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## [The Kingom of the Blind](#)

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## Chapter 13

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At a little after noon on the following day Captain Granet descended from a taxicab in the courtyard of the Milan Hotel, and, passing through the swing doors, made his way to the inquiry office. A suave, black-coated young clerk hastened to the desk.

"Can you tell me," Granet inquired, "whether a gentlemen named Guillot is staying here?"

The young man bowed.

"Monsieur Guillot arrived last night, sir," he announced. "He has just rung down to say that if a gentlemen called to see him he could be shown up. Here, page," he went on, turning to a diminutive youth in the background, "show this gentleman to number 322."

Granet followed the boy to the lift and was conducted to a room on the third floor. The door was opened by a tall, white-haired Frenchman.

"Monsieur Guillot?" Captain Granet inquired pleasantly. "My name is Granet."

The Frenchman ushered him in. The door was closed and carefully locked. Then Monsieur Guillot swung around and looked at his visitor with some curiosity. Granet was still wearing his uniform.

"France must live," Granet murmured.

The Frenchman at once extended his hand.

"My friend," he confessed, "for a moment I was surprised. It did not occur to me to see you in this guise."

Granet smiled.

"I have been out at the Front," he explained, "and am home wounded."

"But an English officer?" Monsieur Guillot remarked dubiously. "I do not quite understand, then. The nature of the communication which I have come to receive is known to you?"

Granet nodded and accepted the chair which his host had offered.

"I do not think that you should be so much surprised," he said simply. "If the war is grievous for your country, it is ruin to mine. We do not, perhaps, advertise our apprehensions in the papers. We prefer to keep them locked up in our own brain. There is one great fact always before us. Germany is unconquerable. One must find peace or perish."

Monsieur Guillot listened with a curious look upon his face. His forefinger tapped the copy of the Times which was lying upon the table. The other nodded gravely.

"Yes," he continued, "I know that our Press is carrying on a magnificent campaign of bluff. I know that many of the ignorant people of the country believe that this war is still being prosecuted with every hope of success. We who have been to the Front, especially those who have any source of information in Germany, know differently. The longer the war, the more ruinous the burden which your country and mine will have to bear."

"It is my opinion also," Monsieur Guillot declared, "and furthermore, listen. It is not our war at all, that is the cruel part of it. It is Russia's war and yours. Yet it is we who suffer most, we, the richest part of whose country is in the hands of the foe, we whose industries are paralysed, my country from whom the life-blood is being slowly drained. You English, what do you know of the war? No enemy has set foot upon your soil, no Englishman has seen his womankind dishonoured or his home crumble into ashes. The war to you is a thing of paper, an abstraction--that same war which has turned the better half of my beloved country into a lurid corner of hell."

"Our time has not yet come," Granet admitted, "but before long, unless diplomacy can avert it, fate will be knocking at our doors, too. Listen. You have friends still in power, Monsieur Guillot?--friends in the Cabinet, is it not so?"

"It is indeed true," Monsieur Guillot assented.

"You have, too," Granet continued, "a great following throughout France. You are the man for the task I bring to you. You, if you choose, shall save your country and earn the reward she will surely bestow upon you."

Monsieur Guillot's cheeks were flushed a little. With long, nervous fingers he rolled a cigarette and lit it.

"Monsieur," he said, "I listen to you eagerly, and yet I am puzzled. You wear the uniform of an English officer, but you come to me, is it not so, as an emissary of Germany?"

"In bald words that may be true," Granet confessed, "yet I would remind you of two things. First, that the more dominant part of the personality which I have inherited comes to me from Alsatian ancestors; and secondly, that this peace for which I am striving may in the end mean salvation for England, too."

"I hear you with relief," Monsieur Guillot admitted. "In this transaction it is my great desire to deal with a man of honour. As such I know perceive that I can recognise you, monsieur."

Granet bowed gravely and without any shadow of embarrassment.

"That assuredly, Monsieur Guillot," he said. "Shall I proceed?"

"By all means."

Granet drew a thin packet from the breast pocket of his coat. He laid it on the table between them.

"I received this," he announced, "less than three weeks ago from the hands of the Kaiser himself."

