

Bouril sets you up

The Kingdom of The Blind

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM.

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CHAPTER XXX.—(Cont'd.)
 "Do you mean that Germany will be crushed?" Granet demanded.
 Sir Alfred shook his head.
 "I still believe that impossible," he said, "but the peace of exhaustion will come, and come surely, before many months have passed. It is time for us to think of ourselves. So far as I am concerned, well, there is that one censored letter—nothing in itself, yet damning if the code should be discovered. As for you, well, you are safe from anything transpiring in France, and although you seem to have been rather unlucky there, you appear to be safe as regards Norfolk. You must make up your mind now to follow my lead. Take a home command, do the rest of your soldiering quietly, and shout with the others when the day of peace comes. These last few months must be our great secret. At heart we may have longed to call ourselves the sons of a mightier nation, but fate is against us. We must continue Englishmen."
 "You've taken my breath away," Granet declared. "Let me realize this for a moment."
 He sat quite still. A rush of thoughts had crowded into his brain. First and foremost was the thought of Geraldine. If he could cover up his traces! If it were true that he was set free now from his pledges! Then he remembered his visitor of the evening and his heart sank.
 "Look here," he confessed, "in a way this is a huge relief. I, like you, thought it was to last for three months and I thought I could stick it. While the excitement of the thing was about it was easy enough, but listen, uncle. That Norfolk affair—I am not really out of that."
 "What do you mean?" Sir Alfred demanded anxiously. "This fellow Thomson?"
 "Thomson, of course," Granet assented, "but the real trouble has come to me in a different way. I told you that the girl got me out of it. She couldn't stand the second cross-examination. She was driven into a corner, and finally, to clear herself, said that we were engaged to be married. She has come up to London, came to me to-night. She expects me to marry her."
 "How much does she know?" Sir Alfred asked.
 "Everything," Granet groaned. "It was she who had told me of the waterway across the marshes. She saw me there with Collins, just before the flare was lit. She knew that I lied to them when they found me."
 Sir Alfred sighed.
 "It's a big price, Ronnie," he said, "but you'll have to pay it. The sooner you marry the girl and close her mouth, the better."
 "If it hadn't been for that damned fellow Thomson," Granet muttered, "there would never have been a suspicion."
 "If it hadn't been for the same very enterprising gentleman," Sir Alfred observed, "my correspondence would never have been tampered with."
 Granet leaned a little forward.
 "Thomson is our one remaining danger," he said. "I have had the feeling since first he half recognized me. We met, you know, in Belgium. It was just when I was coming out of the German lines. Somehow or other he must have been on my track ever since. I took no notice of it. I thought it was simply because—because he

was engaged to Geraldine Conyers."
 "You are rivals in love, too, eh?" Sir Alfred remarked.
 Geraldine Conyers is the girl I want to marry," Granet admitted.
 "Thomson," Sir Alfred murmured to himself, "Surgeon-Major Hugh Thomson. He seems to be the only man, Ronnie, from whom we have the least danger of fear. Personally, I think I am secure. I do not believe that that single letter will be ever deciphered, and if it is, three parts of the Cabinet are my friends. I could ruin the Stock Exchange to-morrow, bring London's credit, for a time, at any rate, below the credit of Belgrade."
 "All the same, it seems to me," Granet declared grimly, "that we should both be more comfortable if there were no Surgeon-Major Thomson."
 "The very last dispatches I had to deal with," Sir Alfred continued, "made allusion to him. They don't love some of his work in Berlin, I can tell you. What sort of a man is he, Ronnie? Can he be bought? A hundred thousand pounds would be a fortune to a man like that."
 "There is only one way of dealing with him," Granet said fiercely. "I have tried it once. I expect I'll have to try again."
 Sir Alfred leaned over the table.
 "Don't be rash, Ronnie," he advised. "And yet, remember this. The man is a real danger, both to you and to me. He is the only man who has had anything to do with the Intelligence Department here, who is worth a snap of the fingers. Now go home, Ronnie. You came here—well, never mind what you were when you came here. You are going back an Englishman. If they won't send you to the Front again, bother them for some work here, and stick to it. You will get no reports nor any visitors. I have strangled the whole system. You and I are cut loose from it. We are free-lancers. Mind, I still believe that in the end German progress and German culture will dominate the world, but it may not be in our day. It just happens that we have struck a little too soon. Let us make the best of things, Ronnie. You have many years of life. I have some of unabated power. Let us be thankful that we were wise enough to stop in time."
 Granet rose to his feet. His uncle watched him curiously.
 "You're young, of course, Ronnie," he continued indulgently. "You haven't yet fitted your burden on to your shoulders properly. England or Germany, you have some of both in you. After all, it isn't a vital matter under which banner you travel. It isn't quite like that with me. I have lived here all my life and I wouldn't care to live anywhere else, but that's because I carry my own country with me. It's English air I breathe but it's a German heart I still carry with me. Good night, Ronnie! Remember about Thomson."
 The two men wrung hands and Granet made his way towards the door.
 "About Thomson," he repeated to himself, as the servant conducted him towards the door.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Ambrose announced a visitor, early on the following morning, with some show of interest.
 "Captain Granet to see you, sir. We've a good many notes about him. Would you like the book?"
 Thomson shook his head.
 "Thank you," he answered drily. "I have it in my desk but I think I can remember. Is he outside now?"
 "Yes, sir! He said he wouldn't keep you for more than a few minutes, if you could spare him a short interview."
 "Any luck last night?"
 Ambrose sighed.
 "I was up till three o'clock again. Once I thought I was on the track of it. I have come to the conclusion now that it's one of those codes that depend upon shifting quantities. I shall start again to-night on a different idea. Shall I show Captain Granet in, sir?"
 Thomson assented, and a few minutes later Granet entered the room. He made no attempt to shake hands or to take a seat. Thomson looked at him coldly.
 "Well," he asked, abruptly, "what can I do for you?"

