

THE REFUGEES

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

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(Continued from Sunday.)

several pairs of hands were already unbuckling the harness of the dead horse when De Vivonne pushed his way into the little group.

"It is as much as your lives are worth to touch him," said he.

"But he has slain Etienne Arnaud."

"That score may be settled afterward. Tonight he is the king's messenger. Is the other all safe?"

"Yes, he is here."

"Tie this man and put him in beside him. Unbuckle the traces of the dead horse. So! Now, De Carnac, put your own into the harness. You can mount the box and drive, for we have not very far to go."

The changes were rapidly made. Amos Green was thrust in beside De Catinat, and the carriage was soon toiling up the steep incline which it had come down so precipitately. The American had said not a word since his capture and had remained absolutely stolid, with his hands crossed over his chest while his fate was under discussion. Now that he was alone once more with his comrade, however, he frowned and muttered.

"Those infernal horses!" he grumbled. "Why, an American horse would have taken to the water like a duck. Once over the river, we should have had a clear lead to Paris."

"My dear friend," cried De Catinat, laying his manacled hands upon those of his comrade, "how nobly you have stood by me! But how came you here? Never in my life have I been so astonished as when I saw your face."

Amos Green chuckled to himself. "I thought that maybe it would be a surprise to you if you knew who was driving you," said he. "When I was thrown from my horse I lay quiet, partly because it seemed to me to be more healthy to lie than to stand with all those swords clinking in my ears. Then they all got round you, and I rolled into the ditch, crept along it, got on the crossroad in the shadow of the trees and was beside the carriage before ever they knew that I was gone. I saw in a flash that there was only one way by which I could be of use to you. The coachman was leaning round, with his head turned, to see what was going on behind him. I out with my knife, sprang up on the front wheel and stopped his tongue."

"And then?"

"I pulled him down into the ditch, and I got into his coat and his hat. I had hardly got the reins before they were all back and bundled you into the coach. I was not afraid of their seeing me, but I was scared lest I should not know which road to take, and so set them on the trail. But they made it easy to me by sending some of their riders in front, so I did well until I saw that by-track and made a run for it."

The guardsman again pressed his comrade's hands. "You have been as true to me as hit to blade," said he. "It was a bold thought and a bold deed."

"And what now?" asked the American.

"I do not know who these men are, and I do not know whether they are taking us. I fancy that they are taking us to some place where they can shut us up until this business blows over."

"Well, they'll need to be smart about it."

"Why?"

"Else maybe they won't find us when they want us."

"What do you mean?"

For answer the American, with a twist and a wriggle, drew his two hands apart and held them in front of his comrade's face.

"Bless you, it's the first thing they teach the papooses in an Indian wigwam! Put your hands out." With a few dexterous twists he loosened De Catinat's bonds until he also was able to slip his hands free. "Now for your feet, if you'll put them up. They'll find that we are easier to catch than to hold."

But at that moment the carriage began to slow down, and the clank of the hoofs of the riders in front of them died suddenly away. Peeping through the windows, the prisoners saw a huge, dark building stretching in front of them, so high and so broad that the night shrouded it in upon every side. A great archway hung above them, and the lamps shone on the rude wooden gate studded with ponderous clamps and nails. In the upper part of the door was a small square iron grating, and through this they could catch a glimpse of the gleam of a lantern and of a bearded face which looked out at them. De Vivonne, standing in his stirrups, craned his head up toward the grating, so that the two men most interested could hear little of the conversation which followed. They saw only that the horseman held a gold ring up in the air and that the face above, which had begun by shaking and frowning, was now nodding and smiling. An instant later the head disappeared, the door swung open upon screaming hinges, and the carriage drove on into the courtyard beyond, leaving the escort, with the exception of De Vivonne, outside. As the horses pulled up, a knot of rough fellows clus-

tered round, and the two prisoners were dragged roughly out. In the light of the torches which flared around them they could see that they were hemmed in by high turreted walls upon every side. A bulky man with a bearded face, the same whom they had seen at the grating, was standing in the center of the group of armed men issuing his orders.

