

THE REFUGEES

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

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(Continued from Friday.)

"Where can you detain them?"
"I have thought of that. There is the castle of the Marquis de Montefluo at Portiflac."
"Of my husband—of my most bitter enemy! Oh, Charles, you are not serious."
"On the contrary, I was never more so. The marquis was away in Paris



"This will be our key."

Yesterday and has not yet returned. Where is the ring with his arms?"
She hunted among her jewels and picked out a gold ring with a broad engraved face.
"This will be our key. When good farceau, the steward, sees it, every unguion in the castle will be at our disposal. It is that or nothing. There is no other place where we can hold them safe."
"But when my husband returns?"
"Ah, he may be a little puzzled as to his captives. And the complaisant farceau may have an evil quarter of an hour. But that may not be for a week, and by that time, my little sister, I have confidence enough in you to think that you really may have finished the campaign." He took her fondly in his arms, kissed her and then hurried from the room.
For hours after his departure she paced up and down with noiseless steps upon the deep, soft carpet, her hands still clenched, her eyes flaming, her whole soul wrapped and consumed with jealousy and hatred of her rival.
Ten struck, and 11, and midnight, but still she waited, fierce and eager, straining her ears for every footfall which might be the herald of news. At last it came. She heard the quick step in the passage, the tap at the anteroom door and the whispering of her page. Quivering with impatience, she rushed in and took the note herself from the dusty cavalier who had brought it. It was but six words scrawled roughly upon a wisp of dirty paper. It was her brother's writing, and it ran, "The archbishop will not come tonight."

CHAPTER XI.

DE CATINAT in the meanwhile was perfectly aware of the importance of the mission which had been assigned to him. He knew enough of the intrigues and antagonisms with which the court was full to understand that every precaution was necessary in carrying out his instructions. He waited, therefore, until night had fallen before ordering his soldier-servant to bring round the two horses to one of the less public gates of the grounds. As he and his friend walked together to the spot he gave the young American a rapid sketch of the situation at the court and of the chance that this nocturnal ride might be an event which would affect the future history of France.
"Are you armed?" he asked. "You have no sword or pistols?"
"No; if I may not carry my gun I had rather not be troubled by tools that I have never learned to use. I have my knife. But why do you ask?"
"Because there may be danger. Many have an interest in stopping this marriage. All the first men of the kingdom are bitterly against it. If they could stop us, they would stop it, for tonight at least."
"But I thought it was secret."
"There is no such thing as a court. There is the dauphin or the king's brother. Either of them or any of their friends would be right glad that we should be in the Seine before we reached the archbishop's house this night. But who is this?"
A burly figure had loomed up through the gloom on the path upon which they were going. As it approached, a colored lamp dangling from one of the trees above upon the blue and silver of an officer of the guards. It was Major de Brisac of De Catinat's own regiment.
"Hello! Whither away?" he asked.
"To Paris, major."

"I go there myself within an hour. Will you not wait, that we may go together?"
"I am sorry, but I ride on a matter of urgency."
"Very good. Good night, and a pleasant ride."
"Is he a trusty man, our friend the major?" asked Amos Green, glancing back.
"True as steel."
"Then I would have a word with him." The American hurried back along the way they had come, while De Catinat stood chafing at this unnecessary delay. It was a full five minutes before his companion joined him, and the fiery blood of the French soldier was hot with impatience.
"I think that perhaps you had best ride into Paris at your leisure, my friend," said he. "If I go upon the king's service I cannot be delayed whenever the whim takes you."
"I am sorry," answered the other quietly. "I had something to say to your major, and I thought that maybe I might not see him again."
"Well, here are the horses," said the guardsman as he pushed open the postern gate. "Have you fed and watered them, Jaques?"
"Yes, my captain," answered the man.
"Boot and saddle, then, friend Green, and we shall not draw rein again until we see the lights of Paris."
For a mile or more the comrades galloped along. The road was very dark, and it was hard but for the loom upon either side to tell where it lay. De Catinat at least found it so, and he peered anxiously over his horse's ears and stooped his face to the mane in his efforts to see his way.
"What do you make of the road?" he asked at last.
"It looks as if a good many carriage wheels had passed over it today."
"What! Mon Dieu! Do you mean to say that you can see carriage wheels there?"
"Certainly. Why not?"
"Why, man, I cannot see the road at all."
Amos Green laughed heartily. "When you have traveled in the woods by night as often as I have," said he, "when to show a light may mean to lose your hair, one comes to learn to use one's eyes."
"Then you had best ride on, and I shall keep just behind you. So! Hola! What is the matter now?"
There had been the sudden sharp snap of something breaking, and the American had reeled for an instant in the saddle.
"It's one of my stirrup leathers. It has fallen."
"Can you find it?"
"Yes, but I can ride as well without it. Let us push on."
"Very good. I can just see you now."
They had galloped for about five minutes in this fashion, De Catinat's horse's head within a few feet of the other's tail, when there was a second snap, and the guardsman rolled out of the saddle on to the ground. He kept his grip of the reins, however, and was up in an instant at his horse's head.
"A thousand thunders of heaven!" he cried. "What was it that happened then?"
"Your leather has gone too."
"Two stirrup leathers in five minutes?"
"It is not possible that it should be chance," said the American gravely, swinging himself off his horse. "Why, what is this? My other leather is cut."
"And so is mine. I can feel it when I pass my hand along. Have you a tinder box? Let us strike a light."
"No, no; the man who is in the dark is in safety. I let my enemy strike lights."
"My rein is cut also."
"And so is mine."
"And the girth of my saddle."
"It is a wonder that we came so far with whole bones. Now, who has played us this little trick?"
"Who could it be but that rogue Jaques? He has had the horses in his charge. By my faith, he shall know what the strappado means when I see Versailles again!"
"But why should he do it?"
"Ah, he has been set on to it. He has been a tool in the hands of those who wished to hinder our journey."
"Very like. But they must have had some reason behind. They knew well that to cut our straps would not prevent us from reaching Paris, since we could ride bareback or, for that matter, could run it if need be."
"They hoped to break our necks."
"One neck they might break, but scarce those of two. They could not have thought to stop us. What did they mean, then? They could only have meant to delay us. And why should they wish to delay us?"
"For heaven's sake"—broke in De Catinat impetuously.
"Why should they wish to delay us, then? There's only one reason that I can see—in order to give other folk time to get in front of us and stop us. That is it, captain. I'd lay you a beaver skin to a rabbit pelt that I'm on the track. There's been a party of a dozen horsemen along this ground

(To Be Continued.)

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