

THE REFUGEES

By A. CONAN DOYLE,
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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 Carnegas, with a sprinkling of Oneidas. We had a running fight for a few miles, and we have lost five men. We

had them for an instant," he screamed, and, rushing at the brass gun, he struck his flint and steel and fired it straight into the thick of the savages. Then, as they receded for an instant, he stuck a nail into the touch-hole and drove it home with a blow from the butt of his gun. Dashing across the yard, he spied the gun at the other corner and was back at the door as the remnants of the garrison were hurled against it by the rush of the assailants. The Canadians darted in and swung the ponderous mass of wood into position, breaking the leg of the foremost warrior who had striven to follow them. Then for an instant they had time for breathing and for counsel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BUT their case was a very evil one. Had the guns been lost, so that they might be turned upon the door, all further resistance would have been vain, but Du Lhut's presence of mind had saved them from that danger. The two guns upon the river face and the canoes were safe, for they were commanded by the windows of the house. But their numbers were terribly reduced, and those who were left were weary and wounded and spent. Nineteen had gained the house, but one had been shot through the body, while a second had his shoulder cleaved by a tomahawk and could no longer raise his musket. Du Lhut, De la Noux and De Catinat were uninjured, but Ephraim Savage had a bullet hole in his forearm and Amos was bleeding from a cut upon the face.

A few shots from the barricaded windows sufficed to clear the inclosure, for it was all exposed to their aim, but on the other hand the Indians had the shelter of the stockade, and from the farther side of it they kept up a fierce fire upon the windows. Half a dozen of the censitaires returned the fusillade, while the leaders consulted as to what had best be done.

"We have twenty-five women and fourteen children," said the seigneur. "I am sure that you will agree with me, gentlemen, that our first duty is toward them. Some of us have lost sons or brothers this day. Let us at least save our wives and sisters."

"No Iroquois canoes have passed up the river," said one of the Canadians. "If the women start in the darkness they can get away to the fort."

"By Ste. Anne de Beaupre!" exclaimed Du Lhut, "I think it would be well if you could get your men out of this also, for I cannot see how it is to be held until morning."

"Tut tut! What nonsense is this!" cried De la Noux. "Are we to abandon the manor house of Ste. Marie to the first gang of savages who choose to make an attack upon it? No, no, gentlemen; there are still nearly a score of us, and when the garrison learns that we are so pressed, which will be by tomorrow morning at the latest, they will certainly send us relief."

"If you stand by the fort I will not desert you," said Du Lhut, "and yet it is pity to sacrifice brave men for nothing."

"The canoes will hardly hold the women and children as it is," cried Theuriet. "There are but two large and four small. There is not space for a single man."

The Iroquois were very quiet now, and an occasional dropping shot from the tree or the stockade was the only sign of their presence. The twilight was gathering, and the sun had already sunk beneath the treetops. Leaving a watchman at each window, the leaders went round to the back of the house, where the canoes were lying upon the bank. There were no signs of the enemy upon the river to the north of them.

"We are in luck," said Amos. "The clouds are gathering, and there will be little light."

"It is luck, indeed, since the moon is only three days past the full," answered Du Lhut. "I wonder that the Iroquois have not cut us off upon the water, but it is likely that their canoes have gone south to bring up another war party."

"In an hour it might be dark enough to start."

"I think that there is rain in those clouds, and that will make it darker still."

The women and children were assembled, and their places in each boat were assigned to them. To Omega, the Indian wife of the seigneur, who was as wary and as experienced as a war sachem of her people, the command of the women was intrusted.

"It is not very far, Adele," said De Catinat. "It is but a league or two."

"But I do not wish to leave you, Adele," said De Catinat.

"That is what I think," cried the seigneur. "Bring the spare guns up here and all the men except five for each side."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a shrill yell rose from the wood, and in an instant a cloud of warriors burst out and charged across the open, howling, springing and waving their guns and tomahawks in the air. Some of those in front bore canoes between them, and as they reached the stockade they planted them against it and swam up them as if they had been scaling ladders. Others fled through the embrasures and loopholes, the muzzles of their guns touching those of the defenders, while others again sprang unaided to the tops of the palisades and jumped fearlessly down upon the inner side. The Canadians fired while they had time to load, and then, clubbing their muskets, they smashed furiously at every red head which showed above the rails.