"To the upper dungeon, Simon!" he cried. "And see that they have two bundles of straw and a loaf of bread until we learn our master's will."

"I know not who your master may be," said De Catinat, "but I would ask you by what warrant he dares to stop two messengers of the king while traveling in his service?"

"By St. Denis, if my master play the king a trick, it will be tie and tie," the stout man answered, with a grin. "But no more talk! Away with them, Simon, and you answer to me for their safe keeping."

It was in vain that De Catinat raved and threatened, invoking the most terrible menaces upon all who were concerned in detaining him. Two stout knaves thrusting him from behind and one dragging in front forced him through a narrow gate and along a stone flagged passage. They made their way down three successive corridors and through three doors, each of which was locked and barred behind them. Then they ascended a winding stone stair, and finally they were thrust into a small square dungeon, and two trusses of straw were thrown in after them. An instant later a heavy key turned in the lock, and they were left to their own meditations.

Very grim and dark those meditations were in the case of De Catinat. A stroke of good luck had made him at court, and now this other of ill fortune had destroyed him. There were his people in Paris, too—his sweet Adele, his old uncle, who had been as good as a father to him. What protector would they have in their troubles now that he had lost the power that might have shielded them?

But his energetic comrade had yielded to no feeling of despondency. The instant that the clang of the prison door had assured him that he was safe from interruption he had felt all round the walls and flooring to see what manner of place this might be. His search had ended in the discovery of a small fireplace at one corner and of two great clumsy billets of wood, which seemed to have been left there to serve as pillows for the prisoners. Having satisfied himself that the chimney was so small that it was utterly impossible to pass even his head up it, he drew the two blocks of wood over to the window and was able by placing one above the other and standing on tiptoe on the highest to reach the bars which guarded it. Drawing himself up and fixing one toe in an inequality of the wall, he managed to look out on to the courtyard which they had just quitted. The carriage and De Vivonne were passing out through the gate as he looked, and he heard a moment later the slam of the heavy door and the clatter of hoofs from the troop of horsemen outside. The seneschal and his retainers had disappeared; the torches, too, were gone, and, save for the measured tread of a pair of sentinels in the yard twenty feet beneath him, all was silent throughout the great castle.

The window was large enough to pass his body through if it were not for those bars. He shook them and hung his weight upon them, but they were as thick as his thumb and firmly welded; then, getting some strong held for his other foot, he supported himself by one hand, while he picked with his knife at the setting of the iron. It was cement, as smooth as glass and as hard as marble. His knife turned when he tried to loosen it. But there was still the stone. It was sandstone, not so very hard. If he could cut grooves in it he might be able to draw out bars, cement and all. He sprang down to the floor again and was thinking how he should best set to work when a groan drew his attention to his companion.

"Something on your mind?" said Amos Green, sitting down upon his billets of wood. "What was it, then?"

The guardsman here made a movement of impatience. "What was it? How can you ask me when you know as well as I do the wretched failure of my mission? It was the king's wish that the archbishop should marry them. The archbishop should marry them. The archbishop should marry them. The archbishop should marry them. Ah, I can see the king's cabinet, I can see him waiting, I can see madame waiting, I can hear them speak of the unhappy De Catinat!"

"I see all that," said the American stolidly, "and I see something more."

"What then?"

"I see the archbishop trying them up together."

"He could not be at the palace."

"On the contrary, he reached the palace about half an hour ago."

De Catinat sprang to his feet. At the palace! he screamed. "Then who gave him the message?"

"I did," said Amos Green.

"If the American had expected to surprise or delight his companion by this curt announcement he was woefully

misguided, for De Catinat approached him with a face which was full of sympathy and trouble.

"My dear friend," said he, "I have been selfish and thoughtless. That fall from your horse has shaken you more than you think. Lie down upon this straw and see if a little sleep may not—"

"I tell you that the bishop is there!" cried Amos Green.

"He is, he is," said De Catinat soothingly. "He is most certainly there. I trust that you have no pain?"

