

THE REFUGEES

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

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(Continued from Saturday.)

"You hear them?"
"Yes; they are no great way from us. They will find that they have followed us once too often this time. Slip off your moccasins, monsieur."

De Catinat pulled off his shoes as directed and Du Lhut did the same. "Put them on as if they were gloves," said the pioneer, and an instant later Ephraim Savage and Amos had their comrades' shoes upon their hands.

"You can swing your muskets over your back. So! Now down on all fours, bending yourselves double, with your hands pressing hard upon the earth. That is excellent. Two men can leave the trail of four. Now come with me, monsieur."

He fitted from tree to tree on a line which was parallel to but a few yards distant from that of their comrades. Then suddenly he crouched behind a bush and pulled De Catinat down beside him.

"They must pass us in a few minutes," he whispered. "Do not fire if you can help it." Something gleamed in Du Lhut's hand, and his comrade, glancing down, saw that he had drawn a keen little tomahawk from his belt. Suddenly he saw something move. It fitted like a shadow from one trunk to the other, so swiftly that De Catinat could not have told whether it were beast or human. And then again he saw it, and yet again, sometimes one shadow, sometimes two shadows. Then for a few moments all was still once more, and then in an instant there crept out from among the bushes the most terrible looking creature that ever walked the earth—an Iroquois chief upon the war trail.

He was a tall, powerful man, and his bristles of scalp locks and eagle feathers made him look like a giant in the dim light, for a good eight feet lay between his beaded moccasin and the topmost plume of his headgear. One side of his face was painted in soot, ochre and vermilion to resemble a dog and the other half as a fowl. His gun was thrown forward, and he crept along with bended knees, peering, listening, pausing, hurrying on, a breathing image of caution. Two paces behind him walked a lad of fourteen clad and armed in the same fashion, but without the painted face.

They were just abreast of the bush when something caught the eye of the younger warrior, some displaced twig or fluttering leaf, and he paused, with suspicion in every feature. Another instant and he had warned his companion, but Du Lhut sprang out and buried his hatchet in the skull of the older warrior. De Catinat heard a dull crash, as when an ax splinters its way into a rotten tree, and the man fell like a log, kicking and striking with his powerful limbs. The younger warrior sprang like a deer over his fallen comrade and dashed on into the wood. But an instant later there was a gunshot among the trees in front, followed by a faint wailing cry.

"That is his death whoop," said Du Lhut composedly.

As he spoke the two others came back, Ephraim ramming a fresh charge into his musket.

"Ah, he's gone," said Du Lhut. As he spoke the Indian gave a last spasm with his hands and feet and lay rigid.

"He's a great chief," said Du Lhut. "It is Brown Moose of the Mohawks, and the other is his second son. We have drawn first blood, but I do not think that it will be the last, for the Iroquois do not allow their war chiefs to die unavenged. He was a mighty fighter."

They turned away, leaving the red figure stretched under the silent trees. As they passed on they caught a glimpse of the lad lying doubled up among the bushes where he had fallen. The pioneer walked very swiftly until he came to a little stream which prattled down to the big river. Here he slipped off his shoes and leggings and waded down it with his companions for half a mile or so.

"They will follow our tracks when they find him," said he, "but this will throw them off, for it is only on running water that an Iroquois can find no trace. And now we shall lie in this clump until nightfall, for we are little over a mile from Fort Polton, and it is dangerous to go forward, for the ground becomes more open."

And so they remained concealed among the alders while the shadows turned from short to long, and the white drifting clouds above them were tinged with the pink of the setting sun. Du Lhut coiled himself into a ball, with his pipe between his teeth, and dropped into a light sleep, pricking up his ears and starting at the slightest sound. The two Americans whispered together for a long time, but at last the soothing hum of a gentle breeze through the branches lulled them off also. De Catinat alone remained awake, his nerves in a tingle from a strange, sudden shadow which had fallen upon his soul. So clear it was and so vivid that it was with a start that he came suddenly to himself and found that the night was creeping on in the forest and that Du Lhut had roused himself and was ready for a start.

"Have you been awake?" asked the pioneer. "Have you heard anything?"

"It seemed to me in my sleep that I heard a gunshot in the distance."

"In your sleep?"
"Yes. I hear as well asleep as awake and remember what I hear. But now you must follow me close, and we shall be in the fort soon."

"Peste! You are a woodman indeed!"
"I believe that these woods are swarming with Iroquois, although we have had the good fortune to miss them. So great a chief as Brown Moose would not start on the path with a small following or for a small object. They must mean mischief upon the



Du Lhut sprang out and buried his hatchet in the skull of the warrior.

Richelleu. The woods will not be safe, I fear, until the partridge berries are out once more. You must stay at Ste. Marie until then.

"I had rather stay there forever than expose my wife to such evils."

"Aye, devils they are if ever devils walked upon earth. And now we are on the very borders of the clearing, and the blockhouse lies yonder among the clump of maples. You did not come as near to Ste. Marie unchallenged, and yet De Lannes is as old a soldier as De la Noue. We can scarce see now, but yonder, near the river, is where he exercises his men."

"He does so now," said Amos. "I see a dozen of them drawn up in a line at their drill."

"No sentinels, and all the men at drill!" cried Du Lhut in contempt. "It is as you say, however, for I can see them myself, with their ranks open and each as stiff and straight as a pine stump. One would think to see them stand so still, that there was not an Indian nearer than Orange."

Du Lhut advanced from the bushes as he spoke, and the four men crossed the open ground in the direction of the line of men who waited silently for them in the dim twilight. They were within fifty paces, and yet none of them had raised hand or voice to challenge their approach. There was something uncanny in the silence, and a change came over Du Lhut's face as he peered in front of him.

"My God!" he screamed. "Look at that fort!"

They had cleared the clump of trees, and the outline of the blockhouse should have shown up in front of them. There was no sign of it. It was gone. So unexpected was the blow that even Du Lhut, hardened from his childhood to every shock and danger, stood shaken and dismayed. Then, with an oath, he ran at the top of his speed toward the line of figures.

As they drew nearer they could see through the dusk that it was not indeed a line. A silent and motionless officer stood out some twenty paces in front of his silent and motionless men. They were lashed to low posts with willow withes, some twenty of them, naked all and twisted and screwed in to every strange shape which an agonized body could assume. For a moment the four comrades stared in silent horror at the dreadful group. Then each acted as his nature bade him. De Catinat staggered up against a tree trunk and leaned his head upon his arm, deathly sick; Du Lhut fell down upon his knees and said something to heaven, with his two clinched hands shaking up at the darkening sky; Ephraim Savage examined the printing of his gun, with a tightened lip and a gleaming eye, while Amos Green, without a word, began to cast round in circles in search of a trail.

But Du Lhut was on his feet again in a moment and running up and down like a sleuthhound, noting a hundred things which even Amos would have overlooked. He circled round the bodies again and again; then he ran a little way toward the edge of the woods and then came back to the charred ruins of the blockhouse.

"There is no sign of the women and children," said he. "They are keeping the children to burn at their leisure in their villages. The women they may torture or may adopt, as the humor takes them."

(To Be Continued)

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P. Norton, Secretary.

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