"I don't suppose you can do anything," Granet replied, "but I am going to spend to-day and to-morrow, too, if necessary, in this place, bothering every one I ever heard of. You have some influence, I know. Get me a job out of this country."
 Thomson raised his eyebrows slightly.

"You want to go abroad again?"
 "Anywhere—anyhow! If they won't have me back in France, although heaven knows why not, can I be sent to the Dardanelles, or even East Africa? I'll take out Territorials, if you like. I'll do anything sooner than be ordered to one of these infernal country towns to train young tradespeople. If I don't worry, I know I shall get a home appointment directly, and I don't want it."

Thomson studied his visitor, for a moment, carefully.
 "So you want to be fighting again, eh?" he remarked.

"I do," Granet answered firmly.
 Major Thomson drew a little locked book towards him, unfastened it with a key from his chain and held his hand over the page. It was noticeable that his right hand slipped open a few inches the right-hand drawer of his desk.

"You have come to me, Captain Granet," he said, "to ask my aid in getting you a job. Well, if I could give you one where I was perfectly certain that you would be shot in your first skirmish, I would give it to you, with pleasure. Under present conditions, however, it is my impression that the further you are from any British fighting force, the better it will be for the safety and welfare of that force."

Granet's face was suddenly rigid. He had turned a little paler and his eyes flashed.
 "What do you mean?" he demanded.

Thomson had removed his hand and was glancing at the open page.
 "There are a few notes here about you," he said. "I will not read them all but I will give you some extracts. There is your full name and parentage, tracing out the amount of foreign blood which I find in your veins. There is a verbatim account of a report made to me by your Brigadier-General, in which it seems that in the fighting under his command you were three times apparently taken prisoner, three times you apparently escaped; the information which you brought back led to at least two disasters; the information which exactly at the time you were absent seemed to come miraculously into the hands of the enemy, resulted in even greater trouble for us."

"Do you insinuate, then, that I am a traitor?" Granet asked fiercely.
 "I insinuate nothing," Thomson replied quietly. "So far as you and I are concerned, we may as well, I presume, understand one another. You are, without doubt, aware that my post as inspector of hospitals is a blind. I am, as a matter of fact, chief of the Intelligence Department, with a rank which at present I do not choose to use. I have been myself to your Brigadier-General and brought home this report, and if it is any satisfaction to you to know it, brought also an urgent request that you should not be allowed to rejoin any part of the force under his control."
 "It was simply rotten luck," Granet muttered.

"I come here to a few more notes," Thomson proceeded. "I meet you some weeks ago at a luncheon party at the Ritz. A Belgian waiter, who I learned, by later inquiries, was present as a prisoner in the village where you were being entertained as a guest at the German headquarters, recognized you and was on the point of making a disclosure. The excitement, however, was too much for him and he fainted. He was at once removed, under your

auspices, and died a few days later, at one of your uncle's country houses, before he could make any statement."

"This is ridiculous!" Granet exclaimed. "I never saw the fellow before in my life."

"Ridiculous, doubtless, but a coincidence," Major Thomson replied, turning over the next page of his book. "A little later I find you taking an immense interest in our new destroyers, trying, in fact, to induce young Conyers to explain our wire netting system, following him down to Portsmouth and doing your best to discover also the meaning of a new device attached to his destroyer."

"That is simply absurd," Granet protested. "I was interested in the subject, as any military officer, would be in an important naval development. My journey to Portsmouth was simply an act of courtesy to Miss Conyers and her cousin."

"I find you next," Thomson went on immovably, "visiting the one French statesman whom we in England had cause to fear, in his hotel in London. I find that very soon afterwards that statesman is in possession of an autograph letter from the Kaiser, offering peace to the French people on extraordinary terms. Who was the intermediary who brought that document, Captain Granet?"

Granet's face never twitched. He held himself with cold composure.
 "These," he declared, "are fairy tales. Pailleton was a friend of mine. During my visit we did not speak of politics."

(To be continued.)

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