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CHAPTER XVIII.

Tom Small Receives Visitors.

THE super-spy, having concluded his work, sat with the old fisherman beside the wood-fire in the little low-pitched living-room that smelt so strongly of fish and tar.

Old Tom Small presented a picturesque figure in his long sea-boots, on which the salt stood in grey crystals, and his tanned blouse; for, only an hour ago, he had helped Ted to haul up the boat in which, on the previous night, they had been out baiting their crab-pots. Ruddy and cheery-looking, his grey hair was scanty on top, and his knotty hands, hardened by the sea, were brown and hairy. He was a fine specimen of the North Sea fisherman and being one of "nature's gentlemen," he was polite to his visitor, though at heart he entertained the deepest and undying contempt for the man by whose craft and cunning the enemy were being kept informed of the movements of Britain's defensive forces, both on land and at sea.

Now that it was too late, he had at last awakened to the subtle manner in which he had been inveigled into the net so cleverly spread to catch both his son and himself. Ted, his son, had been sent to the cable-school at Glasgow and there instructed, while, at the same time, he and his father had fallen into the money-lender's spider-web, stretched purposely to entrap him.

What could the old fellow do to extricate himself? He and Ted often, in the evening hours, before the fire, while the storm howled and tore about that lonely cottage on the beach, had discussed the situation. They had both, in their half-hearted way, sought to discover a means out of the impasse. Yet with the threat of Rodwell—that they would both be prosecuted and shot as traitors—hanging over them, the result of their deliberation was always the same. They were compelled to remain silent, and to suffer.

They cursed their visitor who came there so constantly and sent his mysterious messages under the sea. Yet they were compelled to accept the ten pounds a week which he paid them so regularly, with a frequent extra sovereign to the younger man. Both father and son hesitated about taking the tainted money. Yet they dared not raise a word of protest. Besides, in the event of an invasion by Germany, had not Rodwell promised that they should be protected, and receive ample reward for their services?

Old Small and Rodwell were talking, the latter stretching forth his white hand towards the welcome warmth of the flaming logs.

"You must continue to still keep your daughter Mary away from here, Tom," the visitor was saying. "Send her anywhere you like. But I don't want her prying about here just now. You understand! You've got a married daughter at Bristol, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, send her down there for a long stay. I'll pay all expenses. So book the whole of it down to me. Here's twenty pounds to go on with"; and, taking his bank-note case from his pocket, he drew forth four five-

By WILLIAM LE QUEUX

pound notes.

"Yes, sir; but she may think it funny—and—"

"Funny!" cried his visitor. "Remember that you're paid to see that she doesn't think it funny. Have her back here, say next Tuesday, for a couple of days, and then send her off

NEXT WEEK
A NEW SERIAL
THE YUKON TRAIL
By William MacLeod Raine
Near enough to Canada to be just about Canadian. The chief character—though not the hero—is Colby Macdonald, a Canadian. The kind of story that might have been blood-and-thunder, but was saved by the skill of the writer who made a trail novel of it.

on a visit down to Bristol. You and Ted are able to rub along together very well without her."

"Well—we feels the miss o' the girl," replied the old fellow, who, though honest and loyal, had fallen hopelessly into the trap which German double-dealing had prepared for him.

"Of course you do. I should—were I in your place," was Rodwell's response. "But the confidential business in which you and I are engaged just now is not one in which a woman has any concern. She's out of place here; and, moreover, few women can keep a still tongue. Just reflect a moment. Suppose she told some friend of hers what was in progress under your roof? Well, the police would soon be out here to investigate, and you'd both find yourselves under arrest. No," he added. "Keep your girl away from here—keep her away at all costs. That's my advice."

"Very well, sir, I will," replied the wrinkled old fellow, rubbing the knees of his stained trousers with his hands, and drawing at his rather foul pipe. "I quite see your point. I'll get the girl away to Bristol this week."

"Oh! and there's another thing. I'd better remain in here all day to-day, for I don't want to be seen wandering about by anybody. They might suspect something. So if anyone happens to come in, mind they have no suspicion of my being here."

"All right, sir. Leave that to me."

"To-night, about ten or eleven, I'm expecting a lady down from London. She's bringing me some important news. So you'd better get something or other for her to eat."

"A bit o' nice fish, perhaps?" the old fellow suggested as a luxury.

"Well—something that she can eat, you know."

"I'll boil two or three nice fresh crabs. The lady may like 'em, if I dress 'em nice."

"Excellent!" laughed Rodwell. Truly his was a strange life. One day he ate a perfectly-cooked dinner in Bruton Street, and the next he enjoyed fat bacon cooked by a fisherman in his cottage.

OLD TOM, glancing through the window out upon the grey, misty sea, remarked:

"Hulloa! There's that patrol a-comin' back. For two days they've

been up and down from the Spurn to the Wash. Old Fred Turner, on the Seamew, what's a mine-sweeper nowadays, hailed me last night when we were baitin' our pots. He got three mines yesterday. Those devils have sown death haphazard!"