The American raved in the air with his knotted fists. "You think that I'm crazed," he cried, "and, by the eternal, you are enough to make me so! When I say that I sent the bishop I mean that I stepped back to your friend the major?"

It was the soldier's turn to grow excited now. "Well?" he cried, gripping the other's arm.

"Well, when we send a scout into the woods, if the matter is worth it, we send a second one at another hour, and so one or other comes back with his hair on. That's the troquois fashion, and a good fashion too."

"My God, I believe that you have saved me!"

"I went back to the major then, and I asked him when he was in Paris to pass by the archbishop's door. I showed him this lump of chalk. If we've been there, said I, 'you'll see a great cross on the left side of the doorpost. If there's no cross, then pull the latch and ask the bishop if he'll come up to the palace as quick as his horses can bring him.' The major started an hour after us. He would be in Paris by half past 10; the bishop would be in his carriage half an hour ago—that is to say, about half past 12. By the Lord, I think I've driven him off his head!"

De Catinat spun round the cell now, waving his arms and his legs, with his shadow capering up the wall behind him, all distorted in the moonlight.

"Oh, if I could but do something for you!" he exclaimed.

"You can, then. Lie down on that straw and go to sleep."

By persuasions and a little pushing he got his delighted companion on to his couch again and heaped the straw over him to serve as a blanket.

So weary was the young guardsman that it was long past noon and the sun was shining out of a cloudless blue sky before he awoke. For a moment, enveloped as he was in straw, and with the rude arch of the dungeon meeting in four rough hewn gronings above his head, he stared about him in bewilderment. Then in an instant the doings of the day before, his mission, the ambuscade, his imprisonment,

all flashed back to him, and he sprang to his feet. His comrade, who had been dozing in the corner, jumped up also at the first movement, with his hand on his knife and a sinister glance directed toward the door.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said he. "I thought it was the man. They brought those two loaves and a jug of water just about dawn, when I was settling down for a rest."

"And did he say anything?"

"No; it was the little black one."

"Simon, they called him."

"The same. He laid the things down and was gone. I thought that maybe if he came again we might get him to stop. Maybe if we got these strapp leathers round his ankles he would tell us where we are and what is to be done with us."

"Pshaw! What does it matter since our mission is done?"

"It may not matter to you—there's no accounting for tastes—but it matters a good deal to me. I'm not used to sitting in a hole, like a bear in a trap, waiting for what other folks choose to do with me."

"There's no help but patience, my friend."

"I don't know that. I'd get more help out of a bar and a few pegs." He opened his coat and took out a short piece of rusted iron and three small, thick pieces of wood, sharpened at one end.

"Where did you get those, then?"

"These are my night's work. The bar is the top one of the grate. I had a job to loosen it, but there it is. The pegs I whittled out of that log. You see, peg number one goes in here, where I have picked a hole between the stones. Then I've made this other log into a mallet, and with two crackers there it is firm fixed so that you can put your weight on it. Now these two go in the same way into the holes above here. So! Now, you see, you can stand up there and look out of that window without asking too much of your toe joint. Try it."

De Catinat sprang up and looked eagerly out between the bars.

"I do not know the place," said he, shaking his head. "It may be any one of thirty castles which lie upon the south side of Paris and within six or seven leagues of it."

He was dropping back to the floor and put his weight upon the bar. To his amazement it came away in his hand.

"Look, Amos, look!" he cried.

"Ah, you've found it out! Well, I did that during the night. I could make no way with my knife, but when I got the bar out of the grate I managed faster. I'll put this one back now, or some of those folk down below may notice that we have got it loose."

"Are they all loose?"

"Only the one at present, but we'll get the other two out during the night. You can take that bar out and work with it while I use my own picker at the other. You see, the stone is soft, and by grinding it you soon make a groove along which you can slip the bar. It will be mighty queer if we can't clear a road for ourselves before morning."

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(To Be Continued.)

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Daily	Stations.
Except Sunday.	
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