De Catinat was bearing himself like an experienced soldier, walking up and down among his men with short words of praise or repreach—those fire words, rough and blunt, which bring a glow to the heart and a flush to the cheek.

Seven of his men were down, but, as the attack grew fiercer upon his side

heard the high, shrill voice of the old seigneur imploring his censitaires to stand fast. With Du Lhut, Amos, Le Catinat and Ephraim Savage, he was ever in the forefront of the defense. So desperately did they fight, the sword and musket but outraching the tomahawk, that though at one time fifty Iroquois were over the palisades they had slain or driven back nearly all of them, when a fresh wave burst suddenly over the south face, which had been stripped of its defenders. Du Lhut saw in an instant that the inclosure was lost and that only one thing could save

the great pine tree. Lambert, do you take the other gun?"

The two wrinkled old artillerymen glanced along their guns and waited for the canoes to come abreast of them. The fire blazed higher and higher, and the broad river lay like a sheet of dull metal, with the two dark lines which marked the canoes sweeping swiftly down the center. One was fifty yards in front of the other, but in each the Indians were bending to their paddles and pulling frantically, while their comrades whooped them on to fresh exertions. The fugitives had already disappeared around the bend of the river.

As the first canoe came abreast of the lower of the two guns the Canadian made the sign of the cross over the touch-hole and fired. A cheer and then a groan went up from the eager watchers. The charge had struck the surface close to the mark and dashed such a shower of water over it that for an instant it looked as if it had been sunk. The next moment, however, the splash subsided, and the canoe shot away uninjured save that one of the oars had dropped his paddle while his head fell forward upon the back of the man in front of him. The second gunner sighted the same canoe as it came abreast of him.

It was a beautiful shot. The whole charge took the canoe about six feet behind the bow and doubled her up like an eggshell. Before the smoke had cleared she had founders, and the second canoe had paused to pick up some of the wounded men.

"Quick, quick!" cried the seigneur.

"Load the gun!" We may get the second one yet!"

But it was not to be. Long before they could get it ready the Iroquois had picked up their wounded warriors and were pulling madly downstream. As they shot away the fire died suddenly down in the burning cottages, and the rain and the darkness closed in upon them once more.

"My God!" cried Du Lhut furiously.

"They will be taken! Let us abandon this place, take a boat and follow them! Come, come! Not an instant is to be lost!"

"I do not think that they will be caught," said Du Lhut, laying his hand soothingly upon his shoulder.

"Do not fear. They had a long start, and the women here can paddle as well as the men. Besides, these canoes of the Mohegans are not as swift as the Algonquins birch boats which we use. In any case, it is impossible to follow, for we have no boat."

"There is one lying there."

"Ah, it will but hold a single man. It is that in which the friar came."

"Then I am going in that! My place is with Adele!"

He flung open the door, rushed out and was about to push off the drift skiff when some one sprang past him and with a blow from a hatchet stave in the side of the boat.

"It is my boat," said the friar, throwing down his ax and folding his arms. "I have found you and you shall not escape again."

The hot blood flushed to the soldier's head, and, picking up the ax, he took a quick step forward. The light from the open door shone upon the grave, harsh face of the friar, but not a muscle twitched nor a feature changed as he saw the ax whirl up in the hands of a furious man. He only signed himself with the cross and muttered a Latin prayer under his breath. It was that compposure which saved his life. De Catinat hurled down the ax again with a bitter curse and was turning away from the shattered boat when in an instant, without a warning, the great door of the manor house crashed inward and a flood of whooping savages burst into the house.

"They have set it on fire!" cried Du Lhut. "The canoes must go at once, for the river will soon be as light as day. In! In! There is not an instant to be lost!"

There was no time for leave taking.

One impassioned kiss and Adele was torn away and thrust into the smallest canoe, which she shared with Omega, two children and an unmarried girl. The others rushed into their places, and in a few moments they had pushed off and had vanished into the drift and the darkness. The great cloud had broken and the rain pattered heavily on the roof.

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"Thank God for this storm!" murmured Du Lhut. "It will prevent the savages from blazing up too quickly."

But he had forgotten that, though the roofs might be wet, the interior was as

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