Monsieur Guillot gazed at his companion incredulously.

"It was very simple," Granet continued. "I was taken prisoner near the village of Ossray. I was conducted at once to headquarters and taken by motor-car to a certain fortified place which I will not specify, but which was at that time the headquarters of the German Staff. I received this document there in the way I have told you. I was then assisted, after some very remarkable adventures, to rejoin my regiment. You can open that document, Monsieur Guillot. It is addressed to you. Guard it carefully, though, for it is signed by the Kaiser himself. I have carried it with me now for more than a fortnight in the inner sole of my shoe. As you can imagine, its discovery upon my person would have meant instant death."

Monsieur Guillot was engrossed in reading the few lines of the missive. When he had finished, he covered the paper with the palm of his hand and leaned forward. There was a queer light in his eyes.

"Germany will give up Alsace and Lorraine," he said hoarsely, "and will retire within her own frontiers. She will ask for no indemnity. What is the meaning of it?"

"Simple enough," Granet pointed out. "A great politician like you should easily realise the actual conditions which prompt such an offer. What good is territory to Germany, territory over which she must rule by force, struggling always against the accumulated hatred of years? Alsace and Lorraine have taught her her lesson. It is not French territory she wants. Russia has far more to give. Russia and England between them can pay an indemnity which will make Germany rich beyond the dreams of avarice. Form your party, Monsieur Guillot, spread your tidings in any way that seems fit to you, only until the hour comes, guard that document as you would your soul. Its possession would mean death to you as it would to me."

Monsieur Guillot took the document and buttoned it up in his inside pocket.

"Supposing I succeed," he said quietly, "what of your country then?"

"My country will make peace," Granet replied.

"It will be a peace that will cost us much, but nothing more than we deserve. For generations the war has been the perfectly obvious and apparent sequence of European events. It threw its warning shadow across our path for years, and our statesmen deliberately turned their heads the other way or walked blindfolded. Not only our statesmen, mind, but our people, our English people. Our young men shirked their duty, our philosophers and essayists shirked theirs. We prated of peace and conventions, and we knew very well that we were living in times when human nature and red blood were still the controlling elements. We watched Germany arm and prepare. We turned for comfort towards our fellow sinners, America, and we prattled about conventions and arbitration, and hundred other silly abstractions. A father can watch the punishment of his child, Monsieur Guillot. Believe me, there are many other Englishmen besides me who will feel a melancholy satisfaction in the chastisement of their country, many who are more English, even, than I."

Monsieur Guillot passed away from the personal side of the matter. Already his mind was travelling swiftly along the avenues of his own future greatness.

"This is the chance which comes to few men," he muttered. "There is Dejeane, Gardine, Debonnot, Senn, besides my own followers. My own journal, too! It is a great campaign, this which I shall start."

Granet rose to his feet.

"After to-day I breathe more freely," he confessed. "There have been enemies pressing closely around me, I have walked in fear. To-day I am a free man. Take care, monsieur. Take care especially whilst you are in England."

Monsieur Guillot extended his hand.

"My young friend," he said, "in the years to come you and I shall perhaps meet in our wonderful Paris, and if I may not tell the world so, I shall yet feel, as we look upon her greatness, that you and I together have saved France. Adieu!"

Granet made his way along the empty corridor, rang for the lift and descended into the hall. A smile was upon his lips. The torch at last was kindled! In the hall of the hotel he came across a group of assembling guests just starting for the luncheon room. A tall, familiar figure stepped for a moment on one side. His heart gave a little jump. Geraldine held out her pearl-gloved hand.

"Captain Granet," she said, "I wanted to tell you something."

"Yes?" he answered breathlessly.

She glanced towards where the little group of people were already on their way to the stairs.

"I must not stay for a second, she continued, dropping her voice, "but I wanted to tell you--I am no longer engaged to Major Thomson. Goodbye!"

A rush of words trembled upon his lips but she was gone. He watched her slim, graceful figure as she passed swiftly along the vestibule and joined her friends. He even heard her little laugh as she greeted one of the men who had waited for her.

"Decidedly," Granet said to himself triumphantly as he turned towards the door, "this is my day!"