"Devils!" echoed Rodwell, in a reproachful tone. "The Germans are only devils because we are out to win."

"I'm sorry, sir," exclaimed the old fellow, biting his lip. "I didn't think when I spoke."

"But, Tom, you should never speak before you think. It lands you into trouble always," his visitor said, severely.

"Yes, I—But—I say—look!" cried the old man, starting forward, and craning his neck towards the window. "Why, if there ain't that there Judd, the coastguard petty-officer from Chapel Point again! An' he's a-comin' across 'ere, too."

"I'll get into the bedroom," whispered Rodwell, rising instantly, and bending as he passed the window, so as not to be seen. "Get rid of him—get rid of him as soon as ever you can."

"E's got a gentleman with him," old Tom added.

"Don't breathe a word that I'm here," urged the spy, and then, slipping into the stuffy little bedroom, he closed the door and turned the key. Afterwards he stood listening eagerly for the arrival of the visitors.

IN a few moments there was a loud knocking on the tarred door, and, with a grunt, Tom rose to open it.

"Hulloa, Tom!" cried the petty-officer of the coastguard, cheerily. "Morning! How are you?"

"Oh! pretty nicely, Muster Judd—if it warn't for my confounded rheumatics. An' now, to cap it all, I've got my girl laid up 'ere very bad. She only got 'ome last night."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Judd. "But I thought you had a gentleman visitor this morning?"

"Gentleman visitor? Yes. I've 'ad the doctor to my girl—a visitor I've got to pay—if that's what you mean. She's been awful bad all night, an' Ted's now gone into Skegness for some med'ine for 'er."

The man who accompanied the coastguard-officer remarked:

"This is a lonely house of yours, Mr. Small. A long way from the doctor—eh?"

"It is, sir, an' no mistake. We don't see many people out 'ere, except Mr. Judd, or Mr. Bennett—or one o' the men on patrol."

Then, being compelled to ask the pair inside, for it had started to rain heavily, Tom Small sat with them chatting, yet full of wonder why they had called at that early hour.

The man in the next room stood breathless behind the door, listening to all their conversation. It was quite plain that he had been seen to enter there, whereupon the coastguard's suspicions had been aroused. He scented considerable danger. Yet his adventurous spirit was such that he smiled amusedly at old Small's story of his sick daughter, and of the visit of the doctor.

Judd, seated in the chair which Rod-

well had occupied until he had vacated it in alarm, suddenly turned to old Tom, and said:

"This gentleman here is my superior officer, Tom, and he wants to ask you something, I think."

"Yes, sir, what is it?" asked the crafty old fisherman, turning to the man in plain clothes.

"You had a visitor here last Thursday—a gentleman. Who was he?" asked the stranger, suddenly.

"Last Thursday," repeated Small, reflectively. "Now let me see. Who came 'ere last Thursday? Weren't we both out fishin'? No," he added: "I know! Yes, we did 'ave someone come—Mr. Jennings, of course."

"And who is Mr. Jennings?"

"Why, 'e comes regularly from Lincoln for our insurances."

The petty officer exchanged meaning glances with his superior, who then asked—

"Aren't you in the habit of receiving visits from a gentleman—somebody who's been seen about here in a closed car, painted pale grey?"

"No car 'as ever come 'ere, sir," declared the old man, blankly. "Folk in cars don't come to visit people like Tom Small."

"And yet you are not quite so poorly off as you pretend to be, Mr. Small," remarked his questioner. "What about that nice little balance you have in the bank—eh?"

"Well, I've earned it; therefore I don't see why it should concern you," protested the old fellow, angrily.

"Just now it does concern me," was the other's rather hard reply—words to which the man in the inner room listened with breathless concern.

Was it possible that the existence of the secret cable was suspected? Had Tom, or his son, been indiscreet? No; he felt sure they had not. They had everything to lose by disclosing anything. And yet those two visitors were bent upon extracting some information from him. Of what nature he was not quite clear.

An awful thought occurred to him that he had left his cap in the sitting-room, but, on glancing round, he was relieved to see that he had carried it into the bedroom when he had sat down at the instruments.

What would those two men say, if they only knew that, within a few yards of them, was the end of a cable which ran direct to Berlin?

While the rain continued pelting down for perhaps a quarter of an hour, the pair sat chatting with Small. It was evident that the naval officer was disappointed with the result of his visit, for the old fisherman answered quite frankly, and had given explanation of his two visitors which could not well be met with disbelief.

"Are you gentlemen a-lookin' for German spies, then?" asked old Small at last, as though sorely puzzled at the questions that had been put to him.

"We're always on the look out for those devil's spawn," answered Judd. "There was a Dutch trawler off here last night, and she wasn't up to any good—I'm sure of that."

"PERHAPS it's the same craft as wor 'ere about a fortnight back. She flew the Dutch flag, but I believe she wor a waitin' for a German submarine, in order to give 'er petrol. They were a talkin' about 'er in the