentin, the noble barber, flung a purple dress- ing gown over the royal shoulders and placed a long, many curled court wig upon his head, while Bontems drew on his red stockings and laid before him his slippers of embroidered velvet. The monarch thrust his feet into them, tied his dressing gown and passed out to the fireplace, where he settled himself down in his easy chair, holding out his thin, delicate hands toward the blazing logs, while the others stood round in a semicircle, waiting for the grand lever which was to follow.

M. de St. Quentin, is this not our shaving morning?" said the king.

"Yes, sire; all is ready."

"Then why not proceed? It is three minutes after the accustomed time. To work, sir; and you, Bontems, give word for the grand lever."

It was obvious that the king was not in a very good humor that morning. He darted little quick questioning glances at his brother and at his sons, but whatever complaint or sarcasm may have trembled upon his lips was effectually stifled by De St. Quentin's ministrations. With the nonchalance born of long custom, the official covered the royal chin with soap, drew the razor swiftly round it and sponged over the surface with spirits of wine. A nobleman then helped to draw on the king's black velvet haut-de-chausses, a second assisted in arranging them, while a third drew the nightgown over the shoulders and handed the royal shirt, which had been warming before the fire. His diamond buckled shoes, his garters and his scarlet inner vest were successively fastened by noble courtiers, each keenly jealous of his own privilege, and over the vest was placed the blue ribbon with the cross of the Holy Ghost in diamonds, and that of St. Louis tied with red. The black undercoat was drawn on, the cravat of rich lace adjusted, the loose overcoat secured, two handkerchiefs of costly point carried forward upon an enameled saucer and thrust by separate officials into each side pocket, the silver and ebony cane laid to hand, and the monarch was ready for the labors of the day.

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