

# THE VANISHING FLEETS

Continued from page 10



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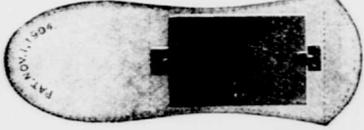
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you I wished your assistance. I need more than that; I want your advice. I have been a man with a dream, and that you may know how much it has meant to me, I must tell you something of myself. I come of a race that for generations has given its blood for country. It was almost obliterated in the Wars of the Revolution and of 1812. In the great Rebellion there were five men in my family, a father and four elder brothers, the youngest a mere lad, who went to war as volunteers. Some of them never returned. My father was brought back shattered by barbarism to die in my mother's arms. The lad who had gone out with his drum came back to drag out only a few wretched months of suffering.

"My home was on the border land, where men fought backward and forward across our fields." He paused for a moment as if the memory of his childhood was too bitter for recaptulation, then went bravely on: "In those years the sight of ghastly wounds and cruel death was before me sometimes daily, but never far removed. When peace came there was nothing left to my mother but her ravaged farm, her bitter poverty, and her one boy. Oh, it was a nightmare, gentlemen, that never dimmed! It was a memory that never left me, as hard working, poorly clad, and sometimes hungry, I grew to manhood. My mother went, as did thousands of other widows made by war, to an early grave, prematurely worn out by work and grief."

The floodgates were down at last. His repression was going, and he rose to his feet behind his desk, trembling in every fiber, and with white, quivering lips. In the stillness of the room he stood thus for an instant, then his teeth suddenly came together with a click, and his fist came down upon the table in one quick, hard blow of emphasis.

"Do you wonder," he said, "that I swore to give my life to peace? Is it strange that I who have suffered have taken unusual means to keep others from suffering as I and mine have? I have invited you here not as the President of a nation, but as man to man to help me put—an end—to war!"

Every word of his final declaration was bitten off with sharp emphasis and accentuated by a fist which beat time. The King was suddenly conscious that he had leaned forward in his chair so far that nothing but the tense grip of his hands upon the arms had held him down. In all his years he had witnessed no such scene of emotion as this, nor heard a more earnest appeal.

The President, as if regretting his lack of control, settled wearily into his seat. He had said things in a way that in any other man would have been undignified, but he, inspired by the grandeur of his purpose, failed to realize that an angel with a flaming sword could scarcely have been more impressive. He had been addressing no ordinary audience. Before him was an august ruler, but more than that, a great man. And in the hush which followed, the sovereign rose from his seat, stepped across to the desk, and for one of the few times in his life gave untrammelled vent to his feelings as a man. He put his hand out across the polished mahogany top as the tall form of the President straightened up. Their hands met in one strong grip of understanding, and they looked squarely into each other's eyes, reading, comprehending, and binding themselves together in a common purpose for humanity.

It was not the etiquette which demands that all men shall stand when a King is on his feet, that brought the others from their chairs, erect, breathless, and motionless; it was rather the impulsive respect and veneration due to two great minds which before their very eyes were entering an unwritten compact for a high and noble cause.

Once more they took their seats; but now by the subtle alchemy of humanity they drew their chairs together. They were no longer rulers and subjects, Englishmen and Americans, but men inspired with magnanimity toward all their fellow beings. They were on a Godlike plane, reasoning out momentous plans involving the nations of the world and all mankind. From their combined fund of knowledge they evolved methods which were to strengthen the weak and put in leash the strong.

All reckoning of time was lost in this review of what had been accomplished and what was to be done. The night paled, the sun crept up, the lights of the darkness were extinguished, and the day advanced, without their heeding it. The last tentative clause was signed, and each knew the part which his country must play. Again they were all upon their feet, looking into one another's faces and abruptly conscious of weariness and relaxation. Too overcome to resume their homeward journey, the visitors accepted the hospitality of the White House for a few hours' rest, and staggered to their rooms.

Once, more than a hundred years before, an unwise King had caused a war between brothers which had sent them on diverse paths. Each had prospered but held aloof. And now after all this time a wiser King had proffered his hand, and the brothers were to be friends again in truth, and were to travel side by side unto the end.

### PART II, CHAPTER X.

THAT night for the first time a radioplane flew through the air from Washington to New York, where it came to earth in a portion of Central Park adjacent to one of the most exclusive hotels. It was not late in the evening, but while it did not court discovery

neither did it use any great endeavor to land. Those aboard had only one wish, which was to avoid the gathering of a crowd. The machine was the Roberts, conveying the King and his counsellors for a short interview with the higher officers of the British fleet. They had bade good by to the man in the White House, who was henceforth to hold a place in their strongest admiration and friendship, and were now preparing for their homeward journey.

The park entrances had been closed in advance, and the public debarred from its path; hence there was no demonstration when the party stepped out of the craft and took seat in a motor car which had been awaiting their arrival. Only the Secretary of State and Bevins accompanied them as escorts to the glaring entrance of the hotel, and even the august clerks were unaware of the identity of their visitors. With polite insouciance the party was directed to a parlor until the manager could be summoned, and he, on being informed that the King wished to meet the officers at once, conducted them to an elevator which carried them upward.

By requisition of the Government the entire top floor had been given up to the accommodation of the British guests, and with them this night as entertainers were many of the higher officers of the American navy throughout the war had been forced to live in idleness. The realization that the end of seafaring were nearly at an end had come to them with full force, and all were awaiting and hoping for orders which would put an end to inactivity.

Beneath the shaded lights of the corridors were many tables, at some of which men in fatigue uniforms were being initiated into an American game that seemed to find favor while at others spirited discussions were being held. Wreaths of smoke curling up to meet the lights added to the air of informality, and a burst of laughter in one corner of the room indicated the success of some raconteur.

The door swung open noiselessly, and its threshold stood open who looked smiling at the idle veterans of two nations. He stood thus for an instant, before the crusty old Sea Admiral known to his fellows as "Jimmy" Barr lifted his eyes in the direction of the door. His mouth opened in astonishment beneath its red beard, and his sharp eyes browned and peered across the shoulder of the man opposite and then with one hurried leap he gained the feet, upsetting his chair in his haste. His hands came together, and his arm was raised in salute as he exclaimed loudly:

"Gentlemen, the King!" Instantly those in the room looked at the Admiral and then at the entrance. There came the muffled sound of chairs hastily shoved across the carpeted floor, startled exclamations, and a hurried rising. Two scores of hands came to the salute, and a dramatic moment followed in which their owners strove to gather their wits. It was almost unbelievable that their sovereign was before them.

The King looked at them gravely, and then took a few steps forward, and his companions followed. He stopped almost in front of Barr, and slowly raised his hand with open fingers in a gesture which combined greeting and a demand for attention. He wasted no time nor words.

"My men," he said, "I have come from conference with His Excellency the President of the United States. Its results will be made known to you within the course of a few days at the most, or hours at the least. I have come to say to you that in submitting yourselves to an invincible power for reasons which you could not rathom you acted wisely and now have our full approval."

The British officers exchanged quick glances of relief. Barr alone had the magnanimity to break into an open smile of satisfaction. They were not, then, to be censured by their country, and the situation would be no disgrace. His Majesty continued:

"You have unwittingly assisted in reconciling the Anglo-Saxon race, I hope, after its separation of nearly a century and a half. You have been made involuntary guests by a man whose friendship I esteem, and whom I honor above all men. I refer to the President of this nation, and I ask that you remember him as kindly as I do. Your countrymen and you have no just cause for criticizing you or your actions. Instructions will be sent you in due time through the Admiralty. Until then you are to maintain patience. I wish you good night."

With dignified grace he bowed to them, took a step backward, turned on his heel, and was going before they grasped the significance of his speech or awakened from the wonder of his unexpected visit to this alien land. The clang of an elevator door revealed them as they stirred them to action. They ran after him, bunched on the street a minute later a group of hatless men craving further explanations and wishing to honor their ruler. They crowded to the edge of the pavement beside which the motor car was humming in readiness for a start.

The King saw them coming, smiled at their eagerness, and turned to Bevins with a question which they could not hear. The American Admiral gave a reply, and the monarch leaned over to Jimmy Barr, who was standing at the curb close at hand. "My host, the Admiral," the King said, "says lack of time prevents your accompanying us. Otherwise we should ask you to witness our embarkation. We are returning to London."